

# Luther, the Protestant Reformation, and preparing for professional work

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## Abstract

Martin Luther's reformist activities aimed at a fundamental transformation of the Christian faith and life. This conference paper sheds light on an issue that has so far received little scholarly attention. This research analyses Luther's ideas about education and the way that Protestant clergy and educators subsequently sought to put those ideas into practice towards the betterment of society and economic development.

Luther encouraged Christians to increase their educational attainment to read and comprehend the Holy Scriptures. Luther therefore urged secular and religious leaders and authorities to open and maintain schools for boys and girls in Protestant areas. Rather unlike Max Weber's influential thesis that it was a specific Protestant work ethic that let them to work harder and save more, the attainment of higher levels of education raised levels of human capital and advanced economic development.

As a historic case study, this conference paper zooms in on one specific example of Protestant ideas of preparing for professional work. One of the largest and most independent projects of education inspired by Lutheran thought that surged and prospered throughout the German lands in the 18th and 19th centuries was a foundation started by the Protestant clergyman and educator August Hermann Francke in Halle. Francke did not only pursue a social goal by founding a school for the poor and orphans, but his foundation also managed to design a curriculum that would over time attract students with a bourgeois and aristocratic background. Francke's approach was heavily influenced by pietism and the belief that a pious character would develop professional competency and efficiency. Apart from the classical subjects that had already been taught at schools at the time, Francke's curriculum design also included the instruction of theoretical and practical knowledge in maths, physics and engineering.

## Introduction

Martin Luther's (1483-1546) reformist activities aimed at a fundamental transformation of the Christian faith and life. This conference paper sheds light on an issue that has so far received little scholarly attention. This research analyses Luther's ideas about education and the way that Protestant clergy and educators subsequently sought to put those ideas into practice towards the betterment of society and economic development.

Luther encouraged Christians to increase their educational attainment to read and comprehend the Holy Scriptures. Luther therefore urged secular and religious leaders and authorities to open and maintain schools for boys and girls in Protestant areas. Rather unlike Max Weber's (1864-1920) influential thesis that it was a specific Protestant work ethic that let them to work harder and save more, the attainment of higher levels of education 'had the side effect in the economic sphere of serving as human capital that brought economic development'<sup>1</sup>.

As a historic case study, this conference paper zooms in on one specific example of Protestant ideas of preparing for professional work; i.e. the *Paedagogium* at Halle and one of its offshoots, the *Kloster Berge School* at Magdeburg. One of the largest and most independent projects of education inspired by Lutheran thought that surged and prospered

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<sup>1</sup> Sascha BECKER – Ludger WOESSMANN, *The effects of the Protestant Reformation on human capital, The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, (2011), p. 94.

throughout the German lands in the 18th and 19th centuries was a foundation started by the Protestant clergyman and educator August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) in Halle. Francke did not only pursue a social goal by founding a school for the poor and orphans, but his foundation also managed to design a curriculum that would over time attract students with a bourgeois and aristocratic background. Francke's approach was heavily influenced by pietism and the belief that a pious character would develop professional competency and efficiency. Apart from the classical subjects that had already been taught at schools at the time, Francke's curriculum design also included the instruction of theoretical and practical knowledge in maths, physics and engineering.

Following on from these introductory paragraphs, this paper proceeds by providing a brief and critical reading of the concept of human capital and the notion of human talent. Subsequently, we shall focus our attention on the key ideas and principles that especially Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) developed and advanced to further education. The fourth section presents the case study of the *Kloster Berge* school where Francke's educational principles found application. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to how the Protestant Reformation contributed to the fostering of human talent in Prussia over time.

### **Human capital and human talent**

The term *human capital* entered the English language in the 1950s, and the concept can be defined as 'the stock of skills that the labo[u]r force possesses [encompassing] the notion that there are investments in people (e.g., education, training, health) and that these investments increase an individual's productivity'<sup>2</sup>. This economic perspective has been both much lauded and much disputed over time. As one of the key early proponents of the concept in economics, Becker (1962, 1994) acknowledges that much criticism is being levelled against this notion 'and the underlying analysis because [it is] believed that it [treats] people like slaves or machines'<sup>3</sup>. Although Becker mounts a robust defence of the term, we propose the use of the term *human talent* instead, as this allows us to draw the debate on the reformers' ideas on education away from a purely or mainly economic centric view and towards a perspective that has a more solid focus on human development and dignity. Thus, we find *human talent* more fitting as a paradigm that could serve as a helpful tool to highlight some of the lasting contributions Luther and his successors made to education in general and subsequent initiatives on preparing for professional work in the labour market in pre-industrial times and beyond.

