

A Christoscopic Reading of Scripture: Johannes Oecolampadius on Hebrews



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Abbreviations

- ACCS *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Thomas Oden (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998–)
- ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950–).
- BuA *Briefe und Akten zum Leben Oekolampads*, ed. Ernst Staehelin. Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte 10, 19 (New York: Johnson, 1971)
- CCSL *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnholti : Brepols, 1954–)
- CNTC *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, ed. David W. Torrance, Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959–1972)
- CO *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, 59 vols., ed. W. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss (Brunswick and Berlin, 1863–1900)
- COE II *Calvini Opera Exegetica Series II* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1992–)
- CPG *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (Turnhout : Brepols, 1974–2003)
- CR *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halis Saxonum: Schwetschke, 1834–1860)
- DMBI *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2007).
- GO *Textus Biblie cum Glossa Ordinaria et expositione Lyre litterali* (Basel: Froben & Petri, 1508)
- GO (1601) *Bibliorum Sacrorum cum Glossa Ordinaria* (Venice: Magnam Societatem, 1601)
- LW *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, American edition (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–)
- NI (1516) *Novum Instrumentum Omne*, ed. Desiderius Erasmus (Basel: Froben, 1516)
- NT (1519) *Novum Testamentum*, ed. Desiderius Erasmus (Basel: Froben, 1519)
- NPNF¹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff. First Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1886–1890)
- NPNF² *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Second Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952–1957)
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857–1912)
- PL *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844–1890)
- RCS *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*, eds. Timothy F. George and Scott M. Manetsch (IVP Academic, 2011–)
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–)

1. Introduction

The sixteenth century was a time when massive changes were taking place in almost every aspect of life, including the church and how people practiced their faith.¹ One of the most significant changes was how the Bible was read and interpreted. Yet, despite the fact that the early sixteenth century witnessed an explosion of commentary writing, the history of biblical interpretation in the sixteenth century was a “virtually unexplored” territory of Reformation history until recently.² Scholars have focused more on the theological writings than on the commentaries, and those who have studied the commentaries largely focused on only a few well-known Reformers.³

An anonymous Dutch print from the seventeenth century illustrates the importance of the men who shaped the way the Bible was interpreted (see Figure 1).⁴ “The Light on the Candlestick” depicts a group of men sitting at a table around a lit candlestick, representing the gospel. While the devil, the pope, a cardinal, and a monk attempt to blow out the candle, these men keep the light going by proclaiming the word of God. Each figure in the portrait is marked with a letter and identified in the caption below. Luther and Calvin sit at the center of

1 See, for example, the summary description of changes related to printing, geography, war, literature, science, and the church in Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 17–18.

2 Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, eds., *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 156–157. David Steinmetz propelled the resurgence of recognizing the importance of Reformation exegesis with his influential article, David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *Theology Today* 37, no. 1 (1980): 27–38. This article has been republished numerous times.

3 Richard Muller asserts that a great deal of research still needs to be done since there are “few presentations of the exegetical practices of lesser figures in the sixteenth century” (“Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages,” in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Muller and Thompson, 4).

4 The print was published by Hugo Allard between 1640 and 1684. It is item RP-P-OB-78.422 in the Frederik Muller History Plates Collection in Amsterdam (FMH 369[c] Atlas van Stolck, 235). The image is used by permission of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, Netherlands.

the table, flanked by other important men connected to the Reformation, such as Wycliff, Hus, Zwingli, Melancthon, Bucer, Bullinger, and Beza. In the top right, we see Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531) portrayed as one of these important interpreters of Scripture. This study seeks to recapture the voice of Oecolampadius as an important contributor to the history of biblical interpretation and exegesis.



Figure 1. *t' Licht is op den kandelaer gestelt.*

Biographical Summary of Oecolampadius

The man later known as Oecolampadius was born in 1482 to Johannes and Anna Huszgen. As a result of his involvement in the humanist movement, he later changed his name to Oecolampadius—the Latinized form of the Greek equivalent (Οικο-λαμπάδ) of a version of his German name “haus-schein” (English, “house lamp”).⁵ The earliest biography of Oecolampadius, *De Vita Oecolampadii*

5 Oecolampadius’s original surname is spelled several different ways (Hussgen, Heusgen, Huszgy, Huszchyn, Hauszchein, Hewsgin) in Ernst Staehelin, *Briefve und Akten zum Leben Oekolampads* (1927, 1934; repr., New York: Johnson, 1971), 1: 1–13 [Nos. 1–8]. Hereafter,

(1534), was written by his successor at Basel, Wolfgang Capito.⁶ While other biographers have sought to capture the life and work of Oecolampadius over the centuries, Ernst Staehelin's 1939 German biography is the most comprehensive, with virtually unanimous agreement that it is "the standard work."⁷ Prior to publishing this biography, Staehelin accomplished the massive undertaking of locating, cataloging, and publishing all the documents he could collect about Oecolampadius's life and literary production.⁸ A few older German and English biographies exist.⁹ But the only recent English biographies are by Gordon Rupp

abbreviated as *BuA* with entry number in brackets. Staehelin deduces that he changed his name sometime between 1500 and 1511 when it first appears as Oecolampadius (*Das Theologische Lebenswerk Johannes Oekolampads*, QFR 21 [New York: Johnson, 1939], 24, 33).

