



Without strong support of education, the Reformation would never have happened. Martin Luther was born into a family that was part of the newly forming middle class in 15th century Germany. His father started as a miner and then essentially became an investor in the ore mines, and with the money he made from that, Hans Luther educated his children. As Martin read more and more, he started to understand that the church of his time was not conducting itself in a way that was consistent with either scripture or the theological tradition that they

purported to uphold. It was his education that led Martin Luther to pin his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg chapel and, ultimately, to challenge the church structures in order to bring about real change.

One of the unforeseen consequences of the Martin's Reformation was instability for schools. At the time, schools in Europe were almost completely run by the church and were generally reserved for children of the monied elite. Once priests, nuns, and monks left their positions, the schools began to shutter their doors. Rather than simply accept this as a casualty of an important revolutionary cause, Luther made the case for public education, funded by public monies fronted by German princes and other political leaders. He argued that education should be available to all children, include girls who were overwhelmingly left out of the opportunities of education at the time. Even in the face of opposition from those who wanted to children to stay home with families and work to provide economic benefits, Luther insisted on reforms in education that would have a greater long-term impact on the public. But it wasn't only an economic and social long-view that comprised Luther's argument for public education. He insisted that the Reformation wouldn't be successful if we failed to educate the vast majority of the citizenry. Direct access to scripture and theological writings would be absolutely necessary for his project to succeed. In his 1530 "Sermon on Keeping Children in School" Luther suggests that Christianity could only be saved if the people committed to education for the youth.

Over the last week I have delighted in seeing the back-to-school pictures, which probably make up 70% of my social media feeds right now. This is a moment for us to give thanks for access to good public schools and to insist that high standards of education are available for all of our children. We live in an age of disinformation, misinformation, and "alternative facts." That being so, it is as important as ever to support the kind of education that Martin Luther dreamed of nearly 500 years ago. God is glorified by the human person fully alive, living into their potential. So, today, let's give thanks for teachers and students, parents and active community members, school nurses and bus drivers, administrators and school board members, and let's commit ourselves to ensuring that God's great gift of education is enjoyed by all.

A Prayer for Schools (ELW, 78) O God, source of all goodness: we give you thanks for the gift of reason and the opportunity for education. Bless our schools, that they may be places of learning and safety where teachers challenge the minds and nurture the hearts of students. Grant that teachers and students may work together in mutual respect and find joy in the challenges of academic life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