Despite the prevailing uncertainty about a clear definition of *human talent*<sup>4</sup>, we can claim that the concept refers to 'systematically developed innate abilities of individuals that are deployed in activities they like, find important, and in which they want to invest energy. It enables individuals to perform excellently in one or more domains of human functioning, operationalized as performing better than other individuals of the same age or experience, or as performing consistently at their personal best'<sup>5</sup>. Although the thought and ideas of the

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<sup>2</sup> Claudia GOLDIN, *Human Capital, Handbook of Cliometrics*, Springer, Berlin, 2015, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Gary BECKER, *Human capital – a theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 16; Gary BECKER, *Investment in human capital – a theoretical analysis*, "Journal of Political Economy", 70, 5, (1962), pp. 9-49.

<sup>4</sup> Angelos PANTOUVAKIS – Maria KARAKASNAKI, *Role of the human talent in total quality management-performance relationship – an investigation in the transport sector*, "Total Quality Management and Business Excellence", 28, 9, (2017), p. 960.

<sup>5</sup> Sanne NIJS – Eva GALLARDO-GALLARDO – Nicky DRIES – Luc SELS, *A multidisciplinary review into the definition, operationalisation, and management of talent*, "Journal of World Business", 49, 2, p. 183.

driving intellectual forces behind the Protestant Reformation predate the emergence of concepts such as human capital and human talent by about four centuries and a half, contemporary sociologists and economists working on the consequences and impacts of the Reformation within the field of the *economics of religion* have developed a broad literature on these concepts that are now clearly associated with industrial capitalism, economic growth, productivity gains, and the mechanics underlying the operations of the modern business organisation<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, in his influential treatise on the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, argued that the Protestant Reformation and the accompanying virtues of hard work and thrift were key in facilitating the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, Weber's thesis has, of course, been much disputed and a recent research paper suggests that the Catholic Order of 'Cistercians [that spread across Europe 900 years ago] left a cultural imprint on the values of European citizens [leading] to higher productivity'<sup>8</sup>. In actual fact, Weber himself noted a proximity between the Cistercians and Protestants with respect to their perspectives on work ethics and the virtue of thrift, but the impact of the activities of Cistercian monks had a rather limited, and regional impact around their monasteries.

Yet we are still left wondering why the Protestant Reformation had lasting and widespread positive effects on the development of *human talent* throughout the past centuries. In other words, an insightful body of literature raises doubts as to whether it was really (exclusively) a specific work ethic that made Protestants work and save more, or whether 'Protestants had higher human capital, which made them more productive and therefore increased their economic prosperity'<sup>9</sup>. Becker and Woessmann find that Protestantism yielded higher school enrolment and literacy rates for both boys and girls prior to the onset of the Industrial Revolution in Prussia<sup>10</sup>. We can hypothesise that higher rates of literacy and school enrolment in Protestant areas vis-a-vis Catholic regions would have positive long run effects on economic growth due to better education facilitating industrial development. Similar conclusions were drawn by Boppart et al. (2014) in their analysis of empirical data for the case of Switzerland<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the above challenges Weber in that apparently the Protestant reformers' initiatives on education first led to better educational outcomes, which then spurred industrialisation. Weber on the other hand would have it the other way around with Protestant virtues leading to industrialisation that then in turn augmented the demand for education<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Sascha BECKER – Steven PFAFF – Jared RUBIN, *Causes and consequences of the Protestant Reformation*, "Explorations in Economic History", 62, pp. 1-25.

<sup>7</sup> Max WEBER, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge, London, (1930).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas BARNEBECK ANDERSEN – Jeanet BENTZEN – Carl-Johan DALGAARD – Paul SHARP, *Pre-Reformation roots of the Protestant ethic*, "Economic Journal", 127, 604, (2017), pp. 1756-1793.

