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# Religious Motivations Can Only Get You So Far: The Impacts and Limitations of Lutheran Educational Reforms

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Religious Motivations Can Only Get You So Far: The Impacts and Limitations of Lutheran  
Educational Reforms

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Education forms the foundation of western society's thought. In modern times, most people consider education for all children a necessity for a well functioning society.<sup>1</sup> However, the public mindset towards education has evolved greatly over time. Education in Europe was once reserved for the few, the rich, the Catholic, and the male.<sup>2</sup> The Protestant Reformation introduced and perpetuated the idea that valuing the education of *all* children benefits society as a whole.<sup>3</sup> What began as a protest against the abuses of the Catholic church evolved into a movement that affected great cultural, intellectual, and political change across Europe.<sup>4</sup> Though the Reformation was broad in scope, with many conflicting doctrines and figures, it shared common values of self-reliance, and a determination that all people should be able to read and interpret the Bible for themselves.<sup>5</sup> As a university professor himself, Martin Luther (1483-1546), along with other Protestant writers, emphasized the dignity of teachers and the value of education. Luther saw education as not only an intellectual pursuit, but as a religious responsibility. Luther also emphasized that the responsibility to educate children was on the parents of said children and, in the case that a child should have no parents, with the state.<sup>6</sup> Inspired by this line of reasoning, Protestant reformers, such as Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), worked to institute a system of state sponsored schools in order to more effectively educate the most children.<sup>7</sup> The writings and philosophy of the Protestant Reformation were foundational to

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<sup>1</sup> Jere R. Behrman, David L. Crawford, and Nevzer Stacey, *The Social Benefits of Education* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Whitehead, *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe : A History, 1500 to 1800* (London: Routledge, 1999), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Androne, "The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on Education," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 137, (July 2014): 83, doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.256.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Badertscher, *Protestant Reformation* (Toledo, Ohio: Great Neck Publishing, 2009), eBook, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Jesse Couenhoven, "The Protestant Reformation," *A Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy*, (December 2017): 208-209, doi:10.1017/9781139519267.017.

<sup>6</sup> Androne, *The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on Education*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Readings in the History of Education* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Riverside Press, 1920): 236

the later development of a state sponsored schooling system that values the education of all children. However, Protestant reformers failed to spread their educational reforms outside of Northern Europe, and primarily influenced only secondary Latin-schools and schools for the upper-class children. Though the educational reforms of Melanchthon and Luther did increase the public's literacy and access to education, and reformed education in Germany, the ultimate motivation for their educational reforms was to spread Lutheranism, not to educate children. This religious motivation would limit the reach of educational reforms in the German States.

Though the political and social events of the past century had long heralded it, the Protestant Reformation began in 1517 with the publishing of Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*, which detailed the abuses of the Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> From this, Luther continued spreading his theology throughout what is now modern day Germany. The core of Luther's theology was that church practices should return to be more similar to those dictated in the Bible. Luther's mindset may have been influenced by the *Devotio Moderna* movement that had started in the late fourteenth century which advocated for a return to traditional pious forms of prayer, worship, and theology.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to his theological philosophy, Martin Luther's educational philosophy greatly influenced the course of the Protestant Reformation. Luther spent time as an Augustinian monk, and was later a professor at the University of Wittenberg. After publishing his *Ninety-Five Theses*, Luther faced persecution from the Catholic church and was eventually excommunicated and driven into hiding.<sup>10</sup> However, Luther was protected by the Elector of Saxony, Duke

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<sup>8</sup> Badertscher, *Protestant Reformation*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation With Reformation and Humanism* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1968), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Graham Tomlin "Shapers of Protestantism: Martin Luther," in *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, ed. Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Mark (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 43.

Frederick the Wise. Luther's theology originally emphasized the reading and understanding of scripture. Luther preached that godly law was natural law and that each person should have access to this godly law by reading the Bible. He also preached the doctrine of *Sola scriptura*, or by scripture alone, which asserts that scripture is the ultimate arbiter of law. These divisive preachings undermined ecclesiastical authority and went against the church's teachings.<sup>11</sup> In order to facilitate the reading of scripture, Luther translated the New Testament in 1522 and the Old Testament in 1534 into German in order to remove the laities need for clerical mediation when interpreting scripture.<sup>12</sup> However, the populace would not be able to read the Bible if they did not know how to read in the first place, and Protestant reformers soon found that the educational system was not strong enough to create a sufficiently literate populace.

