

# Excerpts

## Excerpt from the Preface

...It is my hope that both theologians and historians will welcome the broader scope of this volume. For those who are interested primarily in issues of religious thought, it covers not only the theology of Luther but also the further clarification of the confessional stance of Lutheranism achieved by the consensus reached in the Formula of Concord of 1577 and the important debates about doctrine and ethics that took place between Orthodox Lutherans, Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutheran Pietists during the seventeenth century. The wider focus of this document collection also fits with a trend among historians of early modern Europe towards study of the more long-term transformations of society that took place between 1500 and 1750. It is common for historians today to speak of a process of "confessionalization," which involved a gradual shift of attention within Protestant movements from the goal of removing burdensome religious and moral strictures toward the reassertion of social discipline and the enforcement of conformity to certain norms of belief. Some of the documents in this book are also relevant to the investigation of this process. ...

This anthology also attempts to integrate the study of theology and church history. It brings together both a substantial number of texts focusing on theological arguments and a wide range of others, written at the same time, that reveal the characteristics of religious experience and social behavior.

The documents in this anthology fall into the following general categories:

- 1) texts providing biographical information about influential Lutheran leaders in their own words or those of their contemporaries;
- 2) documents presenting firsthand accounts of major events and trends in the institutional development of the Lutheran tradition;
- 3) significant statements of theological beliefs, including both official confessional documents and excerpts from influential treatises or books by individual theologians;
- 4) primary source materials illustrating features of popular religious life, including information about the experiences and perceptions of the "common" people and the ways they participated in the Lutheran churches through worship, personal devotion, and the administration of church discipline;
- 5) texts describing how outsiders viewed the Lutheran tradition in its various

stages of development and how the Lutherans viewed other religious groups with whom they coexisted.

I had two general criteria for the selection of texts. First I sought to highlight the elements that have promoted unity and a common sense of identity among Lutherans across the centuries. Second I wanted to acknowledge the presence of significant diversity within Lutheranism, both at any given moment in its history and in successive stages of its development. Certain theological topics will appear repeatedly throughout the chapters of this book, revealing a perennial Lutheran preoccupation with issues such as the authority of the Bible, the proper distinction between law and gospel, the benefits of the saving work of Christ, the relation of faith and good works, the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, and the appropriate roles of clergy and laity. Readers will perceive much continuity in the treatment of these themes by writers across the centuries but will also see that these same issues have been perennial causes of sometimes mild and sometimes severe conflicts among Lutherans. In the current day, when dealing with diversity in both church and society has become so central an issue, it is interesting for historian and theologian alike to observe how Lutherans have wrestled with this issue in the past both among themselves and in their relations with other Christian church traditions. ...

Each chapter begins with an essay intended to provide necessary background information and explanations of how all of the primary source documents on a particular topic relate to each other. Read together, these eight essays also provide a concise overview of the history of Lutheranism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment for those who are approaching the topic with little prior knowledge. Because so many different kinds of material are included and so broad a period of time is covered in one volume, it has been necessary, more often than not, to provide excerpts rather than complete documents. There is, of course, a danger that selectivity of this sort will distort the reader's impressions of the available historical evidence. Nevertheless, I believe there is a justifiable trade-off in the adoption of this method. For general readers and for most students, many excerpted documents make it possible to gain an appreciation of multiple facets of the history of Lutheranism without being overwhelmed by less important details. For those who are inspired to read the complete texts (and have the skills to do so in the original languages), source information has been included with each selection, and a bibliography has been supplied at the end to facilitate further research. ...

### Excerpt from Chapter 3

Luther's excommunication in 1521 marked an important turning point in his efforts to reform the Catholic church. Although he had been very harsh in his evaluations of "Romanist" church leaders, his hope initially had been to implement changes by working within the institutional structures that they controlled. The judgment rendered at the Diet of Worms thwarted this plan. The future of Luther's reform efforts now depended on more local efforts to reorganize religious life within those territories of the Holy Roman Empire whose secular rulers were willing to carry out independent initiatives under his guidance.

The major treatises of 1520 had laid out an extensive list of proposals for the reform of church polity, worship, and theology (docs. #15 and 31). Luther and his associates were now forced to think in new ways about what strategy to use to accomplish these goals. Luther claimed neither special expertise nor interest in dealing with the details of organizational planning, but early efforts in Wittenberg to make rapid and radical changes alerted him to certain dangers that he clearly wanted to avoid (doc. #20). When he came out of hiding in 1522, Luther formulated several guidelines that would have a lasting impact on the development of the Evangelical or Lutheran churches.