- 6 The biography was first published as part of Johannes Oecolampadius, *In prophetam Ezechielem commentarius*, ed. Wolfgang Capito (Strassburg: Matthias Apiarius, 1534). Irena Backus notes that this biography "contains a fair amount of exaggeration," since it functioned as an apology against rumors that Oecolampadius committed suicide (*Life Writing in Reformation Europe* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008], 52–54).
- 7 Ernst Staehelin, *Das Theologische Lebenswerk Johannes Oekolampads*, QFR 21 (New York: Johnson, 1939). As one example of identifying the importance of this biography, see Amy Nelson Burnett, "Contributors to the Reformed Tradition" in *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. David Whitford (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 35.
- 8 Ernst Staehelin, *Oekolampad-Bibliographie*, (1918, 1928; repr., Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1963) and the two-volume work, *Briefe und Akten zum Leben Oekolampads*, published in 1927 and 1934. *Briefe und Akten (BuA)* includes smaller documents such as school records, leaflets, pamphlets, chronicles, biographical reports, proceedings, dedications, prefaces, introductions, and epilogues. It only contains excerpts for most of his larger writings and indicates where the sources could be found at the time. Staehelin also notes that the correspondence includes only what were readily accessible and recognizably reliable letters (1: vii–ix). Other sources, such as *Calvini Opera*, *Bucer Briefwechsel*, *Melanctons Briefwechsel*, *Zwinglius Opera*, and *Erasmii Epistolae* include references to Oecolampadius's life and work that are not found in *BuA*.
- 9 The German biographies are Salomon Hess, *Lebensgeschichte D. Johann Oekolampads, Reformators der Kirche in Basel* (Zurich: Ziegler und Söhne, 1793); J. J. Herzog, *Das Leben Johannes Oekolampads und die Reformation der Kirche zu Basel* (Basel: Schweighauser, 1843); K. R. Hagenbach, *Johann Oekolampad und Oswald Myconius, die Reformatoren Basels Leben und ausgewählte Schriften* (Elberfeld: R.L. Friderichs, 1859) and Theophil Staehelin, *Johann Oekolampad, der Reformator von Basel* (Basel: Christliche Schriften, 1864). Ernst Staehelin also produced a shorter biographical work, *Das Reformationswerk des Johannes Oekolampad* (Bern: Gotthelf, 1932). Herzog's biography was also translated into French as *Oecolampade, Le Réformateur De Bâle*, trans. Armand de Mestral (Neuchatel: Michaud, 1848). Two older English publications are Erasmus Middleton, *Biographia Evangelica* (Hogg, 1779), 85–98 and William Sime, *Life of Ulricus Zuinglius, the Swiss Reformer: With a Biographical Sketch of John Oecolampadius* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841), 126–143. An older Latin biographical entry on Oecolampadius is also included in Adam Melchior, *Vitae Germanorum theologorum* (Heidelberg: Rosae, 1620), 45–59.

and Diane Poythress.¹⁰ Brief summaries of Oecolampadius's life can be found in numerous dictionaries and encyclopedias of the Reformation.¹¹

None of these biographies contain much about Oecolampadius's early life. His family lived in Weinsberg, a Swabian town in the diocese of Würzburg in the Palatinate. At the age of 17, he matriculated at the University of Heidelberg, where he studied from 1499 to 1503.¹² At some point prior to April 1510, Oecolampadius was ordained as a priest and became the preacher at St. John's Church in his hometown of Weinsberg.¹³ He returned to school, matriculating at the University of Tübingen in April 1513.¹⁴ There, he became close friends with Philip Melancthon, and Melancthon's great uncle, the leading Christian Hebraist, Johann Reuchlin. Oecolampadius also attended Stuttgart and Heidelberg where he pursued the humanist ideal of "homo trilinguis" to become skilled in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

Oecolampadius moved to Basel for the first time in September 1515, primarily to assist Erasmus on the first edition of the *Novum Instrumentum*. Among other things, Oecolampadius was responsible for providing the annotations on the passages where the New Testament referred to the Old Testament.¹⁵ He also began attending the University of Basel, where he would ultimately earn a doctorate of theology in 1518.¹⁶ It was also during this time period, that Oecolampadius was presented with the opportunities to teach at the University of

