



Newsletter Lutheran Study Centre

Inaugural Edition

at Sabah Theological Seminary, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

A word from the director...

Dear fellow Christians,

It is a great joy to invite you to the Lutheran Study Centre at Sabah Theological Seminary. This is a great opportunity to learn more about our Christian tradition and roots.

Even though Martin Luther lived in Germany 500 years ago, his message and his theology remains present and alive to us. The study of Martin Luther promises to strengthen and deepen our theology.

The Lutheran Study Centre (LSC) was established by the Lutheran Churches in Malaysia and Singapore with the support of partners from Australia, Germany, the USA and the Lutheran World Federation in 2012.

Some of our member churches have a very strong Lutheran tradition, others less so, because they have experienced different influences in their history.

Sometimes I hear the question, "why should we study Lutheran theology at all? Is it not enough being Christian and study the bible?"

My answer is that Lutherans are first of all Christians who respond to the word of God in the scripture. Lutherans have called themselves *evangelical*, meaning "people of the gospel", long before this word got a specific meaning in modern church history. Lutheranism does not sit on top of being Christian as an addition. Lutheran theology is nothing else than focusing on the heart of the bible through biblical and theological interpretation, witness, worship and practice. Therefore Lutheran theology should rightly be called Christian theology.

Martin Luther rediscovered the heart and centre of the bible, when it was almost lost. He started the Reformation, which was a reform of removing the additions and misinterpretations and of pointing back to the roots of our faith. Therefore Lutheran theology became the basis of all other evangelical or Protestant theology.

Lutheran theology developed over time, because in different situations different questions were asked; for instance, the relationship between church and state became a later issue. Theologians tried to clarify some points of conflict in more and more detail, which led them to strict differentiation from other churches. "Lutheran" became the name of a denomination. Even though we acknowledge this history, in the context of Asia it is more important to return to the beginning in the same way Martin Luther did, when he started his lectures about the books of the bible.

Lutherans are Christians who want to be faithful to the Scriptures. They take from the Scriptures the central theme of God's judgment and mercy, of law and gospel, forgiveness and renewal in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Faith and grace are the most important words for Lutherans. Everything else flows from it.

The Lutheran Study Center invites you to find out for yourself what Lutheran theology has to say to you. It provides the instruments, means and support of your study. Come and make use of it! (Rev Dr Michael Press)



Participants of the Buku Konkord seminar in January 2013

Inauguration Of The Lutheran Study Centre (9th March 2012)



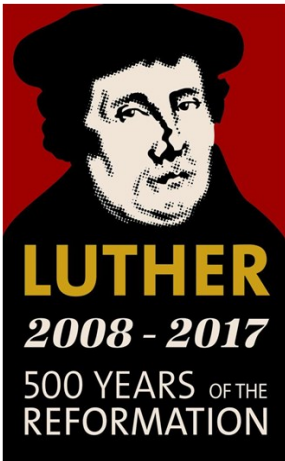


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The Buku Konkord Project

The Book of Concord comprises the confessions of the Lutheran churches from the time of the Reformation. Besides the ecumenical creeds of the early church, it includes Martin Luther's Small and Large Catechisms; the Augsburg Confession, as first exposition of the reformed faith; the Smalcald Articles of Martin Luther; the explanation of the Augsburg Confession; and the Formula of Concord, which settled disputes among Lutheran theologians.

Not all Lutheran churches have accepted all of the confessional writings, partly due to lacking translations. Most of the Lutheran churches regard the two Catechisms and the Augsburg Confession as the basis of their church doctrine. Since 2004 the Book of Concord has been available in Indonesian language, combining earlier and new translations. This book has been out of print, thus LSC has obtained permission to reprint it. The first volume has been distributed freely among the Lutheran churches.



In two seminars almost all the BM speaking pastors of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, BCCM (*bottom picture left*), and the Protestant Church of Sabah, PCS (*bottom picture right*), plus the students of these churches were introduced to these texts.



The intensive seminars were conducted by two Indonesian Lutheran lecturers, Dr Mangisi Simorangkir, the editor of the Buku Konkord, and Rev. Bonar Lumbantobing, with the support of Dr Michael Press and Dr Eric Trozzo (*picture above*).

The participants found the seminar very useful and helpful for their ministry, and almost all participants wish a continuation of such courses in the near future. These courses should also include church leaders and interested members. The Lutheran Study Centre hopes to conduct the first of such courses for the Lutheran churches in Sabah in the second half of 2013. (MPress)





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The LSC Library

This is the library of the Lutheran Study Center. It contains 150 Books in English about Martin Luther, Lutheran theology, history, liturgy and spirituality. To these 150 Books you can add another 123 Lutheran books in the STS library.



There are also 17 Chinese books, including translations of works of Luther as well as Lutheran theology. The Bahasa Malaysia section is very small, because there are few books available. We are working on some translations, but it is difficult to find translators.

Most important are the works of Martin Luther himself. The American edition has 55 volumes. The printed volumes are to be found in the STS library, and the computer version on the LSC computer.

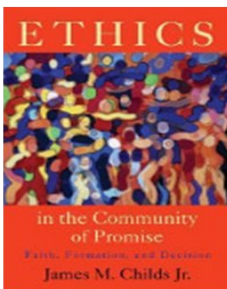
There are treasures to discover. We wish you good researching!