<sup>9</sup> Sascha BECKER – Ludger WOESSMANN, *The effects of the Protestant Reformation on human capital*, *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, (2011), p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> Sascha BECKER – Ludger WOESSMANN, *Luther and the girls – religious denomination and the female education gap in 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussia*, "Scandinavian Journal of Economics", 110, 4, (2008), pp. 777-805; Sascha BECKER – Ludger WOESSMANN, *The effect of Protestantism on education before the industrialisation – evidence from 1816 Prussia*, "Economic Letters", 107, 2, (2010), pp. 224-228.

<sup>11</sup> Timo BOPPART – Josef FALKINGER – Volker GROSSMANN, *Protestantism and education – reading (the Bible) and other skills*, "Economic Inquiry", 52, 2, (2014), pp. 874-895.

<sup>12</sup> Sascha BECKER – Ludger WOESSMANN, *Was Weber wrong? A human capital theory of Protestant economic history*, "Quarterly Journal of Economics", 124, 2, (2009), 531-596.

Having discussed the concepts of *human capital* and *human talent* as well as their relevance and applicability for discourses on the economics of religion, we can now focus our attention to the key ideas and principles that especially Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon developed and advanced to further education.

### **Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon on Education**

The Protestant Reformation would not have been such a monumental historical event with lasting social, political and economic legacies if its ramifications had been limited to the realm of spirituality, or more precisely, the Christian religion. Luther and his contemporaries sharing his fervour to reform the medieval church, chiefly among them Huldrych Zwingli (1483-1531) and John Calvin (1509-1564), had been preceded by clergymen such as John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and Jan Hus (1369-1415). These men were scholars for ‘whom education, instruction, and learning were all of supreme importance’<sup>13</sup>. Thus, even though there had already been some appetite for reforming the church doctrinal structure and rooting out corrupt elements, a number of political and socioeconomic developments during Luther’s days seemed to provide some fertile ground on which his initiatives could prosper. Such actions could subsequently challenge the monopoly that the Roman Catholic Church with its heavy dependence on the support from secular power had been enjoying. In this context, it is worth pointing out that at the time the Catholic Church was to a certain degree a popular institution heeding the needs of its faithful<sup>14</sup>.

In political and social terms, the advances that the Reformation quickly made also massively benefitted from the following four circumstances. First, by the early 16<sup>th</sup> century it had become apparent that the loosely decentralised governance structure of the Holy Roman Empire (HRE) encouraged the German princes to more vehemently undermine the ambitions of the Catholic Church and the authority of its protector, the Holy Roman Emperor<sup>15</sup>. Nowhere was this process more evident than in the person of Luther’s secular ruler and patron, Frederick the Wise of Saxony (1463-1525). Second, shortly after its inception, the Reformation appeared to have been very much of an urban phenomenon with city states wielding considerable political clout in the HRE<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, as opposed to rural areas, cities tend to be home to more sophisticated inhabitants who enjoyed more direct access to information due to relatively high population densities. Cities as home to universities also led to students spreading reformist ideas<sup>17</sup>. Third, the availability and widespread use of the printing press facilitated the circulation of Protestant pamphlets<sup>18</sup>. Fourth, the Ottoman threat to the HRE distracted and occupied the empire’s political elites and diverted resources that could have been used to put down the Reformation movement more forcefully<sup>19</sup>. It appears important to highlight the link between the powerful emergence of the Protestant Reformation and the characteristics of the political landscape of the time because the

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<sup>13</sup> David ROBINSON. Notes on the emergence of Protestant education in Germany, *Christian Higher Education*, 11, 1, (2012). p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Diarmaid MACCULLOCH, *The Reformation*, Penguin, London, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel NEXON, *The struggle for power in early modern Europe – religious conflict, dynastic empires, and international change*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Steven OZMENT, *The Reformation in the cities – the appeal of Protestantism to sixteenth-century Germany and Switzerland*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> Hyojoung KIM – Steven PFAFF, *Structure and dynamics of religious insurgency – students and the spread of the Reformation*, “American Sociological Review”, 77, 2, (2012), pp. 182-215.

<sup>18</sup> Jared RUBIN, *Printing and Protestants – and empirical test of the role of printing in the Reformation*, “Review of Economics and Statistics”, 96, 2, (2014), pp. 270-286.

<sup>19</sup> Murat IYIGUN, *War, peace, and prosperity in the name of God – the Ottoman role in Europe’s socioeconomic evolution*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015.

initiatives in the area of schooling pushed by Luther and in the following centuries by the Protestant clergy also relied heavily on the goodwill of and alliances with the state apparatus of the Kingdom of Prussia.