Events leading up to and during the Protestant Reformation had weakened the state of educational institutions in Germany. The German Peasant Revolt in 1524 weakened many institutions, including schools and churches.<sup>13</sup> As Luther observed in his 1524 writing *To The Councilmen of All The Cities In Germany That They Establish And Maintain Christian Schools*, "schools are everywhere allowed to go to wrack and ruin; universities are growing weak, monasteries are declining."<sup>14</sup> During the Protestant Reformation, many monks and nuns in the Holy Roman Empire abandoned their monasteries to convert to the Protestant religions. This left a shortage in schools, as the monasteries doubled as schools. Reformation thought also led many to believe that the church's previous doctrine and teachings were flawed, and not worth studying.

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<sup>11</sup> Carmen Luke. "Luther and the Foundations of Literacy, Secular Schooling and Educational Administration." *The Journal of Educational Thought* 23, no. 2 (August 1989): 120. [www.jstor.org/stable/23768389](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23768389).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Reisner, *Historical Foundations of Modern Education* (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press, 1927): 435.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, "To The Councilmen of All The Cities in Germany That They Establish And Maintain Christian Schools, 1524," in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, trans. A.T.W. Steinhäuser (Albany, OR: Books For The Ages, 1997), 77.

<sup>15</sup> Because of the forces impairing educational institutions, Protestant Reformation leaders saw the need for a survey of the current state of schools in order to construct a plan to reorganize the educational system. With the support of the Elector John the Constant of Saxony, Luther commissioned a survey of the churches and schools that began in 1527.<sup>16</sup> The Elector of Saxony divided Saxony into five areas and sent a team consisting of lawyers, clergymen, and faculty from the University of Wittenberg to each territory to assess the qualifications of the ministers and educators, settle any existing disputes, and make recommendations for improvement and reform. The survey revealed “deplorable conditions” such as “ignorant priests and widespread adultery.”<sup>17</sup> Motivated by these discoveries of the dismal state of schools in Saxony, Philip Melanchthon composed the *Visitation Papers*, a document that both outlined the basics of Lutheran faith and formulated a plan for reformed schools.<sup>18</sup>

Philip Melanchthon recorded the results of this survey in his *Book of Visitations*. Because of his work in educational reform, Melanchthon was known as the *Praeceptor Germaniae*, or the teacher of Germany.<sup>19</sup> Born Philip Schwarzerd, Melanchthon was a close ally of Luther and a professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg. As a humanist, Melanchthon worked not only on educational reforms for the Protestant Reformation, but also on reconciling classical works with the Bible.<sup>20</sup> This humanist outlook influenced the structure of his educational reforms, as illustrated in his oration on the scope of education: “for the explanation of the major

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<sup>15</sup> Robert C. Schultz, introduction to *A Sermon on Keeping Children in School* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 210.

<sup>16</sup> Luke, “Luther and the Foundations of Literacy,” 122.

<sup>17</sup> Edward P. Denys, “Philip Melanchthon’s Unique Contribution to Education” (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 1973), 314.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy and Education*, ed. Sachiko Kusakawa, trans. Christine F. Salazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xi.

<sup>20</sup> Androne, *The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on Education*, 85.

controversies one needs not only a ready mind and a certain knowledge of the sacred books, but also the art of disputation, fluent speech and a knowledge of history, antiquity and judgments of the past.”<sup>21</sup> Influenced both by his personal philosophy and his observations during his survey of schools, Melanchthon devised a reformed curriculum that was later implemented in municipalities throughout Germany.

*The Visitation Papers* helped establish, for the first time, an evangelical church system separate from the Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup> Though the document was comprehensive, it was meant as a general guide to constructing a school system, not as a strict regulation. The document detailed everything from the structure of the schooling system, to the qualifications of the teachers, to the sequence of the curriculum.<sup>23</sup> Melanchthon divided the Latin schools into three levels, and students were to advance through the levels once their instructors deemed them ready.<sup>24</sup> The curriculum emphasized the teaching of Latin, study of classical texts, and study of music. Christian education was also an integral part of the children’s schooling, with students having to memorize religious excerpts such as the Lord’s Prayer, various psalms, and the Book of Matthew.<sup>25</sup> Though many of Melanchthon’s changes were small adjustments from the curricula of the Middle Ages, Melanchthon did make major adjustments to the school day schedule and the literature studied. For example, Melanchthon reduced the amount of time spent learning songs for Sunday mass, but increased the amount of time students spent studying Latin vocabulary. Additionally, Melanchthon stopped using several medieval texts, such as *Facetus*,

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<sup>21</sup> Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy and Education*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Denys, “Philip Melanchthon’s Unique Contribution to Education,” 316.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Book of Visitation*, in *The American Journal of Education* 4, no 10 (1896): 749-751. trans. Henry Barnard.

