

Created, Fallen, and Redeemed

A Lutheran Theological Anthropology for a Confused Age

Dan Lioy

Standard Abbreviations for Lutheran Sources

AC:	Augsburg Confession
Ap:	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
FC Ep:	Formula of Concord, Epitome
FC SD:	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
LC:	Large Catechism
LW:	Luther's Works
SA:	Smalcald Articles
SC:	Small Catechism

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Urgency of Lutheran Theological Anthropology in Our Time

WE ARE LIVING IN AN ERA OF PROFOUND anthropological crisis, where the question “*What does it mean to be human?*” is no longer merely rhetorical or academic but urgently existential and fiercely debated. In the Global North, the intellectual, cultural, and moral landscape is fractured, with competing and often contradictory visions of human nature, purpose, and dignity. Many of these ideologies conflict with the testimony of Scripture, which affirms that humanity is created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27) yet fallen and in need of redemption through Christ (Rom 5:12–19).

Modern anthropological frameworks—such as naturalistic materialism, expressive individualism, and radical subjectivism—sever humanity from its divine origin and purpose. Naturalistic materialism reduces the human person to a mere biological organism, denying the spiritual dimension and the image of God in which

humanity was created. Expressive individualism elevates personal autonomy and self-expression above communal responsibility or divinely revealed moral norms. Radical subjectivism goes further still, asserting that identity and truth are self-determined rather than grounded in the created order and God's law (Rom 1:22–25). These distorted views of the human person result not in true freedom but in confusion, moral disorder, and deep alienation. Far from liberating, they enslave the human heart to sin and futility (Eccl 1:2, 14; 2:11, 15, 17; 4:4; 6:9; 7:15; 8:14; 11:10; 12:8; Pss 31:6; 39:5, 11; 62:9; 78:33; 94:11; 144:4; John 8:34; Eph 4:17–19).

In response, the Church is called to reclaim and proclaim a theological anthropology rooted in God's inspired and authoritative Word. This anthropology is not speculative philosophy but biblical truth: humanity is created by God, fallen through sin, and redeemed and renewed through union with Christ (Rom 6:4–10; 12:1–2; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Lutheran theology provides essential resources for this task, offering not only an unwavering commitment to Scripture but also doctrinal clarity on the human condition, justification, and sanctification.

1.2 A Lutheran Framework for Theological Anthropology

The Lutheran tradition, deeply rooted in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone (Eph 2:8–9; AC IV.1–3), offers profound insight into the question of human identity. It upholds the inherent dignity of every person created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27), while also recognizing that this image was profoundly corrupted by the fall into sin. As Luther explains in the *Small Catechism*, “I believe that God has created me together with all that exists” (SC II.1–2), yet also confesses, “by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him” (SC II.6). This dynamic tension—between creation and fall, between the Law that exposes sin and the Gospel that proclaims Christ—is not a paradox to be resolved by human reasoning, but a divine truth that drives us to the Cross alone for redemption (1 Cor 1:18–25; FC SD V.1–11).¹

The Lutheran Confessions, as gathered in the Book of Concord, articulate a rich theological anthropology grounded in the doctrines of creation, sin, justification, and vocation. Drawing from these confessional foundations, Lutheran theology describes the human person in terms of three fundamental relationships: before God (*coram Deo*), before others (*coram hominibus*), and before the world (*coram mundo*). Created to reflect God's glory (Isa 43:7), humanity nevertheless stands condemned under the Law (Rom 3:19–20). Yet, through faith in Christ, sinners are justified by his righteousness (Rom 3:23–26) and called to serve their neighbor in love through their divinely appointed vocations (Gal 5:13–14). This biblical anthropology stands in stark contrast to secular visions of humanity—whether those rooted in identity politics, radical autonomy, or the denial of transcendent truth—which often portray

human beings as self-defined or isolated from divine purpose. Instead, Lutheran theology affirms that humans are mortal creatures (Gen 2:7), redeemed sinners (Eph 2:8–9), and new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), called into communion with God (1 John 1:3) and love for one another (John 15:12–13; 1 John 4:19–21). Ultimately, believers await the restoration of all things in the new creation (Isa 65:17; Rom 8:19–21; Rev 21:1–5), where God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

1.3 The Purpose and Scope of This Study

This study presents a distinctly Lutheran theological anthropology—one that is grounded in Scripture, rooted in the confessions, and critically engaged with the challenges of our time. It begins by unfolding the scriptural witness to creation, fall, and redemption, showing how the image of God, though marred by sin, is restored in union with Christ (Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:9–11). Drawing upon the Lutheran Confessions—especially the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Formula of Concord*, and *Luther’s Catechisms*—the essay develops an anthropology that does not flinch at the depth of human sinfulness (Gen 6:5; Jer 17:9), but which magnifies the grace of God revealed in the person and work of Christ (Titus 3:4–7).²

This study also offers a theological critique of prevailing counterfeit anthropologies—including naturalistic materialism, gender constructivism, and expressive individualism—which distort or deny the biblical vision of the human person (Rom 1:18–32). These systems fail to reckon with humanity’s temporal origin, sinful condition, and ultimate accountability before God (Gen 3:19; Eccl 12:13–14; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 9:27). In addition, this work explores how a Lutheran anthropology addresses key ethical and cultural concerns, including gender identity, human dignity at the end of life, and the church’s witness in a fractured society. The essay shows how the doctrine of creation shapes our understanding of the body (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20), how the doctrine of sin diagnoses the idols of the age (Gal 4:3; Col 2:8; 1 Tim 6:20), and how the doctrine of redemption provides not only a message of forgiveness but also a new identity rooted in Christ (Rom 6:4–11; Gal 2:20).

