

Religious Peace in a Rural Commune—Zizers in Graubünden (November 10, 1616)

Abstract

Nowhere in Europe, arguably, was the freedom to make purely local decisions on the issues raised by the Protestant Reformation greater than in the Republic of the Three Leagues in Graubünden (now southeastern Switzerland). Some communes formally chose either Catholic or Reformed worship, while others, such as the commune of the Four Villages [*Vier Dörfer*] near the region's capital in Chur, allowed individual villages to decide which of the two confessions to follow. Throughout the sixteenth century, this divergence caused few apparent difficulties for the villages' political unity, especially since religious dissidents in each village customarily attended churches of their preferred confession in a neighboring community. The situation changed around 1600, when vocal Reformed minorities in Undervaz, Trimmis, and Zizers began demanding access to, or even control of, their villages' main churches. The Catholic majorities responded by pushing back, first with words and lawsuits, later with tumultuous assemblies and several near-riots. By 1614, the earlier confessional peace had given way to a series of tense standoffs, which were intensified by interventions on the part of powerful Catholic and Reformed forces outside the Four Villages. Ultimately, high-level mediation led to negotiations in which the longing for communal unity confronted the reality of well-defined separation in religion. The struggle to balance these realities informed documents such as the one reproduced here, which was signed at Zizers in 1616. When religious conflict flared up again in the 1640s, the settlement of 1616 was presented as evidence of how religious differences could be handled in a village that was firmly divided into two religious communities.

Source

An agreement of the people of Zizers concerning religion and the church there.

We, the Evangelical and Catholic parties of the commune and parish of Zizers, make known and proclaim publicly and to everyone with this letter.

After experiencing some years of division among us and some interference in our parish on account of religion, which has not only resulted in mistrust, envy, and hatred among us, but also, notably, in considerable costs and damage (so that we must be concerned that further and greater inconveniences await us unless God, as the originator of peace, should grant us by his grace the spirit of peace and love). Therefore, we from both parties collectively and separately, for ourselves and for our descendants, have come to agreement and united on the following articles, and we promise one another faithfully and without deceit to hold and keep to them for each other, and to live with and alongside one another according to their provisions henceforth, as befits honorable communal citizens and neighbors.

First, the two above-named religions shall be free in our entire parish, and neither party shall harass the other in the exercise of their religion, nor in offices, in the courts, or in communal benefits. And we shall behave not as two parties or communes, but as one commune, and we will hold our assembly henceforth also in the Ballhuetten after services, without deceit, as in old times.

And he who earnestly tries to convince another to stand with his party, and tries to persuade him in this or that matter, shall be obliged to pay the other party a fine of 5 £ for each instance, without reduction of the penalty.

Accordingly, the lower church shall serve the Evangelicals; they shall use it, and remodel it as they please, but at their own cost; but those parts that are used in common shall be maintained from the communal treasury, and the *tafflen*^[1] shall not be damaged or decreased in whichever church they are.

The upper church shall serve the Catholics, and if they request something that the Evangelicals do not need for their services, then it shall be allowed to them willingly; they may use the church with honorable priests, though without expense on the part of the commune, but not with foreign or wandering monks, even at their own cost; and they shall not introduce any novelties or conduct their burials in the lower customary graveyard.^[2]

Marriages shall be held according to whichever religion the groom, or the bride, request.

The collection plate proceeds shall be divided in the lower church in a nonpartisan manner, and there shall be two supervisors of the collection.

All public notices shall be made at the lower church, by the village crier, as is customary. And the Evangelical churchwardens shall manage the entire endowment now, and in the future, according to their desire, but without damage or deterioration to it. And on the other hand, the Catholics shall be released from all damages, costs, contempt charges, and fines stemming from religious matters. And if the entire commune should become Evangelical, then everything that has been donated to the endowment shall fall to the commune.

And what the parishioners may have donated, shall revert to them or their heirs, in place of the endower, all according to our common law of endowment and inheritance,^[3] but if everyone should become Catholic, then both churches and the entire endowment shall be given to them.

Any remaining unpaid costs shall be paid from the communal treasury, if the Evangelicals have approved them up to this day.

The beadles shall be elected as formerly; they shall help each other and divide the mass offering equally.

And everything shall belong to the entire commune undividedly, including both churches, the bells, the church decorations, to manage and control according to its wishes.

And all earlier verdicts and recesses of the Three Leagues^[4] and their courts shall henceforth be declared dead and cancelled, on both sides.

Anything that shall come about outside these articles shall be resolved peacefully in all cases according to our local custom and statutes. And if either party should disregard one or more of the articles, and should wholly wish not to follow the agreement; or if any person should protect someone who did so, he shall be deprived of all the privileges described above.

And as a true charter and for greater security for precisely what stands above, for the future, we have drawn up two identical copies of this our contract; and both parties have requested Mr. Lawrence Gopfert, at this time Landamman of Zizers, to confirm it with the communal seal, so that if one should be lost, the other would be given credit for all time. Given at Zizers on St. Martin's Day [November 11], 1616.

NOTES

[1] Either the priest's gravestones in the walls of the church, or more likely the entire interior decoration—trans.

[2] The lower church, the larger one, had the communal graveyard—trans.

[3] A reference to the Ilanz Articles—trans.

[4] The three federated leagues of the Graubünden—trans.

Source of original German text: “Convention deren zu Zitzers wegen der Religion und Kirchen daselbst,” Staatsarchiv Graubünden, B 1538/15, pp. 94–97, copy from 1644.

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