<sup>24</sup> Denys, “Philip Melanchthon’s Unique Contribution to Education,” 318.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

but introduced several other medieval texts, such as *Paedologia* by Mosellanus and *Colloquies* by Erasmus. Though some scholars, such as Hartfelder, assert that Melanchthon's curriculum changes were mostly a combination of older medieval school structure with humanists texts, such as *Metamorphosis* by Ovid and *De officiis* by Cicero, it was the widespread implementation of Melanchthon's curriculum was what set Melanchthon's educational reforms apart.<sup>26</sup> Fifty-six cities throughout the German region were advised by Melanchthon in the development of their school systems.<sup>27</sup> An example of these such schools is the school at Nuremberg. Though the school was founded in 1496, it did not attract many pupils.<sup>28</sup> In the 1520s, the mayor of Nuremberg asked Melanchthon to help reform the school. Melanchthon established the school at Nuremberg as the first of his Ober Schulen, or upper schools, which served as a transition between lower, Trivial school, and university.<sup>29</sup> Melanchthon recruited experts in Latin poetry and mathematics to teach at the school, and structured the school to have classes in logical argument, poetry, and Greek and Latin composition.<sup>30</sup> The inclusion of mathematics in this school plan is of particular note, because the *Visitation Papers* did not include mathematics as a school subject until university.<sup>31</sup> This demonstrates how Melanchthon's *Visitation Papers* were not made to be a strict formula for constructing a school, but more of a guideline for general standards that could be adapted to fit the needs of the individual school and area. For this reason, the exact structure and curriculum of schools influenced by Melanchthon varied, but conserved

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<sup>26</sup> Karl Hartfelder, *Philipp Melanchthon als Praeceptor Germaniae* (Berlin: A. Hoffman and Co., 1889). 427; Denys, "Philip Melanchthon's Unique Contribution to Education," 322.

<sup>27</sup> Denys, "Philip Melanchthon's Unique Contribution to Education," 325.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>31</sup> Philip Melanchthon, "Instructions to the Visitors," in *Luther's Works-Church and Ministry, II*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 314.



basic elements, such as the use of Luther's catechisms.<sup>32</sup> Still, Melanchthon's writing and guidance provided a basic standard for state-run schools in Germany.

In order to ensure a sufficiently educated populace, Lutheran reformers advocated for compulsory education for all children. For the time, this was a novel idea, as education had previously been privately run and optional.<sup>33</sup> Luther advocates for this idea of government mandated education in his writing *A Sermon On Keeping Children in School* in 1530:

“Dear rulers...I maintain that the civil authorities are under obligation to compel the people to send their children to school...If the government can compel such citizens as are fit for military service to bear spear and rifle, to mount ramparts, and perform other material duties in time of war, how much more has it a right to compel the people to send their children to school, because in this case we are warring with the devil, whose object it is secretly to exhaust our cities and principalities of their strong men.”<sup>34</sup>

Here, Luther encourages the nobility of Germany to exercise not only their right, but their duty to educate their people. Through his comparison of education to war, Luther references the concept of education being used as a defense of the soul, and that leaders had the obligation to defend their people both physically and spiritually. Luther implored the territorial princes to follow Lutheran methods of schooling not only in his larger Sermons, such as *To the councilmen of all cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian schools* (1524) and *A Sermon On Keeping Children in School* (1530), but also through personal letters, such as Luther's letter to Elector John of Saxony in 1526.<sup>35</sup> The nobility responded positively to this appeal, with school

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<sup>32</sup>Denys, “Philip Melanchthon's Unique Contribution to Education,” 325.

<sup>33</sup> Luke, “Luther and the Foundations of Literacy, Secular Schooling and Educational Administration,” 124.

<sup>34</sup>Luther, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School, 1530,” 257.