The goal is not merely intellectual critique, but pastoral formation. The Church must be equipped to speak the “truth in love” (Eph 4:15),³ to uphold the sanctity of life from conception to natural death (Ps 139:13–16), and to embody the hope of the Gospel in its life and witness (1 Pet 2:9–10). At strategic points throughout the study, essential terms and pivotal concepts (including those mentioned above) are revisited to help readers gain a deeper analytical understanding. This emphasis is intentional, because at stake is nothing less than the integrity of the proclamation of the Gospel and the clarity of the Church’s mission in a world that has forgotten what it means to be human.

2.0 Created in God’s Image: A Lutheran Framework for Human Identity

2.1. Humanity as God’s Good Creation

LUTHERAN THEOLOGY, GROUNDED IN THE AUTHORITY of Scripture and articulated in the Lutheran Confessions, affirms that humanity is uniquely created in the *imago Dei* (the image of God; Gen 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). This image is far more than a peripheral attribute or a functional faculty, but an ontological gift bestowed by the Creator. It constitutes the human being’s original righteousness, relational integrity, and capacity for communion with the Triune God.

God’s declaration that His creation is “very good” (Gen 1:31) affirms the inherent, functional integrity of embodied human existence. Contrary to gnostic dualisms that devalue the body or materialist ideologies that reduce humanity to biological processes, Lutheran theology affirms the unity of body and soul in God’s design (Gen 2:7). As Luther teaches in his *Lectures on Genesis* (LW 1:60–69), the image of God includes not only reason and will but also the orientation of the whole person—physical, intellectual, volitional, and spiritual—toward God and neighbor. In this sense, redeemed humanity is recreated as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20; 1 Pet 2:4–5), destined to live in communion with God, and intended to reflect his holiness in the world (1 Pet 1:14–16).

The Lutheran Confessions uphold a high anthropology while acknowledging humanity’s corruption through sin. The Augsburg Confession (AC I.1–4) establishes God as the gracious Creator of all, providing the foundational understanding that human dignity and value are inherent, stemming from this divine act rather than individual achievements, social recognition, or utilitarian function. While AC II.1–2 highlights the profound impact of original sin on humanity’s state, Lutheran theology consistently affirms that every person, regardless of age, ability, or circumstance, bears the divine imprint, as beautifully reflected in Psalm 8:4–5 and 139:13–16. This understanding renders human life sacred from conception to natural death, a core tenet in Lutheran teachings on the sanctity of life.

2.2. Human Purpose in Divine Design

Humanity’s purpose is rooted in relationship: *coram Deo* (before God), *coram hominibus* (before others), and *coram mundo* (before the world). Created not in isolation but in communion, humans were made to love God, serve the neighbor, and steward creation (Gen 2:15; Isa 1:17; Jer 22:3; Mic 6:8). The *imago Dei* is expressed not through self-assertion but through self-giving love, reflecting the relational nature of the Triune God. As Luther declares in *The Freedom of a Christian*, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (LW 31:344).

Luther's doctrine of vocation (*Beruf*) profoundly illuminates the Christian's calling. In his *Treatise on Good Works* (LW 44:21–114), Luther lays the ethical foundation for vocation, showing how faith expresses itself in love through everyday responsibilities. The theme is developed more fully in the *Large Catechism*, especially under the First Commandment (LC I.1.1–29), where Luther teaches that the heart of Christian life is trust in God above all else—a trust that shapes one's callings in the home, church, and society. For Luther, vocation is not a path to self-fulfillment but the arena in which God's providential care is exercised. Through faith, Christians become instruments of that care, serving the neighbor in love (Gal 5:13–14). In this, they are “masks of God” (*larvae Dei*), as Luther teaches in his exposition of Psalm 147 (LW 14:112–115), where he emphasizes that God provides and governs through ordinary human work. This perspective is also embedded in Luther's exposition of the Fourth Commandment (LC I.4.103–178), where roles such as parent, teacher, and ruler are honored as divine offices. Thus, every vocation becomes a means by which Christians glorify God (1 Cor 10:31) and walk in the good works prepared for them (Eph 2:10).

This theology of vocation directly challenges the hyper-individualism of modern Western culture, which idolizes autonomy, self-definition, and expressive freedom. Lutheran anthropology instead asserts that true freedom is found in being bound to God and neighbor in love. The *Small Catechism's* petition for “daily bread” (SC III.4, 12–14) teaches believers to pray not only for their own needs but also, implicitly, for the needs of all, as part of life under God's providential care. This communal and creaturely dimension is expanded in the *Large Catechism*, where Luther explains that “daily bread” includes “everything that belongs to our entire life in this world”—such as food, health, good government, peace, and faithful neighbors—gifts which God provides through the vocations of others (LC III.4.71–84). Moreover, the stewardship of creation (Gen 1:28; Ps 24:1–2) is not dominion through exploitation but care marked by gratitude and responsibility. Redeemed humanity's purpose is fulfilled not in isolation or domination, but in worship, communion, and service.

2.3. The Fall: Corruption and the Need for Redemption

The Fall, as recorded in Genesis 3, introduced a profound rupture into human nature, corrupting the *imago Dei* and binding the will, intellect, and affections to sin (Rom 3:10–18; 5:12). As the *Formula of Concord* teaches (FC Ep I.1–4), original sin is not merely the absence of good but the active presence of concupiscence—a “deep corruption of [human] nature”—leaving humanity without the spiritual capacity to turn to God unaided (Ps 51:5; Jer 17:9; FC SD I.52). Luther's *Bondage of the Will* (LW 33:64–70, 98–104) emphasizes the severity of this fallen state: the human will, apart from the Holy Spirit, is not free but enslaved, turned inward (*incurvatus in*

se), and wholly incapable of choosing God (John 6:44; Rom 8:7–8). The human condition after the Fall is not merely one of sickness but of spiritual death (Eph 2:1–3). This sobering anthropology rejects any utopianism or Pelagian optimism in human progress or moral perfectibility.

