Foreword

The preparation of collections of "basic" writings of Martin Luther has been going on since Luther's own time. Inevitably any such collection requires of the editor a series of decisions about what to include, and on what basis. Indeed, even so extensive a collection as the American Edition of *Luther's Works* involved a constant process of selecting and deciding: Which of several successive editions (the first or the last) would be the most faithful? Should we use lecture notes, either Luther's own or those of his students, or printed versions, some of them evidently doctored by editors? Where there is both a German text and a Latin text (e.g., for *The Freedom of a Christian* of 1520, and for that matter the Augsburg Confession of 1530), which should be taken as normative? The history of such theological compilations—like the history of anthologies, *florilegia*, and *Sentences* in Byzantium and in the medieval West, and behind them in Greek and Roman antiquity—has of course been shaped by the presuppositions and interests of the theologians and scholars who have prepared them. This has been true in special measure of the history of Luther editions and of Luther study as a whole; for as a group of us sought to show in a volume of essays published by Fortress Press in 1968 under the title *Interpreters of Luther*, the variety and complexity of Luther's thought and personality could, and did, give rise to an astonishing variety of *Lutherbilder*, each of them possessing at least some legitimate claim to accuracy and authenticity but each of them also showing unmistakable marks of when, by whom, and for what purpose it was drawn.

Timothy F. Lull's Luther reader also reflects the orientation of its editor and of his time, and that in several respects. It is, for one thing, unabashedly *theological* in its intent. (Somewhat to my regret, although I do appreciate the reasons for it, that has required him to slight the massive corpus of Luther's exegetical works; Luther was, after all, *Doctor in Biblia* and did not teach systematic or doctrinal theology at Wittenberg, but biblical interpretation.) But the theological concentration of the book also protects it from capitulating, as so much of contemporary theological literature does, to the trendy and the excessively topical. Much of the debate over the thought of Luther since the years of the church struggle under the Nazis has, for understandable reasons, concentrated on his political ideas, and has done so, moreover, even when it was debating his theological ideas. The issue of the relation between Law and Gospel is, as Professor Lull notes in his introductions, basic to Luther's thought about the Bible, about the nature of God, and about the economy of God's dealing with the human race. But it is also an important element—and, in the judgment of so profound an

interpreter as Karl Barth, a fatal one—in Luther's interpretation of the authority of temporal government and in his views about the validity and the limits of the Christian witness of the Word of God in relation to government. Several of the selections in Part VII have been chosen with this debate in mind, but they come where they do because the editor believes, and rightly, that the fundamental theses about the Word of God that are the business of Part III and about grace and justification that appear in Part IV must be clear if the reader is to make sense of the social and political ethics of Part VII. There is no apology here for taking Christian doctrine seriously as an object of study in its own right, not merely as a preface to politics.

Much of what Luther said and wrote about politics pertained chiefly to his own time and place, but the Luther who speaks in this volume is primarily an *international* figure. As Heinrich Heine observed in his brilliant essay on the Reformation, there was something quintessentially Germanic about Luther's character as well as about his writings. I have reason to know that no translation can hope to capture the riches of his language, especially in the German works. Sometimes he saw himself in almost exclusively German terms, as "the prophet of the Germans" and as the defender of Germanic values against Roman ones. But more often he strove to articulate his teachings in a larger, more international context. Like Moscow after the Revolution, the Wittenberg of Luther's day became a crossroads for students from many countries—it should be recalled that Hamlet, prince of Denmark, is described as having studied there—who returned to bring the Reformation to their own peoples and churches. For much of its history, Luther study has likewise been almost exclusively a German preserve, and none of us could get anywhere in the field without the pioneering work that has been done for all these years by German scholars and editors. But in the twentieth century, and especially since the Second World War, that has changed substantially, as Luther scholars in many lands have gone on from the tutelage of their German mentors to create a truly international community, reflected for example in the attendance at the International Congresses for Luther Research since 1956, in which researchers from Europe, America, and Asia have all participated.

Those researchers also come from all the branches of Protestantism and from Roman Catholicism. Like the Congress for Luther Research, therefore, this compendium is also explicitly *ecumenical* in its orientation and intent. In the history of theological controversy Luther occupies a special place, both because he had a remarkable intuition for recognizing the key issue in a doctrinal debate (what he himself called, in the conflict with Erasmus, an instinct for the jugular, although he was referring to Erasmus rather than to himself) and because his powers as a veritable sorcerer of language enabled him to express that recognition with a pungency and force that was always memorable and that often verged on polemical overkill. With a few exceptions, such as the Wittenberg Concord of 1536 and his negotiations with the Hussites during those same years, Luther was usually suspicious of the "ecumenical" efforts of his own time, and he even found the Augsburg Confession, as authored by Philip Melanchthon, to be a bit too gentle. That Luther, the archpolemicist and descendant of Epiphanius and Jerome (and of Saint Paul), is represented here, for example in substantial selections from *The Bondage of the Will* in 1525 and from the defenses of Baptism and the Real Presence in 1526 and 1528. But these are outweighed, quantitatively and especially qualitatively, by those writings in which Luther is expressing, with characteristic force and eloquence, the great consensus of most Christian teachers and of their churches. That is, it seems to me, as it should be, for in a variety of ways the Luther study of our time has been locating him within the spectrum of that consensus.

Closely related to the ecumenism of this compend is its *churchly* orientation. Luther has often been seen as the prototypical modern individualist: "you must do your own believing," he said, "as you must do your

own dying." But if twentieth-century Luther research has made any point that is sure to remain central in future study, it is that, according to Luther, this believing and this dying must go on in the company of the church as it listens to the Word of God and as it prays. A Reformation treatise like Luther's *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* of 1520 is not an attack on the church, but a defense of the church by its faithful servant, against all its enemies foreign and domestic. His *The Small Catechism* of 1529 stands alongside his translations of the Bible as a contribution to the total life of the church. And *On the Councils and the Church* of 1539 is documentation for the thesis that even twenty years after the Leipzig Disputation Luther was still probing the meaning of the doctrine of the church both in its theological dimensions and in its practical implications. Luther on the reading of the Old Testament and the New, Luther on the sacramental life, Luther on the liturgy, Luther on daily life—this is the theologian who speaks in these pages.

For it is ultimately with the practical implications—that is, with the implications for Christian *praxis*—that Martin Luther was concerned, and that Timothy Lull is concerned. If my reading of the state of the church—and the state of all the churches—is accurate, the crisis both of their *praxis* and of their doctrine has reached the point where it will require the witness of the communion of saints "of every time and every place" to summon them to discipleship. In that communion of saints, Luther occupies a special place, and in this volume his witness comes through, loud and clear.

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