Returning to Luther and his intellectual charges against the prevailing religious order of his day such as his discoveries on salvation and justification, we need to highlight ‘Luther’s concept of vocation [...] largely in reaction to the medieval monastic ideal and its religious devaluation of all earthly occupations’<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, Luther formulated a powerful ‘critique of the elitist social hierarchy of his time’<sup>21</sup>. As a key insight, Luther realised that ‘[w]ork itself, then, is a divine vocation’<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, Luther did not perceive ‘the need for secular pursuits as being any the less important in the kingdom of God than church-related work’<sup>23</sup>. Not only did Luther initiate deep-seated changes in the spiritual, political and economic domains, but his restless activities also made him branch out into other spheres of social life, such as education<sup>24</sup>. Of course, Luther himself first and foremost thought of education and especially the appropriation of literacy as a vital tool for all believers to access the Word of God and to be instructed in the Christian religion. In this context, it is noteworthy to consider that Luther envisaged such aspects of primary education not only for boys, but he also urged German noblemen to support the establishment of girls’ schools<sup>25</sup>. Here we can relate back to the definitions of the concepts of *human capital* and *human talent*. After all, it can convincingly be argued that Luther pursued the goal of contributing to the (spiritual) health or wellbeing of the population by translating the Bible into German and then facilitating the access to the scriptures.

In fact, although ‘no complete system of popular instruction was established, the foundation for it was laid. To this great result Luther contributed more than any other man of his time; and this fact makes him the leading educational reformer of the sixteenth century’<sup>26</sup>. However, Luther himself and his contemporary Philip Melancthon, also known as *Praeceptor Germaniae* (Germany’s teacher)<sup>27</sup>, went far beyond such activities formulating ‘a *Book of Visitation* [...] as a kind of handbook outlining what school planners and their overseers should use to establish and administer [...] schools’<sup>28</sup>. Apart from stressing the moral value of education and its enabling function to live in a civil society, Luther also highlighted economic aspects of schooling because the reformer ‘wanted parents to make sure that children had vocational training so that they could support themselves as adults and become productive citizens’<sup>29</sup>. In other words, Luther called for the formation of skills and talents as a preparation for professional work emphasising the socioeconomic aspects of education. Against this background, it now becomes somewhat easier to comprehend (1) why

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<sup>20</sup> Lee HARDY, *The fabric of this world – inquiries into calling, career choice, and the design of human work*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1990, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> ID. P. 46.

<sup>22</sup> ID, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> David ROBINSON, Notes on the emergence of Protestant education in Germany, *Christian Higher Education*, 11, 1, (2012). p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Martin LUTHER, *Sermon on keeping children in school*, (1530).

<sup>25</sup> Martin LUTHER, *To the Christian nobility of the German nation concerning the improvement of the Christian estate*, (1520).

<sup>26</sup> Franklin PAINTER, *A history of education*, (1886), Appleton, New York, p. 147.

<sup>27</sup> Robert SORENSEN, *Philip Melancthon and classical Christian education*, Paper presented at the Conference on Faith and History, George Fox University, Newberg, OR, (2010), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> David ROBINSON, Notes on the emergence of Protestant education in Germany, *Christian Higher Education*, 11, 1, (2012). p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Allan ORNSTEIN – Daniel LEVINE – Gerry GUTEK – David VOCKE, *Foundations of education*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition, Wadsworth Publishing, New York, (2016), p. 80.

Luther and more forcefully his successors placed such an emphasis on our working lives and (2) how education that is broadly accessible and of considerable quality can prepare us for employment or entrepreneurial activity. Finally, the developments that Luther and Melancthon helped set into motion obviously took some time to unfold and to gain traction. The following section of this paper focuses on a case study whose data stems from the eighteenth century, which Timm refers to as a ‘pedagogical century’ in Germany<sup>30</sup>.