In this fallen state, human dignity, though marred, endures and awaits redemption through union with Christ. The Lutheran Confessions articulate this dynamic tension in the doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator*—simultaneously justified and sinner (Rom 7:18–25; Gal 5:17)—as expounded in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (Ap IV.48–60), and reaffirmed in the *Formula of Concord* (FC SD III.9–11, 23–25). Justification is by grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), for the sake of Christ alone (*solus Christus*), as affirmed in the *Augsburg Confession* (AC IV.1–3) and defended in the *Apology* (Ap IV.2–5, 48–60, 86–96; Rom 3:28; Eph 2:8–10). The Law, rightly preached, reveals the depth of human sin and exposes all pretense of self-righteousness (Rom 7:7–13; FC SD V.1–11), while the Gospel, rightly proclaimed, grants the imputed righteousness of Christ to the ungodly (2 Cor 5:21; FC SD III.13–15; III.54–56). This Law-Gospel dialectic, foundational to Lutheran theology, ensures that human identity is not self-fashioned but is graciously bestowed and continually restored in Christ.

2.4. Redemption and Eschatological Hope in Christ

Christ is the true and perfect *imago Dei*—the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15)—who came to restore what Adam lost through sin and to recreate humanity in the Son, the new and greater Adam (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:45–49). Through Christ’s incarnation, atoning death, and bodily resurrection, he does not merely offer moral improvement but brings about a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). By faith alone, believers are justified and united with Christ and are conformed to his image by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace—Word and Sacrament (Rom 8:29; Gal 4:4–7).

Luther’s *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross), articulated in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (especially theses 19–21; LW 31:40), teaches that God’s power and wisdom are hidden (*Deus absconditus*) under the apparent weakness of the cross. Yet, in this very concealment, God is revealed (*Deus revelatus*) in Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:18–25). Human identity is thus found not in glory or self-actualization but in Christ, through whom the believer is daily put to death by the Law and raised to new life by the Gospel. The Christian’s existence is cruciform—marked by dying and rising with Christ in baptism (Rom 6:3–5; Col 2:11–12), bearing the cross in daily repentance, and awaiting the resurrection of the body (Phil 3:20–21). This eschatological hope is not a theoretical abstraction, but a concrete promise grounded in Christ’s bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:1–8, 12–22). It affirms that redemption en-

compasses the whole person—body and soul—and culminates in eternal communion with God in the new creation (Rev 21:1–5). Thus, Lutheran anthropology not only emphasizes what is creational and fallen but also redemptive and eschatological.

In this “present evil age” (Gal 1:4), believers live as those who have been restored by grace and who now bear witness to God’s renewing work through their vocations and through the Church’s ministry of Word and Sacrament. The sanctity of human life, rooted in the Creator and redeemed by the Savior, calls the Church to defend the vulnerable, uphold justice, and practice mercy (Isa 1:17; Jer 22:3; Mic 6:8; Matt 25:40; Jas 1:27; 1 John 3:16–18). As the *Apology* affirms (Ap XX.15), faith expresses itself in love—not to merit salvation, but as the fruit of the Spirit’s indwelling presence (Gal 5:5–6, 22–23). So then, until the day of Christ’s return, the baptized live in hope, confessing that their true identity is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Sustained by the means of grace, the Church proclaims the Gospel that not only saves souls but also restores believers to their created purpose—living in communion with God, neighbor, and creation as redeemed image-bearers of Christ.

3.0 Counterfeit Anthropologies and Their Consequences: A Lutheran Theological Perspective

3.1 The Nature and Origin of Counterfeit Anthropologies

COUNTERFEIT ANTHROPOLOGIES REPRESENT FALSE and destructive beliefs about human nature. They stem from intentionally rejecting the biblical truth that humanity is created in God’s image (Gen 1:26–27). These distortions are widespread in modern culture, media, education, and politics, replacing God’s revelation with human-centered ideas. As Paul warns, “Such people have traded the truth about God for the lie, worshipping and serving the creation rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25).

From a Lutheran perspective, such distorted views about humanity stem not from intellectual missteps but from original sin—the inherited corruption that darkens reason, disorders desires, and alienates humanity from God (Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12). The *Formula of Concord* describes original sin as “a corruption so deep that there is nothing sound or uncorrupted left in the human body or soul in its internal or external powers” (FC Ap I.8). Luther, in his *Lectures on Genesis*, similarly describes original sin as stripping humanity of divine knowledge and corrupting all faculties, rendering man without judgment in spiritual matters (LW 1:114; 1 Cor 2:14). This corruption is not a surface flaw, but a radical disintegration of what humanity was created to be—leaving the will bound, the intellect obscured, and the affections disordered apart from divine grace.

Furthermore, this corruption yields counterfeit anthropologies that elevate human autonomy, reject divine authority, and redefine the self in rebellion against God's creative order (Rom 1:21–23). These pagan ideologies, which Luther critiques for attributing to free will the ability to contribute toward righteousness, appeal to fallen reason and promise liberation, but ultimately lead to bondage, despair, and death. The Lutheran tradition, standing upon the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture and the doctrinal fidelity of the *Book of Concord*, seeks to unmask these falsehoods and confess the true anthropology: that humanity is created by God, fallen through sin, and redeemed through Christ—called, as Luther writes, “that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (SC II.4), existing *coram Deo* in faith, *coram hominibus* in love, and *coram mundo* as stewards of God's creation.

3.2 Four Dominant Counterfeit Anthropologies

3.2.1 Materialism and Scientism

Extreme materialism, which asserts that only physical matter is real, and scientism, which insists that empirical inquiry is the only valid means of knowing truth, both tend to reduce the human person—including consciousness, identity, and will—to nothing more than biological mechanisms and observable data. This myopic view neglects the deeper spiritual reality of human existence. By denying the presence of the soul, such ideologies stand in direct contradiction to the biblical witness: “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). In doing so, they also obscure the doctrine of the *imago Dei* by rejecting the soul's reality and the moral responsibility with which God has endowed human beings (Eccl 12:7; Isa 8:13; Matt 10:28; Heb 10:31).

