

Schools and the investment in education

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The reformers believed that every Christian should be able to read the Bible, and that the church needed educated pastors capable of interpreting it. Education was therefore a central concern of the Reformation. The income of the secularised church property was used in large part to finance schools. Basel reorganised its Latin school at the Minster, which prepared boys for the university, and established German schools for the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic. In 1589, the Latin schools were consolidated into the *Gymnasium* on the Münsterplatz, which still exists as the *Gymnasium am Münsterplatz*, one of the oldest schools in Switzerland.¹

The investment in education had economic returns that the reformers did not intend but that were considerable. A literate and numerate population was better able to engage in trade, to keep accounts, to write letters and to follow instructions. The merchant families of Basel sent their sons to the *Gymnasium* and the university. Many of them studied abroad, in Geneva, Heidelberg, Leiden or Paris, before entering the family business. The combination of classical education, commercial training and international experience, which characterised the Basel merchant of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was built on the educational institutions of the Reformation.

The Bernoulli family, which produced eight mathematicians of distinction over three generations, is the most famous example of the fruits of this education. The Bernoullis were Protestant refugees from Antwerp who settled in Basel in the early seventeenth century as spice merchants. Their sons attended the *Gymnasium* and the university. Several of them became professors of mathematics, whose work on probability, calculus and mechanics shaped modern science. Chapter V returns to the Bernoullis as an example of refugee families.

The importance of education for a financial centre hardly needs emphasis. Banking, insurance, asset management and the regulation of financial markets require highly qualified professionals. The quality of a country's schools and universities is one of the conditions of its competitiveness as a financial centre. The Swiss system of vocational training, which combines apprenticeship in a company with attendance at a vocational school, trains a large part of the employees of Swiss banks and insurers. Its origins lie partly in the guild system and partly in the educational reforms of the Reformation.

1 Notes

1. On the reorganisation of schools in Basel after the Reformation and the foundation of the Gymnasium on the Münsterplatz in 1589, see HLS, article "Gymnasium am Münsterplatz". Date to be verified. ↩

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