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## Book Reviews

**Notice: Additional book reviews will soon be available online at the address listed below.**

**<http://www.ctsfw.edu/resources/concordia-theological-quarterly/book-reviews/>**

***Praying Luther's Small Catechism.* By John T. Pless. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 182 pages. Softcover. \$8.99.**

A child does not learn to speak from themselves, but by being given the words to speak. Likewise, when it comes to prayer, we too are given the words to speak. This contention is the basis of *Praying Luther's Small Catechism*. Using the *Small Catechism* as a template does not stifle prayer, but provides the language to open up a world of prayer.

Although the *Small Catechism* as a prayer aid is not a novel concept, Rev. Pless does a beautiful job synthesizing scholarship on the topic. He walks through each section of the catechism providing sample prayers throughout. The appendices include useful tools such as Psalms correlated to each petition of the Lord's Prayer, and self-examination questions before confession and absolution. This book serves as an excellent resource to refresh one's prayer life and to gain a deeper appreciation for *Luther's Small Catechism*.

Jacob Eichers,  
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***The Reformation Coin and Medal Collection of Concordia Historical Institute: A Striking Witness to Martin Luther and the Reformation.* Edited by Daniel Harmelink. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016. 416 Pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.**

A constant challenge to Lutherans in America is maintaining their distinctive Lutheran heritage. We are in danger of seeing ourselves, and others seeing us, as another kind of Protestant. One way of regaining and determining what it means to be Lutheran is becoming acquainted with as much of what happened in the last five hundred years in Germany as possible. Helping to reclaim the Lutheran past is this meticulously executed volume of photographs of coins minted to commemorate past Reformation celebrations with an introduction to past Reformation numismatics. Along with coins featuring Luther are those with images of such other

Reformation figures as Jan Hus, Melanchthon, Erasmus, Zwingli, and Calvin. Even Katie Luther manages to find a place on some coins. Also worthy of commemoration are such events as Luther at Worms, the Peace of Augsburg, and Peace of Westphalia. Lest truly tragic events go unremembered coins were struck to commemorate the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Huguenots in France of 1572, and the exile of the Protestants from Salzburg in 1732.

Albertine Electors of Saxony have their images placed on eighteenth century coins, though they were the successors to Maurice of Saxony who in aligning himself with Charles V displaced his more loyal Lutheran cousin John the Steadfast. All is not lost, John finds a place for himself between Luther and Melanchthon in a coin minted in St. Louis in 1930. A coin commemorating the Reformation in Prussia minted in 1839 is a reminder of the disastrous union of 1830 that accelerated the downward slide of Lutheranism and ignited the Lutheran emigration to America. Thus, included also are coins commemorating Lutheran congregations in America.

This is a great book to display on coffee tables in Lutheran living rooms during the commemorative Reformation and beyond. Pastors can make great use of it in study groups, or display it in the church narthex. General, scriptural, and personal indices are appended. Topics and persons commemorated on the coins are listed in the index of legends. Thanks to numismatics, Luther lives on—at least on coins. This is a carefully executed publishing accomplishment and in itself an outstanding work for which I give special thanks to editor Daniel Harmelink.

David P. Scaer

***Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World.* By Larry W. Hurtado. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016. 290 + xiv pages. Hardcover. \$19.95.**

The gods to be destroyed consisted not only of the twelve canonical Olympians, but what Hurtado calls the “cafeteria of deities” (25) that the ancient Romans relied upon for the existence of their civilization and way of life: foreign cults of Isis and Mithras, time-tested rituals of the state religion (*do ut des* = “I give so that you give”), delightful sylvan deities of Roman poetry, the emperor’s image, and so much else. The best way to fit in back then was to reverence “the gods” (note lower case in the book’s title) and curse Christ, and because the early Christians could not (or would not) comply they were dismissed as silly, superstitious, irrational, hateful, obstinate, anti-social, perverse, and wicked (from the dust jacket). The Christians’ worst enemies were their own family members, neighbors, and social contacts. Matthew’s Jesus says it best: “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter

against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. *And a person's enemies will be those of his own household*" (Matt 10:35–36; added emphasis). For Hurtado's documentation of Roman society's harassment and persecution of Christians in the first three centuries A.D. see especially chapter 1: Early Christians and Christianity in the Eyes of Non-Christians.