The *Augsburg Confession* declares that human nature, though corrupted by sin, is not a morally neutral biological mechanism: “Since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God (AC II.1–2).⁴ Likewise, the *Formula of Concord* affirms that original sin is not a mere flaw but “a corruption so deep that there is nothing sound or uncorrupted left in the human body or soul, in its internal or external powers” (FC Ep I.8); indeed, as noted earlier, the image of God in man has been completely lost in the narrow sense of original righteousness (FC SD I.10). Yet, because humanity remains God's creature, fashioned in his intent and sustained by his providence, each person retains God-given worth (Gen 5:1–2; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). In contrast to this biblical view, materialist ideologies sever the spiritual dimension from anthropology and yield a culture grounded in

utilitarian ethics. Human life becomes a disposable commodity, leading to practices such as abortion, euthanasia, and genetic manipulation (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17; Ps 139:13–16). As Luther warns in the *Large Catechism*, “Anything on which your heart relies and depends ... is really your God” (LC I.3), and “where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God” (LC I.3). Such idolatry erodes the dignity of human life, especially that of the weak and vulnerable.

3.2.2 Expressive Individualism and the Autonomous Self

Expressive individualism exalts the self as the ultimate authority, promoting the false belief that identity, purpose, and morality arise from within the individual. This ideology stands in opposition to God’s created order, which places human beings within vocations and communities shaped by his providential will. Instead of receiving meaning as a gift from God, the individualist framework insists on self-definition, echoing the serpent’s temptation in Genesis 3:5, “you will be like God.” From a Lutheran perspective, this reflects the sinful rebellion of fallen humanity against God’s authority, as described in Romans 1:21, in which the way people thought “became nonsense, and their senseless heart was darkened.” In turning from the Creator to the self, humanity has “traded the truth about God for the lie” (v. 25). Conversely, true identity and purpose are not found in autonomy, but in Christ, who through his grace restores us to our God-given callings and reorients us toward life under his lordship.

Luther’s doctrine of vocation teaches that true freedom is found not in self-assertion but in humble service to neighbor through one’s God-given roles (Gal 5:13–14). As Luther writes in his *The Freedom of a Christian*, “A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise, he is not a Christian” (LW 31:371). Through faith, the Christian is “caught up beyond himself into God,” and through love, “descends beneath himself into his neighbor” (LW 31:371). The *Large Catechism*, under the First Commandment, emphasizes that “Anything on which your heart relies and depends..., that is really your God” (LC I.4).

When the self becomes the highest authority, it leads to the breakdown of God’s institutions—marriage (Gen 2:20–25; Eph 5:22–33; 1 Pet 3:1–7), family, church, and state—resulting in social fragmentation, emotional isolation, and moral relativism (Deut 12:8; Judg 21:25). The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (Ap IV; V) emphasizes that righteousness and acceptance before God originate solely through relationship with Him by faith. It asserts that saving faith depends entirely on Christ for forgiveness and justification, not human merit (Rom 3:21; 4:14–15; 8:7–8; 11:6; 14:23). Furthermore, fulfilling God’s Law is unattainable without Christ, and even outwardly good acts done apart from faith are sinful and rejected by God (Ps 130:3–4; Isa 1:10–16; Rom 4:16).

3.2.3 Gender Ideology and the Rejection of Embodiment

Contemporary gender ideology promotes the view that human identity is fluid, self-defined, and potentially disconnected from biological sex. This stands in contrast to the biblical witness that God created humanity as male and female (Gen 1:27; 5:2; Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6) and declared His creation “very good” (Gen 1:31). In this respect, gender ideology echoes the ancient gnostic error, which disparaged the body and viewed it as an obstacle to true selfhood. Lutheran theology, however, affirms that the human body is part of God’s good creation, explicitly rejecting any worldview that denigrates the physical form as inherently evil or as a barrier to spiritual life. Grounded in the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and the resurrection of the body, Lutheranism understands the body not as a prison for the soul but as an integral part of the human person, “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14) by God.

Lutheran theology upholds the body as an essential part of human identity, not a disposable shell. The *Small Catechism* confesses: “I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul” (SC II.1), affirming that our embodied existence is a gift from our Creator. Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions consistently teach that human sexuality is a deliberate part of God’s design. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* affirms that marriage is the lifelong union of man and woman, instituted by God and rooted in his creation of male and female (Ap XXIII.7-13). To deny the goodness of biological sex is to challenge the wisdom of the One who fashioned it. Here, human identity is grounded not in self-invention but in God’s act of redemption through Christ. As Paul declares in Galatians 1:4, Christ was sacrificed on the cross for humanity’s “sins,” in order to rescue the lost “from this present evil age.” From a Lutheran perspective, God preserves believers through faith, not in the absence of but precisely within their ongoing struggle against sin (Rom 7:14–25).

Lutheran theology upholds the body as an essential part of human identity, not a disposable shell. Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions consistently teach that human sexuality is a deliberate part of God’s design. The *Formula of Concord’s* Epitome states that original sin so deeply corrupts human nature “that there is nothing sound or uncorrupted left in the human body or soul, in its internal or external powers” (FC Ep I.8). This corruption disorders our affections and understanding, perverting God’s design for humanity. As Luther explains in his *Lectures on Genesis* (LW 1:165), the *image of God was lost* through sin, such that the human being “does not love God any longer but flees from Him, hates Him, and desires to be and live without Him.” This alienation inclines us to reject our created embodiment—a repudiation that denies both the Creator and the redemption Christ brings to our bodies (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20). Yet Christ’s incarnation, death, and bodily res-

urrection sanctify human nature—including our embodied existence as male and female—as integral to our salvation (1 Cor 15:42–44). In contrast, gender ideology fosters alienation and confusion, particularly among youth, by offering a false freedom that ultimately leads to despair. The Church responds with both compassion and truth, affirming the inherent goodness of embodied life as created by God and restored in Christ.