10 The English biographies are E. Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation* (1969; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 3–46 and Diane Poythress, *Reformer of Basel: The Life, Thought, and Influence of Johannes Oecolampadius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

11 For example, see Robert Walton, "Oecolampadius, Johannes," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans Hillerbrand, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 169–171; Hughes Oliphant Old, "John Oecolampadius (1482–1531)," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald McKim and David Wright (Westminster John Knox, 1992), 414; and Christoph Weismann, "Oecolampad(ius)," in *Dictionary of the Reformation*, ed. Klaus Ganzer and Bruno Steimer, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 225–226.

12 See Staehelin, *Theologische Lebenswerk*, 14, 24; *BuA*, 1: 1–3 [Nos. 1, 3–4]. Capito identified his father as a tradesman and stated that his mother was a pious woman (*BuA*, 2: 719, 744 [Nos. 960, 971]). Some writers state that he also studied law in Bologna for six months around 1502.

13 He may have been ordained soon after receiving his M.A. in 1503 or not until just before taking his post in Weinsberg in 1510.

14 See Staehelin, *Theologische Lebenswerk*, 57–59; *BuA*, 1: 23 [No. 15].

15 Erasmus hired Oecolampadius to check references to the Old Testament, write theological annotations, proofread the manuscripts, remove heretical views, and write the postscript.

16 Oecolampadius matriculated around the end of September 1515. His licensure exam was on October 27, 1516. He earned his doctorate near the end of 1518. From 1516 to 1518, Oecolampadius apparently traveled back and forth for various lengths of time between Basel and Weinsberg, preaching regularly, lecturing on Lombard's *Sentences*, and fulfilling his priestly duties. See *BuA*, 1: 25–26, 28–29, 30–31, 77–78 [Nos. 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 46]; Staehelin, *Theologische Lebenswerk*, 61–87, 93.

Wittenberg or to assist Erasmus on the second edition of the *Novum Testamentum*, though he did not do either.¹⁷ Instead, he was appointed as the confessor priest at the cathedral in Basel, completed the work for the publication of his Greek Grammar, and began his career as a patristic scholar.

Sometime around the summer of 1519, Oecolampadius had his “break-through to the Reformation understanding.”¹⁸ Oecolampadius does not seem to have had a dramatic conversion experience, but rather, he found himself involved in the Reform movement by way of his participation in humanism. Near the end of 1518 he had accepted the call to become the cathedral preacher in Augsburg, where he began aligning himself with Luther sympathizers and expressing views that were more evangelical than traditional.¹⁹ In April 1520, he surprisingly entered a nearby Brigittine monastery at Altomünster because he was discontent with his work as priest and wanted to find clarity in his thinking about the teachings of Luther.²⁰ During his time at the monastery, Oecolampadius began working on translations of several Eastern fathers, and wrote treatises on the Lord’s Supper, the Virgin Mary, and Confession, as well as his opinions regarding the teachings of Luther.²¹ Because he could not avoid engaging in the theological quarrels outside the monastery walls, Oecolampadius eventually was forced to flee the monastery near the beginning of 1522.²²

Oecolampadius eventually returned to Basel in November 1522 and finally settled down. There, he began a friendship with Zwingli in December 1522 that would shape both their lives and ministries. In the spring of 1523, he began a series of lectures on the book of Isaiah in which he taught many of the theological

17 Staehelin, *Theologische Lebenswerk*, 87.

18 Staehelin, *Theologische Lebenswerk*, 93–94, 106–113.

19 Oecolampadius appears to have authored “The Unlearned Lutherans” and the forward to the writings about the Leipzig Disputation in 1519. These both were favorable toward Luther’s views. See *BuA*, 1: 72–75, 78, 99–100, 108–109 [Nos. 43, 47, 64, 70]; Staehelin, *Theologische Lebenswerk*, 100–103.

20 Oecolampadius wrote years later about the move, “But I myself was searching for quiet and rest so that I could be freed for both letters and prayers; for in these things I had placed a certain happiness” (*BuA*, 2: 27 [No. 465], translation mine). Some writers also note a mystical side that may have been sympathetic to monastic life (Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* [New York: Manchester University Press, 2002], 109; Ed Miller, “Oecolampadius: The Unsung Hero of the Basel Reformation,” *Illiff Review* 39, no. 3 [Fall 1982]: 10). A letter from Adelmann to Pirkheimer also reports Oecolampadius’s decision (*BuA*, 1: 116–117 [No. 78]).