In chapters 2 (A New Kind of Faith) and 3 (A Different Identity) Hurtado focuses upon the "exclusivist stance" (58; cf. 71, 86, 89, 93) that made the Christians so objectionable not only to their Roman neighbors, but even to Jews, with whom the Christians shared many commonalities. Paganism permitted adherents to placate the traditional deities, *daimones*, spirits (or whatever) of one's own choice (see "A World Full of Gods," 44–49, 86). Christians, however, avoided taking part in the worship of any deity other than the one God of the biblical tradition—and to consider all other would-be deities as so many "idols" (50–52, 87–88). The Jews' refusal to worship pagan gods was at least understandable to Romans for such aloofness was part of ethnic Judaism from time immemorial; however, Christians were comprised of many different ethnicities (including former Jews) who refused to play along with pagan scruples and insisted that Jesus (only!) was Lord—not Caesar (see "One God... and One Lord [Jesus]," 66–75). Holy Baptism meant that one invoked the name of Jesus and so came under the ownership of the Lord Jesus Christ (58–59, 91). The Lord's Supper meant that the participant was linked with the redemptive death of Jesus and failure to discern the Lord's body could make one liable to divine judgment (60–61, 91). Pagan converts retained their various ethnic identities, but all Christians—from greatest to least, and regardless of ethnic background—were expected to reverence Jesus as Lord and follow the type of biblical holiness (with respect to sexuality, e.g.) that could set them at odds with pagans.

Furthermore, Christianity was a "bookish" religion (chapter 4), which meant that reading, writing, copying, and dissemination of texts had a major place among the early believers that was unusual for Roman-era religious groups—with the notable exception of the Jews, again, who were quite like the Christians in this respect (see "Christian and Synagogue Practices," 109–118). Finally, Christianity offered "A New Way to Live" (chapter 5). Thus, Paul and NT authors were not afraid to challenge the sexual double standard of the day (lascivious men could "sleep around" with impunity, whereas women were supposed to be chaste, 157, 164). Indeed, early Christianity supposed all *πορνεία* ("sexual immorality") to be sinful (156, 160), relabeled pederasty (more or less approved of by pagans) as "child corruption and abuse" (167–168), and would not have endorsed the controversial view (made popular by Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* [New York:

Oxford, 2002] 60) that Paul implicitly allowed Christian males to have sex with female slaves (he cites my own negative review of Glancy's position on pg. 259 n. 56). Thus, Christianity was distinctive at the time for insisting upon a set of behavioral requirements (a set of "dos and don'ts," as it were) which, again, is rather universally assumed to be part of all religious ethics of today. In antiquity, however, such ethics were virtually unknown: "Christianity helped destroy one world and create another" (dust jacket).

Much is of interest here to modern adherents of the faith who keenly feel the apparent collapse of Christianity in the world—or at least in North America. Still, Hurtado does not go there. He writes instead to address our "cultural amnesia" (1): though loathed and despised in the early centuries the vigorous young faith so succeeded in transforming the world that even its objectionable features (e.g., expecting its adherents to lead chaste and decent lives; caring about "ethics"; formation of character, etc.) have become so commonplace in western culture as to go unnoticed (2, 188–189). Whereas Hurtado's colleagues have made careers attempting to demonstrate ways that "religion" has remained fixed through time (39), Hurtado points out again and again the many ways that Christianity was "distinctive" (the word occurs in the title and dozens of times elsewhere). This would be a good book for pastors to read and discuss with seasoned adult learners.

John G. Nordling

***Real Music: A Guide to the Timeless Hymns of the Church.* By Anthony Esolen. Charlotte: TAN Books, 2016. Xvi + 280 pages; CD included. Hardcover. \$29.95.**

The name Anthony Esolen will not be unfamiliar to most readers of this journal. When he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, just this spring (May 2017), the citation noted not only his contributions as a scholar and translator (including his three-volume translation and edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) and his staunch support of life and marriage, but especially "his bold defense of our Christian cultural heritage."