3.2.4 Transhumanism and the Denial of Human Limits

Transhumanism—the pursuit of human enhancement through technology to overcome death, increase intelligence, and eliminate suffering—offers a vision of salvation by human hands. From a Lutheran perspective, such aspirations echo the serpent’s ancient temptation in Eden: “You will be like God” (Gen 3:5). By seeking immortality apart from God, transhumanism replaces trust in the Creator with faith in human innovation. It proposes a form of redemption not from Satan, sin, and death, but from the limits of creatureliness itself. Yet, Lutheran theology confesses that salvation is not a human *immortality project* but a *divine gift*, accomplished once for all through the cross-resurrection event. Eternal life comes not by transcending our mortal existence through technology, but by being united with Christ, the true and perfect Man. The pursuit of perfection apart from God undermines the sufficiency of His grace, which alone restores fallen humanity to right fellowship with him. Any attempt to secure our temporal and eternal future apart from Christ is, ultimately, a renewed form of idolatry—trusting in ourselves rather than in the mercy of God.

The *Augsburg Confession* teaches that “we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith” (AC IV.1–2). Transhumanism denies this truth by placing its hope not in divine grace but in artificial enhancement and human engineering. It rejects the theology of the cross, where God’s power is hidden in what appears weak and foolish (1 Cor 1:18). As Luther writes in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, “That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened” (Thesis 19; LW 31:40), but rather, “He deserves to be called a theologian ... who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross” (Thesis 20; LW 31:40).

Transhumanist aspirations stand in direct contrast, commodifying life, sidelining the weak, and refusing death as a part of our creaturely condition (Heb 9:27). Yet, as Luther affirms, “It is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross” (LW 31:52-53). Against every Satan-inspired hope of

godless transcendence (2 Thess 2:9–10), the Church proclaims the resurrection of the body, not through technological conquest, but through union with the crucified and risen Christ (1 Cor 15:51–57). As the *Augsburg Confession* teaches, “since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin” (AC II.1–2). The *Formula of Concord* further declares that “original sin is not a slight corruption of human nature, but rather a corruption so deep that there is nothing sound or uncorrupted left in the human body or soul, in its internal or external powers” (FC Ep I.8; FC SD I.10–11). Only divine mercy—not man’s redesign—can restore what was lost in Adam and fulfilled in Christ.

3.3 A Lutheran Theological Rebuttal to False Anthropologies

Counterfeit anthropologies, rooted in humanity’s rejection of its Creator, promise freedom but deliver enslavement to sin and self. From a Lutheran perspective, these pagan ideologies reflect the disordered desires of the fallen heart, which seeks to supplant God’s authority with human constructs (Rom 1:21–23). The Church’s response must be both bold and rooted in the Gospel, offering a vision of human identity that is neither self-derived nor technologically enhanced but divinely bestowed through Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions provide a robust framework for this rebuttal. The *Augsburg Confession* as noted above, affirms that “since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin” (AC II.1). Yet, as Luther teaches, humans were originally created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27; Ps 8:4–5; Isa 43:7; LW 1:55–60)—which grounded their unique dignity. The *imago Dei* is so profoundly ruined by sin and so majestically restored in Christ that its full nature remains beyond fallen human reason’s comprehension. Though this image was lost in the fall, vestiges remain, allowing for civil order. Article XVI.1 of the *Augsburg Confession* affirms that “all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God,” emphasizing that human life—even in its fallen state—retains value and purpose within God’s providential design.

Against materialism, which reduces humanity to mere matter, Lutheran theology affirms the spiritual reality of the soul, created and sustained by God, and destined for eternal communion with Him (Eccl 12:7; Matt 10:28). The *Smalcald Articles* testify that, though human nature is profoundly corrupted by sin, it continues to be God’s creation—fallen yet not annihilated (SA III.I.1–3). Luther underscores this in his *Lectures on Genesis*, stating, “Man without the Holy Spirit is completely ungodly before God (LW 2:42). Nonetheless, all creation remains God’s handiwork, bearing witness to his ongoing providential care and ownership of what he has made. Similarly, the *Small Catechism* confesses, “I believe that God has created me together

with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all my limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties” (SC II.1.2). This theological viewpoint stands firmly against both secular materialism and any utilitarian measure of human worth, affirming that each person—regardless of capacity or social function—bears a dignity rooted in God’s creative and sustaining will.

In contrast to expressive individualism, which exalts the autonomous self, Lutheran anthropology emphasizes that true freedom is found in submission to God’s will and service to others. In his *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, Luther describes faith as a “living, busy, active, mighty thing,” which “does not ask whether good works are to be done but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them” (LW 35:370). This faith “works by love,” fulfilling God’s purpose, a theme echoed in Galatians 5:6. The *Large Catechism* cautions against self-idolatry, asserting that “to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart” (LC I.2–3). Such faith naturally expresses itself in valuing, caring for, and acting kindly toward one’s neighbor. Similarly, the *Augsburg Confession* states that “good works should and must be done, not that a person relies on them to earn grace, but for God’s sake and to God’s praise” (AC XX.27). This theological framework resists the isolating tendencies of individualism by grounding human identity in relationship—first with God, and then with the neighbor.

