

## PREFACE

In January 1989, Timothy F. Lull and I sat in a room full of theologians and church historians at the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia. He casually asked me, “So what writings of Luther would you put in a one-volume collection of his works?” It’s the sort of question theology wonks ask each other—the doctrinal equivalent of commentators who debate their lists of the greatest athletes in a particular sport. Tim was not playing games, however. He must have asked numerous others the same question and apparently he was keeping score. The first edition of *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* appeared before the end of the year.

I followed Tim’s lead to seek the advice of scholars in the field when Fortress Press asked me in 2004 to revise the first edition of *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*. The second edition was published in 2005, in the wake of Tim’s untimely death. And now the publisher wants a revision of a revision. Why? The answer lies, one might say, in the interplay of technology and text. Technology expedites the process of revising an anthology like this. It allows the editor more easily to reorganize the structure of the work and to recast the text into a new, more student-friendly framework. (Not all of the original footnotes are included here.) And thanks to recent advances in technology, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* is now available in print, e-book, and digital download.

Technology can also cause problems. For instance, neither the editor nor the publisher looked

for errors in the second edition that were introduced by the scanned version of *Luther’s Works* in its digital format. This edition pays closer attention to those kinds of glitches. But not all errors are due to technology. For example, Luther himself could err from time to time in citing biblical texts. In this edition, the correct texts appear in italics within brackets.

Textually, a one-volume compendium of Martin Luther’s vast theological output is always open to revision. Even a project as large as the fifty-five-volume *American Edition of Luther’s Works* had to leave out credible candidates, and academics for decades have argued about the credibility of some that made it in. Such issues are multiplied considerably when the material must be confined between the covers of a single volume, no matter how chubby. Therefore, this volume adds some new pieces and reinserts some old ones. Not that this will stop the controversy. I expect that in the coming years, colleagues will stop me to ask, “Why did you leave out *this*?” or “How did *that* get in?”

Also, from a textual perspective, continuing scholarly work on these writings has provided updated versions of important pieces in this volume, particularly Mark Tranvik’s translation of *The Freedom of a Christian* and the editor’s revision of *Consolation for Women Whose Pregnancies Have Not Gone Well* (previously translated as “Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage”).

Because most of the documents collected here are from Luther’s Works, a translation project that

began in the 1950s, some modest updating of style and substance was deemed necessary. These changes are designed to help Luther speak more clearly to the English-speaking world of this century. Where such attempts fall short of their goal, the responsibility lies with the editor. The introductions to the respective documents are revisions of the materials in *Luther's Works* and *The Book of Concord*.

This work was begun in the bucolic setting of Minnesota's St. John's University and finished in the bustle of Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg. At St. John's, the Resident Scholar Program of The Collegeville Institute allowed me to participate in the wonderful community of colleagues it gathered in 2010–2011. The hospitality, conversations, and mutual encouragement made this work possible. In addition, the thorough and patient folks at Alcuin Library offered an invaluable level of collegiality and expertise.

The Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland's generous program for visiting scholars brought me to Germany to finish this project. For such support, I remain deeply grateful. Now that I am in Germany, I wish to thank my friend, Mr. Thomas Franze, whose connection with Berlin's Goethe Institute allows me to use a most beautiful guest

room and office in his home. In addition, I wish to thank Pastor Stephan Kienberger and the folks of the American Church of Berlin, for welcoming me into their lively fellowship.

I have spoken with many colleagues over the years about this reader and I am afraid I have forgotten some. I apologize to you, remain grateful to you, and anticipate the chance to thank you properly at the eschatological banquet. The colleagues and friends I do remember who gave me sound counsel and wise advice along the way include Suzanne Hequet, Robert Kolb, Phil Ruge-Jones, Gary Simpson, and Joy Schroeder. Where this work turns out well, I am indebted to you. Where it falls short, I shoulder the blame.

Last, I thank my loving family. Ann's support is incalculable and our children and grandson, each in their own ways, encouraged this work.

This volume remains dedicated to the memory of Timothy F. Lull, churchman, teacher, mentor, and friend. I am happy to have undertaken the task once again in his honor.

*William R. Russell*  
*Collegeville and Berlin*

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Martin Luther has been much discussed in recent years, especially during the five hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1983. Many splendid new books about Luther have recently been published. But there is still need for a new one-volume anthology of Luther's basic theological writings.

Luther did not write a single compendium of theology comparable to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, or Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*. Because of this his important proposals concerning issues in current theological discussion are sometimes hard to find. This volume is intended to help readers correlate Luther's various writings with some major topics in theology, so Luther can be seen as a formidable and perhaps even systematic theologian, without losing the contextual nature of his writings.

His most important treatises are readily available in English thanks to the fifty-five-volume American edition of *Luther's Works* published by Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press. This splendid scholarly tool, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, provided the texts for this collection. But the documents that are included here are scattered in fifteen of those volumes (and in *The Book of Concord*). Serious readers of Luther will want to buy several of the volumes of the American edition, but even those who already have all those volumes in their library may need help in focusing their reading.

There is an even more pressing reason for a new anthology. In a changed ecumenical situation

many now are willing to admit that Luther is not so much a Lutheran or Protestant figure as an important theologian of the church catholic—*doctor ecclesiae* (doctor of the church). This volume has been prepared with the hope of introducing Luther to a wider range of readers, and to speak to those questions that have emerged in the last twenty years of ecumenical dialog and study.