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Eby and Charles Arrowood, *The Development of Modern Education in Theory* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1934), 90.

ordinances being issued in Nuremberg (1526), Electoral Saxony (1528 and 1533), Württemberg (1559), and more than one hundred other territories throughout Germany.<sup>36</sup> Many of these *Schulordnungen* were written directly by Protestant Reformers, such as Luther, Melancthon, and Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558). This compulsory education also expanded, for the first time, to the education of girls. Though the curriculum created for girls was more focused on preparing them for the management of the household, girls were still taught subjects such as history, music, and mathematics.<sup>37</sup> Through these Lutheran-motivated compulsory education reforms, the state expressed its invested interest in having an educated populace and laid a framework to educate more children.

With regards to Lutheran educational reforms as a means to increase literacy so that common people could read the Bible, the movement does seem to have made progress. However, as Pettegree notes, it is hard to know the impact of the Lutheran educational reforms on literacy rates when humanism and the advent of the printing press were also increasing the literacy rate.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Pettegree emphasizes that twenty-first century standards of literacy cannot be applied to measuring sixteenth century literacy, as the ability to read and write were more separate in the sixteenth century, with more people knowing how to read than write.<sup>39</sup> Keeping this in mind, scholar John Flood defined literacy in the time around the sixteenth century as the ability to read aloud a text in one's own vernacular so that the contents of the text could be communicated to another person. Using this definition, Flood estimates that the literacy rate of the German area in 1500 was 3-4%, and increased to around 30% by 1600. This 30% literacy rate of Germany in

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<sup>36</sup> Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Lowell Green, "The Education of Women in the Reformation," *History of Education Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 97.

<sup>38</sup> Pettegree, "The Reformation World," 541.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

1600 is significantly larger than the literacy rate for the greater Holy Roman Empire, which was 5-10% in 1600.<sup>40</sup> This higher literacy rate in Germany is of note because of the particular concentration of Protestants there.<sup>41</sup> This higher literacy rate in a more Protestant area does seem to reveal a correlation between the Lutheran educational reforms enacted in that region and the increased literacy rate, but scholarship drawing more direct links between the Lutheran educational reforms and literacy rates is lacking.

In addition to promoting the theological benefits of education, Lutheran Reformers also emphasized the benefits that education had to the state. In Luther's *Address to the Mayors and Councilmen of the German Cities* he states that "The world has need of educated men and women, to the end that the men may govern the country properly, and that the women may properly bring up their children."<sup>42</sup> Though he did not hold the more modern idea of educating people for the sake of having an educated society, Luther was progressive in his viewpoint that education could benefit the function of the government and wider society. The educational reforms of the Lutheran Reformation may have been centered around the spreading of Lutheran theology and morals, but the reforms were still meant to create educated people who could effectively rule the state.

After doing his own survey of schools in 1527, Luther reversed his previous support of common people independently reading and interpreting scripture. He now believed that common people could not properly interpret the scripture by themselves and that religious education should be controlled by the Church.<sup>43</sup> This was not the first occurrence of Luther becoming

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<sup>40</sup> John Flood, "The Book in Reformation Germany," in *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-François Gilmont (London: Routledge, 1998), 85.

<sup>41</sup> Pettegree, "The Reformation World," XVI.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Monroe, *A Brief Course in the History of Education* (London: Macmillan Company, 1935), 196.

<sup>43</sup> Eby and Arrowood, *The Development of Modern Education in Theory*, 88.

disillusioned with the lower classes. After many of Luther's preachings and publications from 1517-1525 were interpreted by the peasants to be justification for their uprising, Luther released *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* in 1525, siding with the nobility and condemning the people he inspired to revolt in the first place.<sup>44</sup> Luther reinforced this idea in his writing *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* by stating "not since the time of the apostles have the temporal sword and temporal government been so clearly described or so highly praised as by me."<sup>45</sup> Convinced that common people could not be trusted to independently interpret the Bible, Luther wrote the *Small Catechism* and the *Large Catechism* to provide a summarized version of Christian doctrine in order to avoid individual misinterpretation.<sup>46</sup> In the introduction to the *Small Catechism*, Luther summarizes what he gleaned on his survey of schools in Saxony:

"The deplorable condition in which I found religious affairs during a recent visitation of the congregations, has impelled me to publish this Catechism, or statement of the Christian doctrine, after having prepared it in very brief and simple terms. Alas! What misery I beheld! The people, especially those who live in the villages, seem to have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are ignorant and incompetent teachers."<sup>47</sup>

Luther was once an advocate for the right of the common people to independently interpret the Bible, but, after viewing the supposedly "deplorable" condition of vernacular schools, he removed direct Biblical readings from the vernacular school curriculum and replaced it with the

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<sup>44</sup> Luke, "Luther and the Foundations of Literacy," 122.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved, 1526," in *Luther's Works*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 95.

