

Letter 406: 31 March 1530, Strasbourg, The City Council of Strasbourg to the Public

The manuscript, entitled *Copey eins ußschreibens aller newerong halb so durch gotts wort zu Straßburg inbracht und im namen eins ersamen rhatts beschehen mocht* (Copy of an announcement on account of the innovations that were introduced in Strasbourg through God's word and made in the name of the honourable council), is in the Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Ki. Ar. 25a, 139 (ff. 217-237).

[*Summary*]: The reforms instituted in Strasbourg have resulted in slanderous accusations, which make a defence necessary. When [Matthew Zell] first began preaching the gospel in 1522, he was accused of heresy by the bishop's official, [Jacob von Gottesheim]. This caused dissension in Strasbourg. An edict passed on 6 March 1523 at the Diet of Nürnberg gave authority to the council to censor books and maintain peace until a general council decided the issues under dispute. The relevant section of the Nürnberg edict is cited. The city council therefore called on the preachers and their Catholic opponents ("*päpstler*") to explain their respective positions. The latter declined, however, insisting that the matter was not to be discussed before lay persons. The council protested in vain that it was their duty to look into this matter. On 1 December 1523 the council passed a decree forbidding the preachers to teach anything but the gospel and ordering them to refrain from personal attacks. The preachers taught the people that true justification comes through faith and warned them that works were not sufficient for salvation, arguing on the basis of Scripture, patristic writings, canon law, and conciliar decisions.

The council instituted a public system of alms. "For the first time public almsgiving was instituted, for the following reason:...If each individual wanted to help everyone without correct assessment, for which they do not have time, the pious would have to suffer, and the good poor people would still not be helped. Therefore a public system of almsgiving for the poor in the community is needed, for we are all called Christians and are deemed to be Christians" [f. 221]. For this purpose, i.e. to do away with begging and to help the sick and poor according to predetermined criteria, a commission of three men was appointed: "one of the nobility, one of the permanent councillors,³ and one ordinary councillor, to assist the administrator of alms (*Schaffner*). They are to be called wardens (*Pfleger*)" [f. 222v].

Obligatory auricular confession has been abolished ("No man or angel can forgive sins. That is up to God alone," f. 223) as have fasting, the use of holy water, blessed salt, and the lighting of lamps before images.

On 6 January 1525, the council required all clergy to become citizens. They argued that the commandment to love one's neighbour meant sharing the burdens of the residents of the city. In the secular realm obedience was owed to the secular authorities; in the spiritual realm obedience was owed to God alone. The refusal of certain members of the three collegiate churches to take out citizenship and their subsequent flight from Strasbourg led to legal action in the *Reichskammergericht*.

On 15 March 1525 a decree was passed against clerical concubinage. There was considerable opposition at first against married priests, but the preachers showed that marriage was commended in Scripture. "No person had the right to forbid marriage to a particular estate or person...and no vow was binding that went against God's Word" [f. 225v]. Monasteries were dissolved because "idleness benefits only the individual, and segregation was against brotherly love" [f. 226v]. The inmates were either pensioned off or allowed to reside in specifically

³ *Ewige Räte*, i.e. members of the XV or XIII, who were members for life.

designated convents, according to an edict of 2 September 1525. The portion of the income from monasteries that was not needed for pensions was used for the public good. On 7 May 1525 singing in church was forbidden, except during the four daily masses in the collegiate churches. The preachers taught that the mass was an abomination and harmful because of the claim that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was repeated at mass, whereas he died for sinners once and for all. The mass misrepresented the Lord's Supper. The preachers taught that "we come together in his name, eat his bread and drink his wine to commemorate his death ... and that we are truly nourished by the Lord's body and blood for eternal life" [f. 228v]. Schools were established for the education of children and the training of future pastors. There boys are taught virtue and self-discipline as well as Latin and Greek. Those who were in training to become ministers were taught Greek and Hebrew, as well as mathematics, poetics, rhetoric, secular law and biblical exegesis. A church order was established, providing for morning prayers and sermons in five parishes and two sermons in the cathedral, one in the morning, the other in the afternoon on days when there are no lectures. On Sunday, there are two morning sermons in the seven parishes, a noon sermon at the cathedral and at St. Aurelia, and evening prayers in four parishes, as well as catechism after the sermon in the cathedral. The Lord's Supper is celebrated every Sunday in the parishes. The preachers teach that there "is present in the Lord's Supper the living, true body of Christ, a true nourishment, and also his true, heavenly, living blood, which is a certain and invigorating drink for believers" [f. 230v]. The preachers have abandoned Latin and the use of salt and chrism in the ceremony of baptism and have taken care to admonish the parents and godparents to ensure a Christian upbringing for the child baptized. On 9 February 1527 three cemeteries were created outside the city walls.

On 9 January 1529 the question of the remaining four masses was raised by the city council and relegated to the *Schöffen*, who decided on 20 February 1529 to abolish the mass. On 25 August 1529 a decree was passed regulating morals and instituting a marriage tribunal. On 14 February 1530 a decree was passed to abolish idolatry, to remove images and altars from the churches ("our hearts are the altar and sacrificial stones", f. 235v). A defensive alliance has been formed with Zurich, Bern and Basel. The purpose of all these measures was to safeguard the honour of God and assure the welfare and salvation of the community.