21 See Johannes Oecolampadius, *Iudiciu[m] de Doctore Martino Luthero* ([Leipzig]: [Schumann], 1520), iib. Documentation for Oecolampadius’ writings while in the monastery are found in *BuA*, 1: 122–126, 129–130, 132–135, 137–139, 140–142, 142–143, 145–148, 152–154, 154–156, 164–167, 172–174 [Nos. 84, 88, 90, 91, 94, 97, 98, 102, 103, 107, 108, 109, 117, 118, 122].

22 A report from 1538 dates his departure from the monastery on January 23, 1522 (*BuA*, 2: 781 [No. 986]).

ideas associated with the Reformation. These lectures gained him a good reputation among students, clergy, publishers, and the city council. Martin Luther even wrote to Oecolampadius that June to affirm him in his teaching.²³ Oecolampadius was soon appointed as professor of theology at the University of Basel in June 1523. That same year the city council issued a decree that all sermons were to be based on the Bible alone. So when Oecolampadius assumed the preaching responsibilities of the priest at St. Martin's, who had fallen ill, he had a prominent pulpit from which he could preach, and a classroom in which he could teach.²⁴ From this point until his death, Oecolampadius continued to preach, lecture, and translate patristic texts.²⁵ Oecolampadius further promoted reformed teaching through disputations, liturgical reform, and debates over the Lord's Supper. He participated in disputations at Basel, Baden, and Bern in 1523, 1526 and 1528.²⁶ He also took advantage of the city council's ambivalence by making increasingly more significant changes to the liturgy.²⁷ In May 1527, the city officials made a compromise in response to arguments submitted by Oecolampadius and Augustinus Marius that the evangelicals could worship at St. Martin's, St. Leonhard's, and the Augustinian house. This action officially sanctioned Oecolampadius's preaching.

Oecolampadius also became one of the central figures in the debates over the Lord's Supper. In 1525, he published a controversial treatise in which he expressed his "spiritual" and "symbolic" view of the Lord's Supper for the first time. While his view was similar to that of Zwingli, Oecolampadius emphasized that the words of Jesus, "This is my body," was a trope with the metaphor in the predicate ("my body") rather than affirming Zwingli's position that the word

23 Luther to Oecolampadius, June 20, 1523, in Martin Luther, *Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters*, ed. Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), 190 [No. 591]. Luther also praised Oecolampadius' teaching on Isaiah in the preface to Melancthon's *Annotations on John* (WA 12: 57.18–19).

24 When the priest died in Feb. 1525, Oecolampadius was appointed as the "peoples' priest" at St. Martin's.

25 See the discussion later on the Lectures and Commentaries in chapter two. Even though the university was closed during June 1529, the public theology lectures continued.

26 Oecolampadius posted the disputation in Basel which called for debate on Christ as the highest ecclesiastical authority, salvation by faith alone, Christ as the sole mediator, and the freedom and priesthood of all believers. He disputed nearly alone at Baden, but was reported to have "disputed with valor, skill, and patience." He was joined by Zwingli, Capito, Bucer, and others at the decisive disputation at Bern (*BuA*, 1: 245–247 [No. 166]). See also Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation*, 29 and Miller, "Unsung Hero," 15.

27 In addition to the traditional Roman service, Oecolampadius began offering an evangelical service which followed a reformed liturgy he had written. He offered communion in both kinds in July 1524 and in 1525 replaced the Mass with the Lord's Supper. He also began the practice of using the German language during baptism, the Lord's Supper, and congregational singing.

“is” meant “signifies.”²⁸ As the division grew over interpretations of the Lord’s Supper, Philip of Hesse called the Marburg Colloquy in October 1529 where Oecolampadius and Zwingli debated with Luther and others.²⁹ At the conclusion, the two sides had agreed on fourteen articles of faith, but could not reach agreement on the Eucharist.

In the midst of all these other reform actions, Oecolampadius further defied the teaching and practice of the Roman Catholic Church by marrying Wibrandis Rosenblatt. At the age of 45, Oecolampadius married the 27-year-old widow of another reformer, Ludwig Keller, and together they would have three children, named Eusebius (godly), Irene (peace), and Aletheia (truth).³⁰

While Oecolampadius played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Reformed Church in Basel—as was the case with many other cities—“the Reformation was initiated from below and not from above.”³¹ The people of Basel, and particularly guild members, ultimately compelled the council of Basel to accept reform. Although the first indications of religious dissent were already occurring in Basel around 1518, the Reformation Order would not be instituted until 1529.³² The city council of Basel sought to avoid the growing conflict between the Catholics and those pushing for evangelical reform.³³ By the mid-

28 Johannes Oecolampadius, *De genuina verborum domini, hoc est corpus meum* (Strassburg: Knobloch, 1525). The work was published in Strasbourg rather than Basel because it was so controversial. It was condemned by the Sorbonne in Paris, refuted by Erasmus, and banned in Basel (*BuA*, 1: 370–372 [No. 261]). Oecolampadius stated that he was confident that he would show that Christ said “This is my body” with a trope like Paul said, “Christ was the Rock” (A.iii). For further analysis on Oecolampadius’s Eucharistic views, see Eric Northway, “The Reception of the Fathers and Eucharistic Theology in Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), with Special Reference to the *Adversus Haereses* of Irenaeus of Lyons” (Ph.D. diss., University of Durham, 2008), 64–65.

