



Newsletter

Lutheran Study Centre

Third Edition
May 2014

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New Book : Catechism in Bahasa Malaysia!



Katekismus Kecil (RM 2)

This edition of the Lutheran newsletter marks the publication of two books, the Small Catechism in Bahasa Malaysia and the Introduction to Lutheran Ethics in English. Both books are intended to serve the Lutheran churches in Malaysia and Singapore in their comprehension and teaching of Lutheran theology.

The Small Catechism is the one Lutheran book which stands out among all others. Since the Reformation it has become the book of instruction for children, youth and adults in Lutheran churches worldwide. There are Lutheran Christians who have literally walked hundreds of miles to obtain a printed copy of the Small Catechism, because next to the bible it is the dearest book to them.

How did the Catechism become so successful and so invaluable to Christians in so various countries and of so many different languages? The answer is simply that the catechism succeeded in summarizing the content of the bible in a comprehensive and relevant manner.

Luther intended the catechism to be used daily by every Christian house and family. He himself meditated its three main parts in his daily devotion. The catechism is written in questions and answers in order to provide simple explanations for the young and uneducated members of the family to be taught by the father and mother of the

Later the Lutheran churches used the catechism as basic book of instruction in primary schools and confirmation classes. Some Lutheran churches which do not use the Catechism have made the experience that they lose the balance of instruction (Christian doctrine) and action, since their action and work is no longer founded on the gospel of God's forgiving grace in Christ.

Catechism originally means the instruction given to candidates for baptism. Since the times of the early church this instruction consisted of three parts: the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer as model for our praying. These three parts were also called the lay bible, because every Christian should know them to be counted among Christians.

There have been other catechisms before and after Martin Luther, however none strikes such a balance of simple and profound explanation of law and gospel: what we have to do in response to God's will and how we are enabled to do it by Christ in his Word and sacrament. Thus the catechism is commencing with the will of God in the commandments, moving to the Creed as summary of God's work with us creation and salvation, our daily struggles with death and evil in the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments as visible signs of the daily drowning of the old Adam and rising of the new Adam.

Everyone who uses the catechism should read it as a book of comfort and encouragement, because it shows us the way of faith and how our Christian life grows. The Lutheran reformer Justus Jonas once wrote: "The catechism is a little book. It can be bought cheaply, but no one can pay for it. If the Lutheran Church had brought no other benefit into the world than that it made this Catechism known to the people, it would have done more than all the universities and seminaries on earth."

Copies of the Small Catechism in Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin or English are available from the Lutheran Study Center. The Lutheran Study Center continues to offer courses on the Catechism in Bahasa Malaysia, English and soon in Mandarin. If you are interested in such courses, please contact the LSC for further information.



Quotes: "Luther's catechism is not merely about Martin Luther, how he understood the Bible, and how he explained it in the catechism. His teaching was about Christ crucified. Even though it was written hundreds years ago, the centre of its teaching was Christ. The relevance of this catechism is on its message that is timeless." Rev Joefrerick Atang, BCCM



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New Book: Introduction to Lutheran Ethics

Introduction to Lutheran Ethics



Edited by Michael Press
Lutheran Study Centre

This new book summarizes presentations of different seminars organised by the LSC on the theme of Lutheran Ethics. In the first part it discusses the role of God's law in Christian ethics and the relationship between law and gospel as key Lutheran principal. Law and gospel are the two voices of God which we hear in the Bible. It requires constant attention discerning law and gospel because the lack of discernment makes us captives of the law through accusations and moralistic preaching. The proper differentiation brings about the life giving gospel of God's forgiveness. Lutheran ethics is a narrow walk between too much emphasis on the law and throwing out the law altogether. Freedom means responsibility before God and others, freedom not from, but for doing the will of God.

Luther uses the Ten Commandments in his catechism not only to reveal our fallen nature but also to offer a guide for Christian life. Christians need to acknowledge how they struggle and fail to keep even a single of the commandments. However, the commandments can be fulfilled by the transformed sinner who is empowered by God's Spirit against the temptations of flesh, world and devil. This Lutheran view of the Christian life is different from the typical evangelical view. Growing in holiness means becoming more what we already are through baptism in Christ.

These principles are also discussed in the field of political and economic ethics. Lutheran ethics provide the foundation for engaged and active citizenship.