First of all, Luther paid serious attention to the problem of "the weaker brethren," that is, people who found it difficult to change their way of thinking about beliefs or church practices. Convinced that forcing change upon them would create unnecessary anxiety, confusion, and potentially a backlash against his reform movement, Luther looked to the New Testament for advice about how to deal with this matter. In his letter to the Romans, Paul urged the strong to be patient and even to make temporary concessions to the weak. Paul and Peter compared the process of spiritual development to feeding different kinds of food to a child as it matures. Thus, Luther favored persuasion rather than force and gradual rather than abrupt change (doc. #21).

Second, Luther insisted that the reform process be carried out in an orderly manner. His long-standing convictions about the depths of human sinfulness inclined him to favor the installation of extensive restraints on human behavior. The chaos and destruction produced by more radical reformers in the early 1520s gave him additional incentives to stress the need for called and ordained ministers of the gospel, well-established patterns of worship, and some kind of coordination of the work of the church with the important

restraining activities carried out by the secular authorities in society. Here again, Luther found guidance from the New Testament letters of Paul, who insisted that "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40) and instructed Christians to maintain peace and unity by submitting to divinely ordained or regularly appointed governing authorities (for example, Rom. 13:1-2).

Third, Luther's experiences of oppressive or burdensome methods of control by Catholic church leaders encouraged him to strike a balance between order and freedom. In his mind, there were too many rules and practices in the church structures of his day that were treated as obligatory although they were not based on commandments in the Bible. In his reforming efforts, Luther wanted there to be clearer distinctions between necessary beliefs or practices and other expressions of religious life that should be considered optional even though they might be commendable. For example, Luther insisted on agreement about the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper and took a strong stand on the question of how the Supper should be celebrated, but he was inclined to treat more detailed matters of worship, such as the use of vestments and candles or incense, as matters of indifference (doc. #72). Similarly, he showed little interest in requiring uniformity in matters such as the number of religious holy days to be observed and was prepared to let each of the territorial churches reach its own decision about how ceremonies such as marriages should be conducted (docs. #72, 73, 74, and 80). The Augsburg Confession made Luther's intended course of action into a general principle when it stated that it was sufficient for the unity of the church that the gospel be preached and the sacraments administered in accordance with the divine Word. Beyond that, ceremonies need not always be observed in the same manner in every place (doc. #42).

Luther's efforts to change the way worship was conducted provides a clear illustration of these principles in action. Since public worship services in a church building are the most frequent and communal expression of religious practice, it is also not surprising that Luther directed his attention to this matter almost immediately after his return to Wittenberg. He published a new order for worship, the *Formula Missae*, in December 1523 (doc. #72). Clearly intending to differentiate between his approach and the measures taken by Karlstadt and the other radicals in 1521, Luther stated his wish to purify and simplify the liturgy rather than to abolish it altogether. He raised no objection to traditional parts of the Mass, such as the Gloria, the Benedictus, the Sanctus, or the Agnus Dei, because they were based on words from the Bible. Luther made no immediate issue of the use of Latin as the language of

worship, although he suggested that the vernacular might be used in the future. The major changes consisted of a new emphasis on the necessity of regular preaching from biblical texts and revision of the canon of the Mass, or the words used for the institution of the Lord's Supper. Luther had previously objected to the claim that the priest was making an offering to God in the Eucharist on behalf of the people (doc. #31) and now acted to delete everything that "smack[ed] and savor[ed] of sacrifice." He also made the administration of both the bread and the wine to the laity an essential feature of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Luther highly valued both word and sacrament and advocated frequent communion. However, he discontinued the practice of private masses and insisted that the Lord's Supper should not be celebrated on any occasion where there were no people present who wished to commune. Luther also called for careful scrutiny of those who came to receive the Lord's Supper. They should be able to articulate their basic knowledge of the faith and be aware of the full significance of the sacrament. He recommended private confession prior to communion because it allowed the minister to conduct an examination of the beliefs and manner of life of communicants. Similar measures to insure proper respect for the sacrament would become a standard part of the procedures developed in all of the Lutheran territorial churches (docs. #77 and 78). ...