29 Luther initially debated with Oecolampadius. Only in the plenary session did Luther debate with both Zwingli and Oecolampadius. Rupp comments that the reason for the pairing was “no doubt for personal reasons, but they were, after all, the two D.D.s” (*Patterns of Reformation*, 42).

30 Oecolampadius to Farel, May 11, 1528 (*BuA*, 2: 182–183 [No. 576]) and Oecolampadius to Zwingli (CR 96: 390 [No. 699]). Following Oecolampadius’ death in 1531, Wibrandis would marry his good friend, Wolfgang Capito, and then after Capito’s death, she would marry Martin Bucer.

31 Hans Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century: Aspects of the City Republic Before, During, and After the Reformation* (1982; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 34. Guggisberg observes that when the “climax” of reform came to Basel, Oecolampadius “did not stand in the center of the events” but rather “remained in the background” (24, 31).

32 On the long duration of the process of reform taking place in Basel, see Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century*, 24–30, 34–35; Amy Nelson Burnett, “Basel’s Long Reformation: Church Ordinances and the Shaping of Religious Culture in the Sixteenth Century,” *Zwingliana* 35 (2008): 145–159. Burnett emphasizes that numerous types of reformation continued in Basel long past the official decision in 1529.

33 Ecclesiastically, Basel had been an episcopal see since the eighth century and the host of a General Church Council from 1430–1448. On the religious background and composition of

1520s, the population of Basel was completely split, but the council still hoped for a peaceful settlement.

The council repeatedly attempted to mediate between the conservative group—comprised of the majority of university professors, the cathedral clergy and some wealthy merchants—and the the reform-minded parish priests, monks, and the majority of artisans who rallied around Oecolampadius.³⁴ In 1525, peasants and guilds engaged in riots calling for religious, political, and economic change. The council continued to hedge, choosing not to take sides, even issuing conflicting decrees on the same day.³⁵ However, in 1528 and 1529, several events finally forced the council to make a decision.

On Good Friday, April 10, 1528, a few guild members removed and destroyed all the images in St. Martin's Church and the Augustinian Church. Over the next several months, citizens grew more restless with the council's compromises and stalling. An informal assembly of guild members petitioned the small council on December 23, 1528 to make a decision in favor of the new church. When the council offered compromises but did not implement changes, another iconoclastic riot broke out on the eve of Ash Wednesday, February 8, 1529. This event "brought the religious crisis in Basel to a climax" and in principle, established the Reformation in Basel.³⁶ While evangelical services had already been held in other churches, the first evangelical service was held in the cathedral the following Sunday. On April 1, 1529, the Council officially instituted the new Reformation Order (*Reformationsordnung*), which brought an end to the remaining elements of Catholic worship in Basel. The ambivalence of the council over this time period allowed Oecolampadius to continue preaching and teaching reformation ideas, and methodically implement liturgical reform. With the constitution of the Reformation Order, he was appointed as the Münster cathedral preacher and the first superintendent of the clergy. He was widely recognized as the leader of the church in Basel. Figures 2 and 3 are representative of early modern portraits of Oecolampadius.³⁷

Oecolampadius only held these roles for a short time, however. Within a few

Basel, see Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century*, 4–6, 20–22; Amy Nelson Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation: Ministers and Their Message in Basel, 1529–1629* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20–26.

34 For further description of the events described here, see Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century*, 24–29; Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*, 26–27; Miller, "Unsung Hero," 17–18.

35 On Sept. 23, 1527, the Council appointed the new Catholic bishop of Basel, and they granted freedom to the clergy not to say Mass and to the people not to attend.

36 Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*, 27.

37 Figure 2 is a portrait from Theodore Beza, *Icones, Id Est Verae Imagines Virorum Doctrina* (Geneva, 1580), M.i-a. Figure 3 is a portrait in Richard Rolt, *Lives of Principle Reformers* (London, 1759), 49. Books are in Public Domain. Images used by permission from the H. Meeter Center for Calvin Studies at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids.



Figure 2. Portrait in Beza's *Icones*.



