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Book Review

***Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications.* Edited by John T. Pless and Larry M. Vogel. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2022. 734 pages. Hardcover. \$39.99.**

Hermann Sasse lamented in 1948 that world Lutheranism needed confessional renewal, in which the pastors and people committed themselves to serious study and application of the Lutheran Confessions, beginning with Luther's Large Catechism.¹ The same is true today in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Pastors and church workers in our synod rely on materials about the Christian life by American evangelicals. Much of our social engagement in today's hostile pop culture—at least at the ground level—flows from secular political commentary. Yet, the Large Catechism is a treasure trove of salutary theology and pastoral wisdom that remains largely unmined.

Our synod's publication of *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications* seeks to remedy this problem. This volume accomplishes the goal, set by synodical resolutions from 2013 and 2016, of providing updated catechetical resources that would be “more comprehensive and apologetic in scope.”² It provides readers with some of the finest contemporary scholarship on the historical background and theology of the Large Catechism through introductory essays written by renowned teachers and pastors from around the Lutheran world, and through extensive and detailed footnotes. The work also contains commentary addressing some challenges to our faith in the world today. Here the theology of the Large Catechism is applied apologetically in a manner faithful to the doctrines of the Lutheran Confessions and applicable in a society that vacillates between hostility and ambivalence toward Christian faith and practice.

This volume is not aimed only at theological professionals but at all Lutheran Christians. Here there are riches for all who seek to understand better what it means to be a child of God in Christ and how to live that out.³ At the same time, pastors, church workers, and those studying for these vocations should be urged to study and put to use the insights in this work. They will find help for encouraging Christians to confess and live out their faith in the context of false teachings such as

¹ Hermann Sasse, “Status of the Lutheran Churches of the World,” trans. Paul Peters, in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, vol. 1, 1948–1951, ed. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 15–16.

² *Convention Proceedings: 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2013), 123.

³ *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications*, 3–4.

evolution and in the face of social ills like gender dysphoria, abortion, and euthanasia. In this volume, pastors and church workers have a ready, useful, and faithful resource for thinking through and addressing these and many other contemporary issues facing Christians.

Yet, despite its catechetical and apologetic value, confessional faithfulness, and usefulness today, *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications* has received opposition. Misrepresentation, false witness, and genuine concern have all been expressed. Though it is beyond the scope of this review to recount all the reactions to the work, I will address one.

One criticism is that theological works published by the LCMS should contain only the work of LCMS theologians. While it is certainly true that nothing heterodox should ever be put forth by our synod, its subsidiaries, seminaries, or universities, it does not follow that no synodical publication should ever contain anything by someone who is not a member of the synod or a lay person belonging to a congregation of the LCMS. If we can never use anything by someone outside the LCMS, then *Lutheran Service Book* should not contain hymns or liturgies written by non-LCMS Christians. Many of the hymns we sing are by Roman Catholics, Calvinists, and Methodists. Many aspects of our liturgy are common to other Lutheran church bodies, past and present. Should we never sing "This is the Feast" or "Silent Night"?

Our commitment to doctrinal purity does not rule out publishing non-LCMS authors. What it does rule out is publishing heterodox teaching. In my opinion, *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications* meets the standard of orthodox teaching and should be commended for use by the pastors, professors, church workers, and all people of the LCMS.

Some in the LCMS rely on sources that are not Lutheran and that do contain false teachings about salvation, ecclesiology, the Office of Holy Ministry, and the sacraments. *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications* provides an alternative source for study, teaching, discussion, and practice that is faithful, confessionally Lutheran, and germane to our present context. As President Matthew Harrison states, "You have before you one of the greatest resources for Christian faith and living ever produced by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod."⁴ So, use it.

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⁴ *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications*, xv.