

A Word from the General Editor

ISSUES OF LIFE AND DEATH CONCERN beings that live and die. This issue of *Verba Vitae* deals with the issue of personhood and its relevance to the questions of life and its significance.

In “Luther’s Concern for Life,” Robert Kolb discusses how Martin Luther’s concern for the fifth commandment motivated him to condemn violence towards and abuse of another person and how his views influenced his theological heirs to oppose both positive and negative forms of racism. Kolb’s contribution dovetails nicely with Dan Lioy’s “The Imago Dei: Biblical Foundations, Theological Implications, and Enduring Significance.” Lioy’s article describes how the *imago Dei* functioned historically to ground ethical reflection and behavior while providing a foundation for the sanctity of life. Since Christ is the ultimate embodiment of the *imago Dei*, Christians, through the Spirit, can be effective stewards of God’s creation and life’s sanctity.

The articles by Dennis Bielfeldt, “Personal Identity, Divine Love, and Extrinsic Individuation,” and Doug Morton, “The Incarnation and Human Personhood,” explore philosophical and theological notions of personhood. Bielfeldt examines traditional intrinsic accounts of personal identity, finds them lacking, and argues that adopting an extrinsic criterion of divine intentionality to ground identity is accordingly justified. Such a move, however, results in deep questions about the justifiability of harming or terminating persons whom God accordingly intends. Morton finds Locke’s psychological criterion of personhood problematic, arguing that there are superior resources within the theological tradition to ground personal identity. After exploring the concept of personhood in the tradition, Morton, like Bielfeldt, suggests that grounding personhood theologically is *prima facie* justified and that such grounding has profound significance for issues of the ontology of life.

The contributions by John Ehrett, “Arnim Polster’s Lutheran Case Against Abortion,” and John Eidsmoe and Mary Huffman, “Law and Personhood: A Biblical and Medical Study from a Two Kingdoms Perspective,” each address the issue of personhood before the law, particularly concerning the deeper theological grounds for the law’s consideration of what it is to be a person. Ehrett’s article describes Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod pastor Arnim Polster’s opposition to the liberalization of California’s abortion laws based on what he believed was an objective fact: Unborn life is human life. Eidsmoe/Huffman explore the medical, moral and

theological background to the law's understanding of personhood, pointing out that the development of the notion in the legal tradition is consonant with Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Finally, Daniel Hackmann's "AI and Personhood: A Theological Perspective" points to the current discussion among philosophers, social scientists, and legal scholars on how to understand personhood in the context of AI and AI-driven systems. Two significant questions arise: Under what conditions should personhood be ascribed to AI systems, and what relevance do the traditional notions of personhood have to the world of AI generally? Like Liroy, Hackmann believes that the *imago Dei* can be fruitfully employed in reflecting upon personhood.

Five book reviews round out the issue, each dealing with personhood and the significance of life in some way.

Enjoy the read!

Dennis Bielfeldt, General Editor