

Preface

Twenty years ago Timothy J. Wengert, James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb embarked on what was planned as a three-volume project, embracing a new translation of the documents in the Book of Concord; a volume that provides texts of other documents from the sixteenth century that either served as sources for one or another of the Lutheran confessions or illuminate the context in which they arose; and a historical introduction to the development and content of these documents. Specific tasks were divided among the three and work began. The translation appeared in 2000,¹ *Sources and Contexts of the Lutheran Confessions* a year later,² but for a variety of reasons the third volume was delayed. In the process a third author, Charles P. Arand, came to aid the two of us who set out to compose the historical introduction at the beginning. The delay, we believe, will bring more of recent scholarship to the reader's attention.

The volume contains three essays on three sections of the Book of Concord—the ancient Creeds, the six treatises authored by Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon that came to be regarded as confessional standards; and the Formula of Concord, the work of students of Luther and Melancthon reflecting the development of Wittenberg thinking a generation later. These three sections each were composed by one of us, with input from the others. Readers will notice that the authors represent different points of view on certain issues of historical interpretation. We have attempted to reflect the ongoing debates within the scholarly community without confusing readers. We hope that this is a useful intellectual challenge, not a discouraging dissonance.

Our initial resolve not to let the historical background of the Formula of Concord remain so large in relationship to the contexts of the other confessional documents—a tendency in such historical introductions—fell by the wayside to a great extent. That is due in large part to our sense that contemporary students bring less knowledge of the context to that document than to the others.

The authors intend through these essays to provide students of the Lutheran confessional writings throughout the world with historical orientation for their own task of confessing Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century. This will not be the last word on any of the subjects treated. We do hope that it will encourage many readers to do as we have done—to experience the joy of delving into the life and death

stories of the sixteenth-century confessors. They placed much, including their lives, on the line to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to his church and their society. In this they provide a model for Christian life and witness in our time as well.