Gender ideology, which denies the goodness of embodied existence, is countered by the Lutheran affirmation of creation’s order. In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther affirms that the creation of humanity as “male and female” (Gen 1:27) reflects God’s “very good” (v. 31) creation. He writes, “Moses puts the two sexes together and says that God created male and female in order to indicate that Eve, too, was made by God as a partaker of the divine image” (LW 1:69). As noted earlier, the *Formula of Concord* teaches that while original sin’s corruption is “so deep that there is nothing sound or uncorrupted left in the human body or soul (FC Ep I.8), it has not abolished God’s created order. His design—including the distinction and complementarity of male and female—continues to bear witness to His creative intent. The Incarnation, in which the “Word became flesh” (John 1:14), and the bodily resurrection, in which the mortal body is raised a “spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44), further affirm the enduring goodness of creation and the body’s integral role in salvation. This offers a redemptive vision that embraces, rather than rejects, God’s design for human embodiment.

Transhumanism’s pursuit of self-deification through technologies like artificial intelligence, genetic enhancement, or mind uploading starkly contrasts with the Lutheran theology of the cross. This biblical framework asserts that mankind’s sinful and mortal condition cannot be alleviated by human ingenuity or techno-

logical advancements. Instead, God’s true revelation is found not in displays of power, progress, or worldly triumph, but in the humility and suffering of Christ crucified. As Paul discovered through his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7), Jesus’ “grace” (v. 9) is “sufficient,” for his “power” is “made perfect” (or “reaches its goal”) in “weakness.” Consequently, God’s glory shines most vividly not in humanity’s attempts to transcend its God-given limitations, but in Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection. True hope for humanity lies not in artificial enhancements but in the promise of bodily resurrection, secured through Jesus’ triumph over death (1 Cor 15:54–57).

The Church’s proclamation is grounded in the proper distinction between Law and Gospel—a foundational principle of Lutheran theology. The Law exposes the sinfulness of humanity’s attempts to construct identity apart from God, revealing such efforts as idolatrous and ultimately incapable of granting true meaning or purpose (Rom 1:21–25; 3:20). In contrast, the Gospel proclaims Christ as the true image of God (John 14:9; Col 1:15), whose atoning death and resurrection reconciles sinners to God and restores them to their created purpose in fellowship with Him (Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–21). Through the consistent preaching of the Word, the catechetical teaching of the faith, and the administration of the Sacraments—Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper—the Church speaks a divine counterword to the competing narratives of the world. This proclamation, as affirmed in the Lutheran Confessions, bears witness that human beings are not self-made but created by God, and not self-redeemed but saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. By this Word and Sacrament ministry, the Church calls all people to repentance and faith, inviting them into the true freedom of life in Christ (John 8:36; Gal 5:1)—a freedom not of autonomy, but of restored communion with God and neighbor.

4.0 Reclaiming Human Dignity: A Lutheran Response

4.1 Affirming the Sanctity of Life in a Culture of Death

IN A CULTURE THAT OFTEN CONDONES abortion, euthanasia, and utilitarian definitions of personhood, the Lutheran confessions bear faithful witness to the sanctity of every human life—from conception to natural death. Rooted in Scripture, we proclaim that every person is created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27), and therefore possesses inherent dignity and worth, even in a world marred by sin (Gen 3:17–19; Rom 3:23). This God-given value is not contingent on age, ability, or usefulness, but is graciously bestowed by our Creator. The Scriptures consistently affirm this truth (Gen 5:1; 9:5–6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9), most tenderly in Psalm 139:13–14: “You wove me together in my mother’s womb... I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” God’s intimate and purposeful creation of each human being confers an inalienable

worth that compels us to protect and cherish life at every stage, as stewards of His good creation and neighbors to those in need.

The theology of the cross emphasizes God's solidarity with the lowly, the suffering, and the despised. At the cross, divine strength is concealed in apparent defeat (1 Cor 1:18–25), affirming that God's regard for human life rests not on worldly measures of utility, pragmatism, or autonomy, but on grace alone. As Luther emphasizes in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, "God can be found only in suffering and the cross" (Thesis 21; LW 31:53). Consequently, the Church must reject the *cultura mortis*—the culture of death—that dehumanizes the unborn, the elderly, the disabled, and the marginalized (Deut 30:19; John 10:10).

As the *Augsburg Confession* declares, "Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God" (AC XVI.1), established to uphold justice, preserve peace, and restrain evil (Rom 13:1–4; 1 Pet 2:13–17). Luther affirms in *Temporal Authority* that civil government is a "divine thing" (*göttliches Ding*), instituted by God "for the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the upright" (LW 45:87). Yet, when human law defies God's command, Christians must respond as the apostles did: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), for conscience cannot be bound against the Word of God. This fidelity, arising from a justified heart, finds its shape as faith active in love, both in prophetic public testimony and in the humble service of one's daily station. Correspondingly, the apostolic charge is that "'faith,' if it is alone and has no works, is dead" (Jas 2:17). Likewise, true Christlike love is demonstrated "not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth" (1 John 3:18).

The Fifth Commandment, as taught in Luther's *Small Catechism*, urges us not only to avoid harming our neighbors but to "help and support them in all of life's needs" (SC I.10). Luther explains that the Fifth Commandment "is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so" (LC I.189). This call to active compassion compels us to support pro-life pregnancy resource centers, provide palliative and hospice care, advocate for those with cognitive disabilities, and offer spiritual care for the dying. The human body, redeemed by Christ's blood, is not a disposable shell but a temple of the Holy Spirit, worthy of honor (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20). As "living stones" (1 Pet 2:5) in God's spiritual house, each person bears infinite value through Christ's redemptive work. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* reinforces this truth, teaching that we are *justified for Christ's sake through faith and not on account of our own merits, works, or satisfactions* (Ap IV.48–60). Thus, every human being—regardless of age, ability, or condition—deserves reverence as one for whom Christ died.