In *Real Music*, however, Esolen moves in a somewhat different direction, as he writes in the Introduction: "I am writing this book to bring back the words of great Christian hymns, most of which are no longer heard anywhere" (xiv). Describing them as "verbal and melodic icons of Jesus Christ" (xiv), Esolen sets the goal of teaching us to appreciate the great hymns of the Church as the works of art that they are. With his impeccable credentials in English literature, he certainly delivers!

Dividing his work into twelve simple chapters, Esolen covers fifty-six hymns. (Approximately half of these hymns appear in *Lutheran Service Book*, though

sometimes in different translation.) What becomes evident from the outset is that Esolen knows how to plumb the depths of this venerable poetry. Himself a devout Roman Catholic, Esolen treats the hymns with great care; only occasionally is there a theological point with which one might quibble. He regularly quotes the Scriptures—always from the King James Version, since this is the version that would have been known to all of these hymn writers—demonstrating just how richly these hymns draw upon the biblical text.

Equally impressive is the unassuming way in which Esolen teaches the finer points of poetry. The careful reader will note, for example, the nature and purpose of rhyme (11, 39), the importance of doxological stanzas (32), how rhyme and meter relate to the hymn tune (45, 94, 108, 114), the intricacies of meter (49, 63, 90), and the beauty of alliteration (61). The level of detail, which is never beyond the scope of the average reader, reminds us why Christians have returned to these and other hymns again and again: they have something to say and they say it quite well!

Included with the book is a CD that contains recordings of 18 of the hymns. Sung by the St. Cecilia Choir of St. John Cantius Roman Catholic Church in Chicago, these recordings reflect more of a Roman Catholic style of hymn singing than Lutheran. They are, nevertheless, a beneficial feature since it is in the very nature of hymns that they be sung.

This is a book that should be read by every pastor, church musician, and praise band leader. It is also highly recommended for anyone else who is involved in a congregation's music ministry. Finally, it is the perfect resource for a book study group or for a Bible class. You will not be disappointed.

Paul J. Grime

***Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career (Second Edition).* By James M. Kittelson and Hans H. Wiersma. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. Paperback. 275 pages. \$27.00.**

James M. Kittelson (1941–2003) is remembered for his careful Reformation scholarship, robust humor, and his deep commitment to the Gospel proclaimed by Luther. First published in 1986, Kittelson's *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* was quickly recognized as a fresh and important Luther biography. Whereas Roland Bainton's classic and ever popular Luther biography, *Here I Stand* focused on the young Luther, Kittelson's book would see Luther all the way through, not shying away from the aged Reformer. I was serving as a campus pastor when the book first appeared and did not hesitate to recommend it to students who inquired who asked for a suggested Luther biography. It was a good book then

and under the able help of a Kittelson student, Hans Wiersma, a fine work is made even better.

Two observations are in order about this new edition of Kittelson's book. First of all, Wiersma has incorporated the insights of more recent Luther scholarship into his revision. Much has transpired in Reformation studies over the last three and a half decades. Wiersma knows the scholarship and judiciously weaves more recent research into the fabric of Kittelson's work in a seamless fashion. This is demonstrated not only in the narrative but also in the updated bibliography. Second, while the first edition placed a bit more emphasis on Luther's career, Wiersma balances this aspect with more attention to Luther's life. It is not that Kittelson neglected the Reformer's earthy humanity but this aspect is certainly more prominent in the present volume. We learn a little more about Luther as friend, husband, and father.

Like the first edition, the revised edition attends to the chronology of events in Luther's life as well as the context and content of his theology. While the political and philosophical aspects of the Reformation are by no means ignored, Kittelson and Wiersma narrate the story of Luther who saw himself as a servant and preacher of Jesus Christ.

In this anniversary year, the market is flooded with books on Luther. Certainly, there are many fine biographies both long and short to choose from these days. The three-volume work of Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther* is indispensable for the scholar. This fresh edition of *Luther: The Reformer* remains the best one-volume overview of Luther's life and teaching. It is concise without omitting necessary historical details but the reader is not burdened with excessive data in the text or in the footnotes. The book is accessible for ordinary pastors and laity. It should be in every congregational library and it would be an excellent text to use in an adult forum or book discussion group.

John T. Pless