One curious person asked the editor whether this meant "cleaning Luther up." This is both impossible (as the reader who confronts Luther's bold style for the first time will see) and quite unnecessary. But it has been one of my goals to include selections that may have bearing on the current debates among the churches.

For example, a much wider range of Luther's sacramental writings is needed than was included in some earlier collections in order to do justice to the complexity of his thought in this area. Many older interpretations tended to concentrate on his writings through 1520; for all the importance of the early Luther, this approach failed to show how Luther's thought continued to develop (including its more catholic side) when he was no longer simply fighting the Roman authorities but also other versions of reform.

This anthology has been assembled with the hope of including both the most important of Luther's shorter writings and showing the range of his theological interests. Wherever possible (in twenty-five of the documents contained in this

anthology) entire treatises have been presented. In the case of the partial documents, all but one of these are self-contained sections.

The material has been arranged in several parts, as one suggestion of how these texts might be studied. But any number of ways might be proposed to approach these writings. Luther's own method leads him to range widely while discussing any subject, and one who wanted to read these selections chronologically instead could easily do so by consulting the chronological list included after the table of contents.

Because of the wide range and great length of Luther's writings, a decision had to be made to limit the kinds of material included. The most basic decision was to include only those documents from the so-called Reformation writings *Luther's Works*, American Edition, volumes 31–54 (Fortress Press). It would take another anthology of at least this length to give a fair sampling of Luther as biblical interpreter.

A second difficult decision had to do with three important treatises of 1520: *Appeal to the German Nobility*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of a Christian*. These documents are readily available in an inexpensive paperback edition, and two of them are rather long. But they do have a major claim on the reader of Luther.

The decision was to include in its entirety *The Freedom of a Christian* and Part I of *The Babylonian Captivity*, with the hope that this new volume might be seen as a companion piece to the *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), rather than as a substitute for it. This strategy allowed many shorter works to be included that do show something of Luther's range over a longer period of time and that have been less widely known. (Actually, a fourth key writing from 1520, *On Good Works* [*Luther's Works* 44] also had to be omitted because of its length.)

Next were the questions of what to do about Luther's three writings that have been included in the official collection of confessions of the Lutheran church, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). *The Large Catechism* is simply too long to reproduce in a volume of this size, despite the importance of Luther's treatment of the First Commandment in it. But we have provided the other two items because of their importance for Luther's theology.

*The Small Catechism* has surely been the most widely known writing of Luther, and it is here along with his *Smalcald Articles* of 1537. The catechism shows Luther's pastoral energy engaged to give an irenic summary of the basics of the faith. The articles, written at a time rather late in his career when Luther was full of fear about the coming general council, show his personal and fully developed views about what matters could not be compromised.

Finally, one should be aware that Luther's controversial writings could not be given much space in this anthology. Some of these are crucial for understanding Luther in his times, and certainly his limitations—especially those concerning the papacy, the Jews, and the peasants' war. But Luther's sharp tongue and polemical judgments are not completely absent from this volume.

Limitations of space have made it impossible to include an introduction to Luther's life or thought. Among the books now available, readers of this volume will be especially helped by consulting two excellent recent works: Bernard Lohse's *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), and Eric Gritsch's *Martin—God's Court Jester* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). Gritsch provides an excellent eighty-page summary of the career of Luther in the first

part of his book; both volumes, in somewhat different formats, discuss the intellectual background, major controversies, and Luther's own writings.

But for all that has not been included, much is here—especially for those who are just beginning to know Luther and those who want an essential and ecumenical Luther anthology. My chief concern has been to let Luther speak—to all the churches and to the theological task today throughout the world. This means, above all, letting the reader encounter Luther directly without too much interference.

For this volume's appearing, many deserve thanks. Colleagues at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, especially Lyman T. Lundeen and Christopher R. Seitz (now of Yale Divinity School), offered suggestions and encouragement while this work was being planned. Pastors Joseph A. Burgess and Richard E. Koenig helped me think about what such a book might include and about its potential audience.

Other theologians offered detailed reactions to an anonymous proposal for such an anthology that was circulated to them. They will see that we have been able to include many (although not all) of their good suggestions. But we were not able, within the scope of this project, to do anything about the very real need for new translations of several of these documents.

Pastor Ross Goodman offered a great deal of technical assistance while he was a graduate student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. That seminary's library staff was consistently helpful throughout the editing of this book. The seminary also provided funds for research expenses, and our faculty secretary Laurie E. Pellman took charge of manuscript corrections. St. Edmund's

College, Cambridge, England, provided computer facilities in the summer of 1987.

The editors at Fortress Press, especially Thelma Megill Cobbler, Harold W. Rast, and John A. Hollar, and at a later stage Stefanie Ormsby Cox, deserve special thanks for their support for this project throughout its long development.

Anyone who has ever written, edited, or even read a book will understand that I also wish to thank my family, especially my wife, Mary Carlton Lull, and our sons Christopher and Peter, for their very concrete help, encouragement, and support in this project. Many thousands of books have been written with such thanks at the end of the preface, but this will be a worse world when that custom stops. Here is one "human tradition" that Luther himself would have applauded.

This anthology is dedicated to Professor Brevard S. Childs of Yale Divinity School. Over twenty years ago he was one of the strong voices at that school urging me to read more Luther (and, to be sure, also Calvin). The whole church has benefited from the way in which he has pointed to the richness and continuing relevance of reformation theology in his teaching and writing. But of course his deeper importance is that, like the reformers themselves, he has always pointed to the Word of God as that living voice through which the Spirit still instructs the church.

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