Figure 3. Portrait in Rolt's *Lives of Principle Reformers*.

weeks of Zwingli's death on the battlefield, Oecolampadius died in November 1531 at 49 years of age.³⁸ He had been a priest, a professor, a reformer, a preacher, a pastor, and the author of numerous writings. The epitaph mounted over his tomb reads:

Dr. Johannes Oecolampadius—theologian by profession, expert in three languages, first teacher of evangelical doctrine in this city, true overseer of this church, as in teaching so also very mighty in sanctity of life—lies concealed beneath this narrow slab.³⁹

Today, the plaque is at the Basel Cathedral, near a large statue of Oecolampadius holding the Bible (see Figure 4).⁴⁰ After his death, the Basel pastor, Max Bertschi described Oecolampadius as an “incomparable pillar of piety and education.”⁴¹

In the ensuing years after Basel became Reformed, most of the city's official theology derived from Oecolampadius, even after his death.⁴² In addition to the theological and ecclesiastical elements in the Reformation Order of 1529, Oecolampadius's contribution to the theological identity of Basel is evident in the Basel Confession of 1534. Oswald Myconius drafted this confession based on one Oecolampadius had previously submitted to the council. Similarly, the catechism

38 While some say he died in December, Oecolampadius most likely died during the early hours of November 23, 1531. As with many important figures of the time, there were various rumors about Oecolampadius's death. Some attributed it to blood poisoning, or suicide, or the devil ending his life. See *BuA*, 2: 714–6, 718–719, 724–727, 753–755 [Nos. 958, 961, 966, 974]; Philip Schaff, “The Reformation in Basel. Oecolampadius,” in *History of the Christian Church* (1910; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 119, fn. 1.

39 *BuA*, 2: 783–784 [No. 988]. “D. IO. Oecolampadius professione theologus, trium linguarum



Figure 4. Statue of Oecolampadius in Basel.

Oecolampadius wrote remained in use for decades, despite the fact that its simplicity and doctrinal vagueness made it “a flawed teaching tool.”⁴³ In the 1560s and 1570s, many pastors in Basel demonstrated allegiance and loyalty to the teachings and traditions established by Oecolampadius, because of his founding role in the Basel Reformed church.⁴⁴ The key theological documents of Basel “held an authoritative position, not only because they were given official recognition by the magistrate but also because they were all attributed to John Oecolampadius.”⁴⁵

Not only did people in Basel hold Oecolampadius in high esteem, but so did many of his contemporaries in other regions. They regularly acknowledged Oecolampadius’s theological abilities and praised him for his scholarship.⁴⁶ Martin Bucer wrote that there was not a “greater theologian.”⁴⁷ Theodore Beza described Oecolampadius as “a man whose piety and erudition everyone always made much of, unless either he did not know him, or he himself was lacking in all piety and erudition.”⁴⁸ John à

peritissimus author evangelicae doctrinae in hac urbe primus et temple huius verus epus: ut doctrina, sic vitae sanctimonia pollentissimus sub breve saxum hoc reconcitus iacet.”

40 Used by permission of photographer, Michael Acidri (2012).

41 *BuA* 2: 715 [No. 958]; Walter Troxler, “Oekolampad, Johannes,” in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz and Traugott Bautz, vol. VI (Herzberg: Bautz, 1993), 1133. “Nam Oecolampadius noster, totius pietatis ac eruditionis unica columna.”

42 See Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century*, 31–32; Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*, 47–55.

43 Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*, 54. On the developments and use of the variations on Oecolampadius’s catechism, see 52–55, 96–97.

44 Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*, 274.

45 Burnett, *Teaching the Reformation*, 26, 47–48.

46 Friends and colleagues such as Bucer, Melancthon, Zwingli, Myconius, and especially the publishers of his writings offered words of accolade about Oecolampadius. See for example, *BuA*, 1: 24, 129 [Nos. 17,88]; 2: 715, 752, 753 [Nos. 958, 972, 973]; Miller, “Unsung Hero,” 6, 12; James Brashler, “Oecolampadius, Johannes (1482–1531),” in *DMBI*, 782.

47 *BuA*, 2: 715 [No.958]. “vere enim maiorem eo theologum non habuimus, qui etiam sanioerem ecclesiae instaurationem promotatam unice cupiebat.”