### **The *Paedagogium* at Halle and the *Kloster Berge School* at Magdeburg**

This section of the paper presents insightful data on specific educational projects that were inspired by Lutheran thought on education and the formation of capabilities that would prepare an adolescent for future employment or entrepreneurship and to contribute to overall societal goals. The data is drawn from the case study of two schools that were founded at the behest of August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), a pietist clergyman and educator. Francke served in a parish in Glaucha and as a university professor at Halle. Having been expelled from Halle due to his pietist ideas, Francke subsequently moved to the University of Leipzig. His educational paradigm was clearly motivated by his pietist Protestant perspective. Depending on the intellectual capabilities of his pupils, Francke would either pursue a focus on a more traditional canon of subjects (at times combined with mathematics), or he would have pupils instructed in a range of crafts. The latter would also include visits to local craftsmen, so that pupils would receive a real-life impression of work life<sup>31</sup>. Both institutions, the *Paedagogium* at Halle and one of its offshoot, the *Kloster Berge School* at Magdeburg, were in close geographical proximity to Luther’s main locus of activity in Wittenberg. Schoolteachers that had started working at the *Paedagogium* soon found themselves invited by the clergy and Prussian state administrators to open new schools across Prussia<sup>32</sup>, one of which was the *Kloster Berge* school at Magdeburg. This development also serves as a hint to an early stage in the process of the professionalization of teacher education<sup>33</sup>. The *Kloster Berge* pupils hailed from various German regions<sup>34</sup> and their numbers increased significantly after the year 1738<sup>35</sup>.

The *Kloster Berge* school at Magdeburg could trace its history back to a monastery founded by emperor Otto I in 937<sup>36</sup>. The curriculum at Magdeburg built on the one implemented at Halle, although the former was broader in scope. As of the year 1721, the subjects covered by the curriculum encompassed Latin, Greek, Hebrew, theology, calligraphy, geography, history, introductory maths with a focus on architecture and mechanics, agronomy, economics, and an introduction to philosophy, jurisprudence and medical problems, as well as more practical instructions in the crafts<sup>37</sup>. Even though instruction in the Christian religion would evidently occupy an important position, the

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<sup>30</sup> Albrecht TIMM, *Mitteldeutschland – die pädagogische Provinz*, (1966), p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> Reinhold VORMBAUM, *Die evangelischen Schulordnungen*, Band 3, Das 18. Jahrhundert, Gütersloh, (1864).

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich PAULSEN, *Geschichte des gelehrten Unterrichts auf den deutschen Schulen und Universitäten vom Ausgang des Mittelalters bis zur Gegenwart*. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung auf den klassischen Unterricht, Leipzig, (1885).

<sup>33</sup> Ulrich TROITZSCH, *Ansätze technologischen Denkens bei den Kameralisten des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Schriften zur Wissenschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, 5. Band, Berlin, (1966), p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Carl Gottlob HIRSCHING, *Historisch-Geographisch-Topographisches Stifts- und Closter-Lexicon*, 1. Band, Leipzig, (1792), p. 356.

<sup>35</sup> Hugo HOLSTEIN, *Geschichte der ehemaligen Schule zu Kloster Berge*, Leipzig, (1886), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Carl Gottlob HIRSCHING, *Historisch-Geographisch-Topographisches Stifts- und Closter-Lexicon*, 1. Band, Leipzig, (1792), p. 353.

<sup>37</sup> Reinhold VORMBAUM, *Die evangelischen Schulordnungen*, Band 3, Das 18. Jahrhundert, Gütersloh, (1864).

demands in terms of religious studies were not perceived as overburdening by pupils<sup>38</sup>. The focus of religious education lay on the teaching of Christian virtues, among which professional competence and proficiency featured as the most crucial<sup>39</sup>.

### **Conclusions**

Martin Luther and his fellow reformers undoubtedly had a major impact on the development of education and pedagogy in Germany. Motivated by a desire to make available the study of the Holy Scriptures to broad sections of the population who had previously been denied such access, Luther urged secular rulers to invest in the formation of literacy skills. Not only did Luther envisage basic education for boys, but also for girls thereby beginning to shake up the highly stratified and hierarchical social structure of his day. It can be argued that Luther's insistence on taking quality education and work very seriously and to prepare adolescents for the world of work that they were about to enter laid the foundation for talent and skill formation that proved decisive for socioeconomic development.

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<sup>38</sup> Hugo HOLSTEIN, *Geschichte der ehemaligen Schule zu Kloster Berge*, Leipzig, (1886).

<sup>39</sup> Herwig BLANKERTZ, *Bildung im Zeitalter der großen Industrie. Pädagogik, Schule und Berufsbildung im 19. Jahrhundert*, Hannover, (1969), p. 25.