CHAPTER 6

The Reformation in St. Gallen and Appenzell

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6.1 Introduction

After Zurich, St. Gallen was the second town in the Swiss Confederation to join the Reformation. The monastery of St. Gallen had its roots in the hermitage established by Gallus, an Irish-Scottish monk, in 612 CE. In the 8th century the foundation became a Benedictine monastery that in the course of the 9th and 10th centuries would develop into an important cultural center for central Europe. A community of craftsmen and servants grew up around the monastery and in time formed a town. In 1080 that town was granted imperial free status.

By the middle of the 15th century there were two political institutions in St. Gallen: the abbey of St. Gallen, which had an extensive territory that included the Fürstenland (the lands between the localities of Wil and Rorschach) and Toggenburg (since 1468), and the town of St. Gallen, which had become politically independent. Both prince-abbey and city-republic became associated members (zugewandte Orte) of the Confederation, the former in 1451 and the latter in 1454. Their geography was highly unusual in that the monastery was completely surrounded by the city, and the city by the territory of the Fürstenland. At times the monastery and the city were on relatively good terms, but friction and disputes were not uncommon, a reality that played out in particular at the time of the Reformation.

Since the early Middle Ages the town had been renowned for its linen production. In the 15th and 16th centuries, and even later, St. Gallen linens were exported to many parts of Europe, including northern Italy, France, Spain, Germany, and Poland. Among the established trade routes were those that led via Nuremberg, Leipzig, and Poznan to Warsaw, via Nuremberg and Silesia to Krakow, and via Vienna to Moravia and Hungary. By 1500 St. Gallen, a town

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1 HLS 10: 692–751.
2 See the maps in Hektor Ammann and Karl Schib, Historischer Atlas der Schweiz, 2nd ed. (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1958), 44.
with some 3,000 to 4,000 inhabitants, was a well-known, prosperous city highly regarded for the unique quality of its products.

6.2 The Beginnings of the Reformation

One man above all is associated with the Reformation in St. Gallen, the humanist and physician Joachim von Watt, whose name is generally found in its Latinized version, Vadian (1484–1551). Vadian was descended from an old established merchant family in St. Gallen whose status and wealth were a product of their participation in the linen trade. On completing his studies at the University of Vienna, Vadian became a professor at the same institution and,