48 Theodore Beza, *Volumen Tractationum Theologicarum* (Geneva: Joannis Crispin, 1570), 222.

Lasco expressed his wish to have all of Oecolampadius's writings.⁴⁹ Even his opponents, such as the papal nuncio Aleander, recognized Oecolampadius as "learned in three languages, and one of the outstanding scholars in the world of German scholarship."⁵⁰ Later theologians, such as Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), Edward Leigh (1602–1671), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), and Francis Turretin (1623–1687) regarded Oecolampadius as a major reformer and biblical scholar.⁵¹

The Basel reformer's exegesis was regularly referred to by later commentators and theologians.⁵² When Oecolampadius was lecturing on Isaiah, Luther expressed his appreciation and encouragement.⁵³ Later when Luther published his own Isaiah commentary in 1532, he wrote, "Oecolampadius has quite satisfactorily translated Isaiah," and "Oecolampadius has sufficiently done good work in the grammar, although occasionally he may differ from us."⁵⁴ In his own Romans commentary, Wolfgang Musculus wrote, "Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and more recently, Oecolampadius, addressed this question, but they offered different solutions."⁵⁵ Vermigli affirmed Oecolampadius's exegesis on passages in Daniel and Malachi.⁵⁶ Heinrich Bullinger cited Oecolampadius on numerous

"Ioannes Oecolampadius, homo cuius & pietatem & eruditionem nemo unquam non magni fecit, nisi vel qui nunquam illum novit, vel qui fuit ipse omnis pietatis & eruditionis expertus." Beza also included a poem about Oecolampadius in his *Icones*, and identified him as one of "the most distinguished men of the age" (Beza, *Icones*, M.ii.b–iii.a.; Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, trans. Francis Sibson [Philadelphia: Whetham, 1836], 30).

49 Jan Laski, *Epistolae*, ed. A. Kuyper (Amsterdam: Frederic Muller, 1866), 576, 583, 584. In one letter to Albertus Hardenberg, à Lasco indicated he had several of Oecolampadius's writings, including his commentaries on the epistles, Isaiah, and Daniel, but wished he had the other commentaries on the prophets and John.

50 *BuA*, 1: 149 [No. 105]. "monacho dotto in le tre lengue, uno delli più grandi satrapi in la academia Germanica."

51 For example, Jacob Arminius lists Oecolampadius with Wycliff, Huss, Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin as the most important reformers (*Disputationes Publicae & Privatae* [Leiden: Godefridum Basson, 1629], 317). Francis Turretin lists him with Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin (*De Necessaria Seccessione Nostra Ab Ecclesia Romana* [Trajecti ad Rhenum: Schouten, 1701], 162 and *Institutio theologiae elencticae* [Geneva: de Tournes, 1688], 74).

52 See Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *DMBI*, 42; Gordon, *Swiss Reformation*, 288–292. Other examples include Nicholas Gibbons, William Greenhill, John Mayer, Thomas Watson, and August Pfeiffer.

53 *BuA*, 1: 222–223 [No. 157].

54 WA 31.II: 2. "Oecolampadius satis diligenter transtulit Esaiaim." WA 25: 88 "In Grammatica autem satis bonam operam navavit Oecolampadius, quanquam alicubi a nobis discrepet." Luther and those at Wittenberg also welcomed the publication of Oecolampadius's commentary on 1 John. See *BuA*, 1: 319–320 [No. 221]; Timothy J. Wengert, *Philip Melancthon's Annotations in Johannem in Relation to Its Predecessors and Contemporaries* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1987), 39–40.

55 See for example, Wolfgang Musculus, *In Epistolam D. Apostoli Pauli ad Romanos, Commentarii* (Basel: Sebastian Henricpetri, 1600), 78. "Quaestionem hanc movent Origenes, Hieronymus, Augustinus & ex recentioribus Oecolampadius, sed variè solvunt."

56 Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci Communes* (London: J. Kyngstoni, 1576), 795, 813. He referred to

occasions in his commentaries.⁵⁷ John Calvin also praised the exegetical work of Oecolampadius and frequently interacted with his commentaries.⁵⁸ The editor of the 1852 edition of Calvin's commentary on Daniel refers to Oecolampadius as "the most learned of the commentators among the Early Reformers," who writes with "a proficiency in correct interpretation which we seek for in vain in some disciples of the Early Reformers."⁵⁹ In the seventeenth century, Richard Simon identified that Oecolampadius's Romans commentary demonstrated his attention to the literal sense and his affirmation of Reformation doctrines.⁶⁰ Though Poythress overstates her claim that "Oecolampadius proved to be among the elite exegetes of his day, and continues rivaling many moderns of today," there is little doubt that well into the seventeenth century, Oecolampadius was a highly regarded theologian and biblical scholar.⁶¹

Yet, for various reasons Oecolampadius has not received significant attention from scholars and church historians in later generations. The need for further research on Oecolampadius has been stated and restated for nearly two centuries. Philip Schaff wrote that the important need for Oecolampadius's works to be compiled had been identified as early as 1827.⁶² On the occasion of Oecolampadius's 500th birthday in 1982, Ed Miller observed that Oecolampadius was almost absent in English-speaking treatments of the Reformation—only getting a passing reference even in works that attempt to highlight the "supporting cast"

Zwingli, Luther, Oecolampadius, Bucer, and Calvin as heroes of the reformed religion. Vermigli also referred to Oecolampadius about 60 times in *Defensio Doctrinae de Eucharistiae Sacramento* (1562).