<sup>46</sup> Luke, "Luther and the Foundations of Literacy," 124.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism, 1529," in *The Small Catechism, 1529 : the Annotated Luther Study Edition*, ed. Timothy Wengert (Lanham: Fortress Press, 2017), 212.

study of his catechisms.<sup>48</sup> Though the results of the Peasant Revolt turned Luther off of vernacular schools, Luther saw vernacular schools as essential in enforcing civic order. It was a form of indoctrination for the lower classes.<sup>49</sup> The vernacular school curriculum focused on the recitation and memorization of the catechisms and other Lutheran doctrine. As Luther stated about his view on vernacular education, “The delicate and untouched minds [of children] must be shaped by simple, necessary, and undoubtable doctrine which they can accept as certain truths.”<sup>50</sup> Luther no longer held confidence in the common people to independently interpret scripture and elected instead to interpret it for them. By doing so, Luther turned back on one of the beliefs he originally championed and, as a result, reduced the comprehensiveness and depth of vernacular education in favor of a basic religious instruction.<sup>51</sup>

Though Luther's theological belief in *Sola scriptura* did increase his investment in the literacy of the common people, the common people were not the most effective way for Luther to advance his movement, as the common people were given little to no authority in the former, Catholic structure of the Church. Luther's goal was for each individual to hold power over their own faith, but, for Luther's movement to gain traction in the Holy Roman Empire, Luther looked to appeasing those who already had political and religious power: the territorial princes.<sup>52</sup> In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, the Bishops in Saxony signed treaties with the territorial princes to set up a system of “feudal protectorship.” In return for protecting the Bishops, the princes received power over administrative decisions of the Church.<sup>53</sup> Similar agreements

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<sup>48</sup> Strauss, *Luther's House or Learning*, 156.

<sup>49</sup> Luke, “Luther and the Foundations of Literacy,” 124.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Luther, “Letter to Nikolais von Amsdorf, March 1534, concerning Erasmus's Catechism,” quoted in Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 154.

<sup>51</sup> Eby and Arrowood, *The Development of Modern Education in Theory*, 87.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Reformation World* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 151.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

occurred between the territorial princes and the Bishop in other parts of Germany. Because of these agreements, there was already a precedent in place for territorial princes to have power over both the secular and religious aspects of the state, thus establishing them as key figures for Luther to appease to advance the political and religious power of his movement.<sup>54</sup> This began with Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility* (1520) in which Luther pleaded with the princes of Germany to take up his cause. For Lutheranism to take hold, reformers needed to influence those with societal power by educating the government workers, pastors, and other societal leaders, all of whom conducted affairs in Latin, and were educated at Latin schools. Even after Luther's death, it continued to be to the reformer's advantage to appease the upper-classes, as the Treaty of Augsburg in 1555 allowed each prince of a state within the Holy Roman Empire to decide whether his territory will be Lutheran or Catholic.<sup>55</sup> The choice of which religion to follow was left up to the ruling classes, not the common people, so the most effective way for Lutheranism to spread was by gaining influence among the upper-classes. In order to influence these upper-class citizens, Lutheran educational reformers, such as Melancthon, centered their reforms primarily around Latin schools and universities, not around vernacular education. In his *Sermon on Keeping Children in School* (1530), Luther emphasizes his perceived importance of Latin education over vernacular education, stating "If such a boy who has learned Latin afterwards works at a trade, you will have him in reserve, to labor as a pastor in case of need."<sup>56</sup> Though Luther saw the importance of a Latin education for providing the maximal career opportunities for children, Luther ignored the reality of the inaccessibility of a Latin education

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Cavendish, "The Diet of Augsburg: February 2nd, 1555," *History Today* 55, no. 2 (Feb 2005): 52.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School, 1530," in *Luther's Works*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 260.

for many rural and poor students.<sup>57</sup> Because the men who spoke Latin were the ones who were in government, clergy, and other important positions, the Lutheran educational reforms, such as the plans detailed in the *Visitation Papers*, primarily dealt with reforming and bettering the Latin schools, leaving out children in rural and impoverished areas without access to that form of education.<sup>58</sup>

