Selected Sources for Understanding the Role of the University in the Reformation

Most of these twelve readings are readily available. A few may have to be accessed through Interlibrary Loan. Working through several or all of these chapters and articles will give the reader a clear understanding of how the Lutheran Reformers at Wittenberg University applied “the new learning” of the Christian humanities and the structure of the liberal arts. They did this in order to reform (but not revolutionize) higher education, not for the sake of education but for the sake of the Gospel. Such a study will give the reader an informed background for considering the condition and future of Lutheran higher education today.


Benne, Robert. “Integrity and Fragmentation: Can the Lutheran Center Hold?” in The Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education, Jason A. Mahn, ed. (Lutheran University Press, 2016). Benne argues that Lutheran colleges are no longer recognizable as Lutheran higher education.


Harran, Marilyn. Martin Luther: Learning for Life (Concordia Publishing House, 1997) Chapters 4, 5, and 7 address in helpful detail several of the university concerns in the Reformation.

Kittelson, James M. "Learning and Education: Phase Two of the Reformation" in Die dänische Reformation vor ihrem internationalen Hintergrund, edited by Leif Grane and Kai Hörby (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 46, 149-63. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990). This chapter examines the central role of education in the Reformation and how education fueled the reformers’ many efforts in church and society.


Rosin, Robert. “Humanism, Luther, and the Wittenberg Reformation” in The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology, Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, L'ubomir Batka, eds. (Oxford University Press, 2014). This chapter explains the background and role of the Renaissance renewal of the humanities in the Reformation’s university studies.


Wright, William J. Martin Luther’s Understanding of God’s Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism (Baker Academic, 2010). Ch. 2, “Northern Humanism: The Context of Luther’s Two Kingdoms,” addresses the Reformation’s historical setting for higher education and the Reformers’ two kingdoms perspective.