4.2 Restoring Relational Identity in the Body of Christ

Modern anthropology lionizes radical autonomy and expressive individualism—the belief that identity is self-defined through personal expression, thereby severing humanity from communion with God and others. In stark contrast, Lutheran theology proclaims that human identity is inherently relational, rooted first in God as Creator (Gen 1:26–27) and fulfilled in Christ, who reconciles us to himself and to one another (Rom 5:9–11; 2 Cor 5:18–19). Through Baptism, believers are incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–27), no longer isolated individuals but members of a living communion. To reiterate an earlier citation, as Luther states in *The Freedom of a Christian*, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (LW: 344), succinctly capturing the paradox of Christian freedom and love that binds the believer to others in self-giving service. In his *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*, Luther, reflecting on this communal bond, writes that as the Church, believers are “one body, one bread, we are altogether in Christ, members one of another.... Therefore, since the spirit of Christ dwells within Christians, by means of which brothers become co-heirs, one body, and citizens of Christ, how is it possible for us not to be participants in all the benefits of Christ?” (LW 31:190) Thus, the Church is not merely an assembly of individuals but a temple of the Spirit, “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

To expand on what was noted earlier, Luther’s doctrine of vocation (*Beruf*) teaches that our true worth is found not in self-centered ambition, but in serving others through the specific callings God gives us—as parents, workers, neighbors, or citizens (Gal 5:13–14). This service flows from faith. As Luther explains in the *Small Catechism*, the First Commandment (“You are to have no other gods”; Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7) requires us to “fear, love, and trust God above all things” (SC I.2–3). This trust in God, produced by the Holy Spirit, is the foundation of Christian life. When faith clings to Christ, who has reconciled us to God (2 Cor 5:19), we are freed from the drive for self-glorification. Our lives are now shaped by Christ’s self-giving love (Eph 5:1–2), which makes faith necessarily active in love toward our neighbor. This love—which “does no harm” (Rom 13:10) and “is the fulfillment of the law”—is faith’s fruit and the Christian’s liberated vocation. Thus, in our daily callings, we freely serve our neighbors, carrying out God’s will for the good of all.

The *Augsburg Confession* calls the Church to a unity rooted not in rigid uniformity but in mutual service, declaring: “For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously [*Einträchtiglich*] according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word” (AC VII.2). Luther echoes this in his writings, insisting that where God’s word of the Gospel is, there is also the Church (LW 39:305-314). This

relational unity stands in stark contrast to the expressive individualism of our age. The Gospel summons believers into tangible practices of hospitality, reconciliation, and compassionate care. As the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* reminds us, justifying faith is never idle but necessarily *expresses itself in love* (Ap IV.122-135). To revisit an earlier citation, Luther amplifies this in his *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* by describing faith as a “living, daring confidence in God’s grace” that overflows in service (LW 35:370; Rom 12:9–21; 13:8–10). Such faith forms the Church into a community where, as Scripture exhorts, we “encourage those who are discouraged, help those who are weak, and [are] patient with everyone” (1 Thess 5:14), ensuring that no one bears their burdens alone (Gal 6:2).

So then, in a world fractured by sin, our union with Christ restores not only our relationship with God but also our belonging, for we are joined together as God’s family through Christ’s shed blood (Eph 1:5; 2:13). This truth manifests itself in multigenerational worship, in merciful service to others, and in steadfast care for both mental and spiritual well-being. As we pray, “Our Father in heaven” (Matt 6:9; Luke 11:2), we confess our shared identity as God’s children and our mutual obligation to love one another. The Church, as “God’s household” (Eph 2:19), stands as a beacon of His design, proclaiming a reconciled humanity—gathered into eternal communion through Christ’s redemptive work (Eph 1:10).

4.3 Proclaiming the Gospel Amid Cultural Despair

The modern world oscillates between utopian dreams of salvation through science and technology and the dystopian, nihilistic despair of a culture adrift without meaning. These extremes leave many rootless, anxious, and yearning for a sense of purpose. Into this crisis, the Church boldly proclaims the crucified and risen Christ—the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14)—as the only true source and goal of all renewal (Col 1:15–20). Through His living Word and Sacraments, Christ graciously restores identity and hope, reconciling fallen humanity and all creation to Himself (Rom 5:9–11; 2 Cor 5:18–19), anchoring believers in the eternal truth of the Gospel. This Gospel is not a law but a promise of the grace of God that comforts and consoles fearful hearts. Through this promise, we receive righteousness and are made alive before God. Luther affirms it is the “power of God unto salvation” (LW 25:149-151; Rom 1:16–17)—not merely a word about Christ, but as Luther taught, the very voice of Christ Himself.

The Gospel transcends mere moral reform. Through its proclamation, the Holy Spirit revives the spiritually dead, uniting them in faith with Christ. Lutheran theology grounds salvation firmly in the bodily resurrection, with Christ described as the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20).⁵ Indeed, Christ’s resurrection is the decisive victory over death and the grave, guaranteeing eternal life

with Him for all who believe. Furthermore, the *Augsburg Confession* declares that Christ “will appear for judgment ... and will bring to life all the dead. He will give eternal life and endless joy to the righteous” (AC XVII.1–3). Eschewing speculative eschatologies, biblical hope is anchored in creation’s renewal, where righteousness is forever present (Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1–5).

Preaching must proclaim the dual comfort of the Gospel in Christ’s atoning work: He has both triumphed over our enemies—Satan, sin, and death (Col 2:13–15; Heb 2:14–15)—and borne the punishment our sins deserve (Isa 53:4–6; Rom 3:25–26). This comfort is anchored in Christ’s decisive victory through His sacrificial atonement. Therefore, this proclamation delivers the objective, external consolation that we are fully reconciled to God by grace through faith in Christ’s finished work. The *Large Catechism* echoes this, declaring that Christ has “redeemed and released me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all misfortune” (LC II.27). Together, these testify to the sure and certain hope we have in Christ’s conquering love.

