



CTCR Statement on *Luther's Large Catechism* with Annotations and Contemporary Applications

At its most recent meeting Feb. 16–18, 2023, the LCMS’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) discussed the controversy that accompanied the publication of *Luther’s Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications*, for which the Commission served as editors, contributors and reviewers. The CTCR forthrightly asserts that this volume does not change, question or supplant any doctrinal position of the LCMS, including any Synod teaching on contemporary cultural issues such as race or sexuality. The CTCR furthermore categorically rejects any assertions to the contrary. In feedback we have received as a Commission, it has become clear that many misconceptions about the volume have surfaced on social media, and we wish to offer this brief explanation to clarify what this volume is and what it is not.

First, the CTCR undertook the production of this volume at the behest of recent Synod conventions. 2013 Synod Resolution 3-13A addressed the matter of catechesis, including a resolve that a “catechetical compendium for adults” be prepared “which would be more comprehensive and apologetic in scope” than *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*. The 2016 LCMS convention adopted Resolution 5-12 on the use of Luther’s catechisms. The resolution tasked the CTCR, in concurrence with the Synod president and seminaries, to “explore the

creation of an annotated and expanded edition of the Large Catechism.”

Consequently, the resulting volume should be seen as a resource that was produced under the auspices of the CTCR, in conjunction with the LCMS Office of the President.

Second, the text of the Large Catechism itself remains entirely unchanged in this volume, using the English translation found in *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*. It is the same text to which our Synod has always subscribed as part of our unqualified commitment to the 16th-century Lutheran Confessions. This volume, however, has two very different components, in accordance with the convention resolutions from 2013 and 2016. One component is the newly composed introductions and explanatory footnotes provided with the text of Luther’s Large Catechism (similar in arrangement to *The Lutheran Study Bible*). These introductions and notes were written by scholars of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. They are meant to help clarify the context and language of the catechism in its historical context. The introductions and annotations are the centerpiece of this project and one of the most extensive resources on this score provided in English. The other component is a series of excursive essays. The essays are wide-ranging attempts to engage the sorts of contemporary questions that often come up in relation to both of Luther’s catechisms, as well as more generally in adult instruction and church life. By their nature, essays on contemporary questions touch on challenging and complex social, cultural and political issues. As such, they represent individual perspectives and judgments that some in the LCMS may not share.

Third, the selection of drafters for these excurses was not limited to LCMS authors but expanded to other Lutherans who have a record of scholarship with the Large Catechism or experience with many of these contemporary issues. We sought to

have contributions from a variety of individuals, including Lutherans from other church bodies, to benefit from their expertise and/or experience. Some of these writers are from church bodies not in fellowship with the LCMS. Their contributions were painstakingly reviewed by the entire CTCR (and later by the Synod's doctrinal review process) to ensure that the doctrinal content in each essay is fully consistent with LCMS teachings and practices. The decision was made to include the contributor's name for every piece in this volume (editors, annotators and essayists alike), unlike the typical custom of the CTCR in publishing its materials with the Commission itself identified as the author, rather than the principal drafters. The authors submitting these essays, for their part, did not view their short papers as articulating or defending specific positions of the Synod but as helping to explain some of the controversies that arise while teaching the catechisms or Lutheran doctrine — indeed, arising in many cases from their own congregational and personal experiences as pastors or laypeople.

Fourth, as noted earlier, the text of each introduction, annotation and excursive essay underwent thorough review and subsequent approval by the CTCR, as well as Synod doctrinal review. These reviews were undertaken to ensure that all material was in accord with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and the Constitution, bylaws and doctrinal statements of the Synod. Numerous suggestions for improvement were offered during this process and were ultimately addressed satisfactorily. That is not to say every reader will agree with each essay's perspective on specific social, cultural or political matters where Scripture, the Confessions or the Synod may not have spoken. There is obviously room for debate on many such issues, as brothers and sisters in Christ should be free to engage one another on matters of concern. They should be able to do so with confidence that their voices will be heard, their engagement will be fruitful, and

their positions and objections measured by the rigorous standard of Scripture and the Confessions upon which our doctrinal unity is based.

Last, while we acknowledge that certain things could have been worded differently, better or more precisely (as is true of any publication, especially one of such massive size and scope), we remain firmly supportive of this volume, its contents and its usefulness for our church body. It is our express mandate and purpose as a Commission not to cause controversy, but to advise the Synod on matters of doctrine and practice, to assist the Synod president in his constitutional responsibilities, and to respond to the directives of our Synod in convention. We believe that we have done so with this volume. As the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, Synod president, said in his Feb. 2, 2023, statement to the Synod: “Frankly, I think each reader will be astounded at the content and quality of the volume.” We urge you to read it for yourselves and to make your own judgments.

The LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations

Adopted unanimously — Feb. 17, 2023

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