

***Letters from Katie Luther: A Novel*, by Shirley Casemier. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020. \$14.95. 208 pp. (paper). [Reviewed by Sarah Mowery.]**

I once heard a friend of our family who was converted as an adult say that we Christians speak our own language. I cannot remember the context of his comment, and though I found it interesting, I forgot about it until recently, as I read Shirley Casemier's novel, *Letters from Katie Luther*. In her book's introduction Mrs. Casemier writes, "You will perhaps find some of Katie's letters to her friend Ave more religious than the way that you write or talk to you own friends." But I found that the two women whose "voices" one hears in this unpretentious little novel spoke the same language that my husband and I encourage in our home, the language of Christians. That's the language in which we desire our children be fluent.

As is clear from its title, Mrs. Casemier's novel is an epistolary novel. Like C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* or Elizabeth's Prentiss's *Stepping Heavenward*, its format offers access into the inner thoughts of its main characters, Katie Luther and her friend Ave. After a lengthy character list, which I didn't read all at once but referenced several times as I read, the book begins with Katie's death. Then Ave, the narrator of the story, goes back in time, briefly recounting in chapters one and two how she and Katie and met, their escape from the Nimbschen convent, and their parting. Newly married Ave moves a day's ride away, while Katie remains in Wittenburg, awaiting her own marriage to Jerome Baumgartner. In chapter three, thirty years of letters commence. I sometimes find it difficult to "get into" epistolary novels, so I appreciated that the first two chapters of this book relate Katie's and Ave's history before their letters begin.

This biography is fictionalized, but it's evident that Mrs. Casemier carefully researched Katie's life and worked hard to recount her story faithfully. She notes liberties she took in her writing at the end of book. True to the little that I knew of Katie Luther, the Katie that Mrs. Casemier portrays is lively and impulsive, but she's a thoughtful, godly woman too. The language and expressions used in Katie's fictitious letters did not always seem to me to be true to the time in which she lived, but they are written in language that's accessible to middle-school students. Some of my favorite parts of the book are the paraphrased quotations of Martin Luther. And I laughed aloud with narrator Ave at Martin Luther and Katie's wedding invitation. This novel also included several details that were new and interesting to me. For example, I was unaware that escaped nuns were conspicuous because nuns' heads were kept shaved. I did not think that Ave's regular reflections always enhanced the story. But that is a minor critique.

Why should our children read about Katie's life? In the introduction Mrs. Casemier addresses her young readers: "Reading about her experiences and remembering how God helped her may help you when God sends hard trials into your life." In addition to that, this story impressed upon me the importance of godly friendships, especially among Christian women. It also encouraged me in my work. Sometimes God calls His children to serve Him in the study, in the pulpit, and in the courtroom, as He did Martin Luther. Sometimes He calls His children to serve Him by bearing children, caring for the sick, and butchering chickens, as He did Luther's wife. Sometimes he calls them even in their elder years to take up their pen and write for the love of the generations who follow them, as he did Mrs. Casemier, whom her friend calls the "Grandma Moses" of writing. I am glad He did.