Introduction to Lutheran Ethics (RM 20)



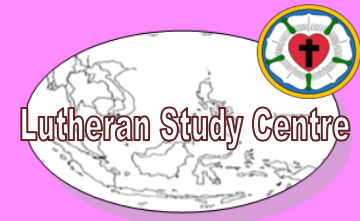
BCCM pastors and church leaders attended Lutheran Study Centre Seminar in Bahasa Malaysia , 17-19 Feb 2014

Sacraments

From February 19 – 21 the LSC offered a three day intensive course with the BCCM BM pastors on the sacraments followed by a similar course in Kudat with PCS. Speakers were two Indonesian lecturers, Rev Bonar Lumbantobing (Pematang Siantar) and Dr Binsar Pakpahan (STT Jakarta) together with Rev Graham Harms (Lutheran Church of Australia) and Dr Eric Trozzo, STS.



Dr Jeff Silcock at the Ethics Seminar in KL, October 2014



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The topic was chosen because of the impression that the understanding of the sacraments as means of God's grace and justification has not been clear in the churches and is further confused



by the impact of the dominant non-sacramental evangelical theology of the other denominations. By starting from the New Testament it could be shown that the Lutheran sacramental the-

ology is based on the bible while the dominant symbolical understanding is a product of modern Western philosophy. There were engaged discussions with the BCCM pastors and their feedback suggests that such a course met a deep need and will change ministerial practices.



Quotes:

"Before the seminar our understanding of the sacraments was blurred. We did not think that Lutheran theology is important. ... The Holy Communion is not regarded as important. But we missed a lot by not knowing it. I will talk to church members and explain and discuss what we have learned. We need to have seminars with elders and council members to explain this Lutheran theology." (Rev. Rajiman, BCCM BM Beaufort).



Quotes:

"In the sacraments we did not follow Luther's teaching. We pastors and elders should sit together and discuss to apply Lutheran theology. ... Now we should teach the next generation properly. It was not wrong what we did, but now we can have a better understanding." (Elder Hector Hunt, BCCCM Bawan).



Quotes:

"This wider knowledge of the sacraments will help me to improve the teaching of the sacraments to my church members so that they will acknowledge the importance of the sacraments. (Rev Mary Chu, BCCM Sandakan).



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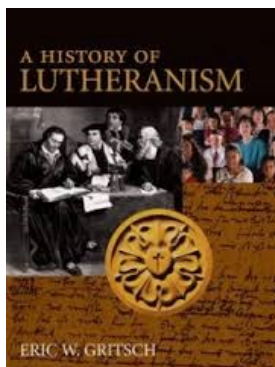
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News and Reviews

Book Review



Luther on Worship: An Interpretation, by Vilmos Vajta

One of the new books in the Lutheran Study Centre library is the 2004 reprint of Vilmos Vajta's classic account of Martin Luther's theology of worship. Originally written in German in 1952, this is one of the few books on Luther's thought that has been translated into Indonesian. The Indonesian version is also available in the LSC library. Vajta was Hungarian-born, studied in Sweden, and served as the first director of the Lutheran World Federation's Department of Theology.

In this book, Vajta sets Luther's thoughts on worship within his broader theology. One of the strengths of the book is that it does not get bogged down in the details of specific views on liturgy. Rather, Vajta shows that Luther's thought on worship was grounded in the freedom we gain through Christ while at the same time keenly attuned to our essential need to hear the Word of God come to us in worship.

The book is divided into three parts: Principles of Worship, Worship as the Work of God, and Worship as the Work of Faith. It is the second section that is most worthwhile for casual reading. The other two sections are a bit denser and better suited for research. In the second part, Vajta helpfully explains Luther's theology of proclamation, showing the importance of the sermon as a means of grace. Next, he describes the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Finally he expounds upon the role of the pastor in imparting these vehicles of God's grace. The book is a helpful and concise introduction to these topics. It brings out the surprising distinctiveness in the way that Luther insists upon the importance of Christ being preached and understanding worship above all else as a means for God to reach out to us. In addition, this book is the only account of these topics that I have come across in Indonesian, and so is of particular value for those looking for resources to better understand Luther's thought using BM.

Upcoming LSC Events in 2014:

June 23-27: Lutheran Theology for Chinese students and BCCM Pastors at STS