57 Bullinger named Oecolampadius at least nine times and quotes from his commentaries on Romans, Genesis, and Daniel in *Commentarii in omnes Pauli apostoli epistolas, atque etiam in epistolam ad Hebraeos* (Zurich: Christoph Froschouer, 1582). Bullinger also wrote the "Praefatio," in *Commentarii omnes in libros Prophetarum*, by Johannes Oecolampadius (Geneva: Crispin, 1558). Bullinger described Oecolampadius as "the most skilled in his day ... the most equipped to explain the books of the prophets. ... for he accurately possessed above all the necessary languages" (iiii-b).

58 See the discussion in chapter two on Calvin's access to Oecolampadius's commentaries.

59 See Thomas Myer's preface and attached dissertations in Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1852), 1: xli-xlii, 2: 395-442.

60 Richard Simon, *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1693), 733-735. Simon acknowledged that he had only looked at the Romans commentary, but still reasoned that Oecolampadius's views on merit, satisfaction, penitence, and the human will could possibly be reconciled with traditional Catholic teaching.

61 Diane Poythress, *Reformer of Basel*, 84. In her dissertation, Poythress states that Oecolampadius was "impeccable" in his exegesis with so few "deviations, excesses, and improper usages of Scripture" that "they hardly bear mentioning" ("Johannes Oecolampadius' Exposition of Isaiah, Chapters 36-37" [Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1992], 418-420).

62 Philip Schaff, "The Reformation in Basel. Oecolampadius," 116.

of the Reformation.⁶³ Fifteen years later, Thomas Fudge reiterated, “For a man so highly regarded in the sixteenth century, it is a curiosity that he has faded so in Reformation historiography.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Bruce Gordon and Amy Nelson Burnett again echo that Oecolampadius has “received scant attention from historians,” and “drawn little scholarly attention.”⁶⁵

There are likely several reasons why Oecolampadius has been neglected by scholarship. Some have speculated that it is because he was not as flamboyant, charismatic, or bold as the more prominent Reformers. Hans Guggisberg noted that

in his double position as teacher and preacher, Oecolampadius was able to consolidate the Reformation movement and to set it upon a sound theological basis, but in spite of his success, he never attained an authority comparable to that of Zwingli.⁶⁶

Zwingli himself referred to Oecolampadius as a “gentle and firm man” who spread “the sweet savor of Christ” to those around him.⁶⁷ Though they likely never met, John Calvin affirmed at least the reputation of Oecolampadius’s meekness in a letter to Melanchthon.⁶⁸ The historian, Philip Schaff described Oecolampadius as a man who was

inferior to Zwingli in originality, force, and popular talent, but surpassed him in scholastic erudition and had a more gentle disposition ... a man of thought rather than of action, [whose] circumstances forced him out of his quiet study to the public ... a modest and humble man, of a delicate constitution and ascetic habits [who] looked like a church father.⁶⁹

Gordon Rupp reiterates that Oecolampadius was not “dowered with a forceful personality or a gift of leadership ... [but] was forced into a position of eminence,” and rose to the challenge.⁷⁰ Fudge also considers the possibility that Oecolampadius’s reputation was tainted because Luther labeled him among the Schwärmer and called him “Icarus” to Zwingli’s deceptive “Daedalus.”⁷¹ Oeco-

63 Miller, “Unsung Hero,” 5. He specifically cites David Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981) as an example, though many others could be given.

64 Thomas Fudge, “Icarus of Basel? Oecolampadius and the Early Swiss Reformation,” *Journal of Religious History* 21, no. 3 (1997): 268. Akira Demura also stated, “It seems that much remains to be carried out in Oecolampadius studies” (“Two Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans: Calvin and Oecolampadius,” in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* [Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997], 188).

65 Gordon, *Swiss Reformation*, 109 and Burnett, “Contributors to the Reformed Tradition,” 35.

66 Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century*, 23–24.

67 See John Dyck, “Johannes Oecolampadius: Lighthouse of the Reformation,” *Western Reformed Seminary Journal* 3, no. 2 (August 1996): 29.

68 Calvin to Melanchthon, January 21, 1545, in CO 12: 9–12 [No. 606].

69 Schaff, “Reformation in Basel,” 116.

70 Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation*, 45.

71 Fudge, “Icarus of Basel?,” 269. See also Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century*, 31.