The Lutherans' emphasis on political maneuvering as opposed to assisting the common people diminished the Lutherans' effect on the common people, and in turn, diminished the Lutherans' ability to gain widespread popular support. The Catholic Church had been the sole educator for centuries, and, in order to overcome the Catholic Church, Luther had to create his own educational system.<sup>59</sup> Yet, by disregarding vernacular schools in the majority of their reforms, Lutheran reformers greatly limited their societal impact to the upper classes, ignoring the majority of society, who were educated in the vernacular, and thus limiting the bulk of the influence of their reforms to the upper-classes.<sup>60</sup> Though Lutheran educational reforms did increase the accessibility of education to the lower classes, it did not improve the quality or provide the people with great potential for advancing in social class. While the Latin school curriculum advanced, vernacular education remained based around repetition and memorization of dogma.<sup>61</sup> However, the state run nature of the Lutheran educational system did build the foundations of an educational bureaucracy that could be used to regulate the quality of an expansive school system.<sup>62</sup> While the institutionalization of education through the Lutheran

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<sup>57</sup> Eby and Arrowood, *The Development of Modern Education in Theory*, 98.

<sup>58</sup> Reisner, *Historical Foundations of Modern Education*, 435.

<sup>59</sup> Eby and Arrowood, *The Development of Modern Education in Theory*, 86.

<sup>60</sup> Reisner, *Historical Foundations of Modern Education*, 434.

<sup>61</sup> Schwartz, "Luther's House of Learning," 177.

<sup>62</sup> Luke, "Luther and the Foundation of Literacy," 125.

reforms increased the accessibility of education to the common people, the more limited curriculum of vernacular schools hindered the potential impact of these educational reforms for the majority of people.

Protestant reformers use of education as a pious indoctrination system limited the reach of their reforms to Catholic territories, such as modern day Italy. Melanchthon states in *In Praise of The New Schools* that the goal of education is “learned piety.”<sup>63</sup> Though Lutheran educational reformers may have turned over much of the educational administrative power to the state, the curricula designed by Melanchthon and other educational reformers still worked to impart Lutheran values into the students and thus did not disseminate into areas with strong Catholic values.<sup>64</sup> As only Germany and parts of Scandinavia accepted Lutheranism and instituted Lutheran educational reforms, the area to which Lutheran educational reforms could spread was limited to the areas which were tolerant of Protestant practices, such as Germany and Scandinavia (See Appendix Figure 1). However, though Lutheran educational reforms did not directly spread to dominantly Catholic areas, such as Italy, the Catholic response to the Reformation, referred to as the Counter-Reformation, did result in some Catholic educational advancements. The Society of Jesus was founded in 1540 in response to the reformation and became one of the main educational instruments of the Catholic church.<sup>65</sup> Despite the shortcomings in terms of the geographic spread of Protestant educational reforms, the reforms did inspire educational advancements in Catholic dominated areas.

One of the principal goals of the Protestant Educational Reforms was to construct an educational system that would transform society’s children into productive, moral, God fearing

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<sup>63</sup> Denys, “Philip Melanchthon’s Unique Contribution to Education,” 177.

<sup>64</sup> Schwartz, *Luther’s House of Learning*, 302.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Monroe, *A Text-book in the History of Education* (London: Macmillan Company, 1905), 420.



members of society. However, Luther did stray from his original goal of giving the common people the power to independently interpret the Bible, electing instead to have children study his own interpretation through the catechisms. This went beyond the use of education to spread theological doctrine; the educational reforms of the Protestant Reformation functioned as an instrument to propagate Lutheran ideology. The infusion of Lutheran theological beliefs and interpretations throughout the school curriculum made it so that the Lutheran educational reforms could not spread into more Catholic dominated areas, thus limiting the spread of the reforms to Germany and parts of Scandinavia. Finally, the emphasis on Latin schools and general disregard of vernacular schools by Lutheran reformers limited the majority of the influence of the Lutheran educational reforms to the upper-classes. Though the curricula changed marginally, Luther's choice to transfer control of the educational system from private organizations to the state marks a key turning point in the history of the educational system in Europe. The concept of state sponsored, compulsory education for all students, including the poor and girls, originated from Lutheran reformers. Thus, studying the origin of these educational practices allows a better understanding of the motives and history behind the current educational system that millions of children participate in each year.

## Appendix



Figure. 1. Map showing religious denomination by geographic area near the end of the sixteenth century. Andrew Pettegree, *The Reformation World* (New York: Routledge, 2000), XVI.

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