Book review

Ethics in the Community of Promise: Faith, Formation, and Decision

- by James M. Childs, Jr. (Fortress Press, 2006)



This book is an updated second edition of Childs' popular introduction to theological ethics from a Lutheran perspective, first published as *Faith, Formation, and Decision* in 1992. Childs takes seriously Dietrich Bonhoeffer's assertion that essential to the Christian faith is the need for others because of Christ. It is in the Christian community, shaped by God's promises made known in Christ, that ethics takes place.

Ethics, for Childs, is not a list of things to do or not do, but rather a way of discussing difficult issues as a community whose values are shaped by the cross of Christ. Only out of difficult discussions within the Church, and only with great humility, can an ethical decision be made. From this faith community-based approach, Childs then explores a range of real world ethical debates, such as end-of-life decisions, medical ethics, truth telling, environmental justice, and war-making, suggesting how key Lutheran doctrines such as the importance of scripture and the theology of the cross impact Christian positions and discussions on these topics. Each chapter also ends with discussion questions so that readers can engage in the kind of ethical decision-making process that Childs advocates. (Rev Dr Eric Trozzo)

Martin Luther's Quote:

"Man is by nature unable to want God to be God. Indeed, he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God. ... There is no moral virtue, without either pride or sorrow, that is, without sin."

(Disputation against Scholastic Theology, thesis 7, 38).



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LSC Member Churches



The **Basel Christian Church of Malaysia** or **BCCM** began its history on North Borneo (now Sabah) in 1882 with the arrival of 10 Hakka-speaking families from China through the “Basel Mission” in Hong Kong. With the expansion in Mission. BCCM now uses Hakka, Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia and also English in Sunday Worship Service. Today BCCM has 42 Chinese congregations, 116 Bahasa Malaysia congregations and 9 English congregations with together around 60,000 members. The current bishop is Rev. Dr. Thomas Tsen.



The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia** or **ELCM** started when the Tamil Lutherans arrived from India in the 1800's. ELCM uses Tamil and English in Sunday Worship Service. Today ELCM has 22 congregations, 11 outreaches, 34 pastors and around 3800 members. The current Bishop is Rt. Rev. Dr. Solomon Rajah.



The **Lutheran Church in Malaysia** or **LCM** started its Lutheran mission work among the Chinese in New Villages of Malaya (now West Malaysia) in 1953. LCM uses Mandarin and other Chinese dialects commonly spoken in West Malaysia and also English in Sunday Worship Services. Today LCM has 59 congregations with close to 10,000 members. The current bishop is Rev. Philip Lok Oi Peng.



The **Lutheran Church in Singapore** or **LCS** shares its early history with the Lutheran church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS). As mission work in Singapore grew, the Lutheran Church in Singapore become a separate independent church and was constituted in 1997. At present there are around 3000 members in 7 congregations in Singapore. There is also mission work in Thailand, Cambodia and China. The current bishop is Rev. Terry Kee Buck Hwa.



The **Protestant Church in Sabah** or **PCS** traces its root back to German, Swiss and BCCM missionary work amongst the Rungus starting in 1952. PCS established her first synod in 1966 and registered with the Sabah government in 1967. At present there are 322 congregations with 40,000 members and 46 pastors. There is a bible training school at Tinangol. The current president is Rev. Jensey Mojuin.

Martin Luther's Quote:

“A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A Theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers work to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and in general, good to evil. ... God can be found only in suffering and the cross. ... It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that his works are not his but God's.”

(Heidelberg Disputation 1518, thesis 21).



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LSC Partner Churches And Church Bodies:



The **Lutheran Church of Australia** or **LCA** which includes the **Lutheran Church of New Zealand** or **LCNZ** It started in the 1830s small groups of European Lutherans emigrated in search of religious freedom. Today the church has become multicultural with its unique diversity from every continent on earth and also its own Indigenous people. LCA and LCNZ have 648 congregations. The current president is Rev. Dr. Mike Semmler.



The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria** or **ELKB** began when the Lutheran Reformation was fully established in Nuremberg by 1524. The actual founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria took place in 1803. Today ELKB has 1541 congregations. ELKB sponsors Dr Michael Press through its mission department: Mission OneWorld in Neuendettelsau. The current bishop is Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm.



The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** or **ELCA** was formed in 1988 from three separate church bodies: The American Lutheran Church, The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and The Lutheran Church in America. ELCA traces its roots back through the mid-17th century when Lutherans came to America from Europe settling in the Virgin Islands and what is now known as New York. Today ELCA has 10,500 congregations. The current presiding bishop is Rev. Mark S. Hanson.



The **Lutheran World Federation** or **LWF** is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden. The LWF now has 143 member churches in 79 countries all over the world representing 70.5 million Christians. The current president is Bishop Dr. Munib Younan.



Sabah Theological Seminary (STS) was established in East Malaysia in year 1988 to train pastors, church workers and lay-Christians in response to Christ's Great Commission. At present STS has more than 330 students in various programs, another 300 off campus students and 28 faculty members. Its degrees are accredited by the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA).

LSC Events For 2013:

- January 28th - 30th :** *Introduction to Lutheran Theology with Buku Konkord (BCCM BM)*
January 31st - February 2nd : *Introduction to Lutheran Theology with Buku Konkord (PCS)*
July to November: *Courses on the Catechism for PCS and BCCM BM districts*
August 27th - 29th : *Introduction to Lutheran Theology (BCCM Chinese Pastors)*
October 7th - 9th : *Lutheran Ethics in KL*
October/November : *LWF seminar on Lutheran Identity in Asia*