The Law exposes the depth of our sin and our bondage to death (Rom 3:19–20; 5:20–21; 7:7–13; 8:2–3; Gal 3:10–13, 19–24). As Luther emphasizes in his *Lectures on Galatians*, the Law’s primary function is to reveal our sin and God’s wrath, thereby condemning us and driving us to Christ (LW 26:131–132). In contrast, the Gospel proclaims our free justification by grace through faith in Christ (Rom 5:1; 8:1; AC IV.1–3). Therefore, the Church does not combat despair with human wisdom, techniques, or therapies, but solely with the hope of Christ’s resurrection, conveyed through His life-giving Word and Sacraments. Human dignity is not achieved by self-assertion but is a precious gift secured by Christ’s blood, as Scripture affirms: “you were redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18–19).

4.4 Practical Engagement for the Church

The Church’s response to modern secular ideologies must be neither retreat nor compromise, but a confessional presence rooted in the truth of God’s Word. The Lutheran Church engages culture by upholding a biblical anthropology—God’s design for humanity—in every aspect of its ministry, guided by Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

- *Teaching and Preaching*: Catechesis shapes believers within the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration—affirming that humanity is created in God’s image (Gen 1:27), corrupted by sin (Rom 5:12), and redeemed through Christ (Rom 5:18–19). Luther’s *Small Catechism* remains a vital resource for grounding Christians of all ages in these foundational truths. In his preface, Luther urges pastors and preachers to commit themselves to faithful instruction. He insists that even those with limited skill should read

the catechism's tables and forms word for word, ensuring consistent teaching for young people across all congregations (LW 53:64–65). This pastoral urgency reflects the catechism's enduring purpose: to communicate the clarity of Christian doctrine among generations and throughout the Church.

- *Compassionate Apologetics*: With humility, the Church engages skeptics by speaking the “truth in love” (Eph 4:15), acknowledging the Christian reality of being both righteous and sinful at once (Rom 7:18–20). This paradox shapes the Church's approach to evangelism. Since humanity is bound by sin and possesses no true free will in spiritual matters, it is solely by God's grace in Christ that the lost are freed from sin's captivity and delivered from the power of the devil.
- *Prophetic Cultural Witness*: The Church is called to confront contemporary pagan ideologies—such as expressive individualism, transhumanism, and technocratic utopianism—that rebel against human limitations and the goodness of God's creation (Rom 1:21–25; 12:1–2). As a hospital for sinners, the Church offers Christ's rest to those exhausted by the demands of self-salvation and what Luther called the “theology of glory.” The remedy it provides is the “true treasure of the church”: the “most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God” (*Heidelberg Disputation*, Thesis 62; LW 31:31; Matthew 11:28–30). This message is not merely proclaimed generally but is applied specifically through Absolution. The Office of the Keys, instituted by Christ, is the authority given to the Church to bind and loose sin (SA III.[7].1; Matt 16:19; John 20:23). As the *Augsburg Confession* states, this absolution is nothing less than the “voice ... of God” proclaimed for the comfort of the penitent (AC XXV.3).
- *Sacramental Life*: The unity of the Church depends solely on the Gospel being preached purely and the Sacraments being administered according to Christ's institution (AC VII.1). As an expression of this unity, the Lord's Supper is where believers receive the true body and blood of Christ—“in, with, and under” the bread and wine—as definitively taught in the *Smalcald Articles* (SA III.[6]) and formalized in the *Formula of Concord* (Ep VII.15; SD VII.35, 37). This Sacrament delivers Christ's testament of forgiveness (Matt 26:28) and enables participation in His body and blood (1 Cor 10:16; 11:23–26). Lutheran theology emphasizes that Christ's words of institution—“given for you” and “shed for you”—constitute the very heart of the Sacrament, dynamically delivering forgiveness of sins and Christ's real presence to the believer. This sacramental pardon tangibly fulfills the promise that within the Church, God “daily ... abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers” (SC II.6). Ultimately, this forgiveness is the source of all hope, for “where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation” (SC V [VI].6).⁶ Therefore, the Lord's Supper stands as a tangible assurance of divine grace and the certain hope of the resurrection.

By living as a redeemed, reconciled community, the Church proclaims a counter-anthropology: humanity created by God, corrupted by sin, redeemed by Christ, and destined for resurrection glory (Rev 7:9–12). This is the true dignity of redeemed humanity—secured not by self-expression, but by union with the crucified and risen Lord.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Restatement of Central Arguments:

A Lutheran Anthropology for an Age of Confusion

THE CONTEMPORARY CRISIS OF ANTHROPOLOGY—evident in fragmented identities, moral relativism, and technological hubris—demands a return to the scriptural truth of what it means to be human. At its core, this crisis is not merely philosophical or sociological but theological. It is a crisis born of humanity’s alienation from its Creator, and it can only be resolved by a recovery of the biblical and confessional understanding of the human person: created by God, corrupted by sin, and redeemed in Christ.

Lutheran theology, grounded in *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *solus Christus*, presents a coherent and hope-filled anthropology rooted in divine revelation. Scripture affirms that human beings are created in the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26–27), their dignity conferred not by merit or achievement but solely by God’s creative word. Yet, this image has been profoundly corrupted by sin, as all humanity has fallen short of God’s glory (Gen 3; Rom 3:23; FC SD I.1–11).

In the fullness of time (Gal 4:4–5), God restores what was lost—not by human effort, but by sending His Son in the “likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3), reconciling the world to Himself through Christ’s atoning sacrifice (Rom 5:8–11; 2 Cor 5:19–21). This is the heart of the Gospel and the Lutheran confession: we are pardoned not by our works, but solely by God’s undeserved mercy in Christ. God calls out to us through Word and Sacrament, to trust in Christ, the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36; AC IV.1-3; SC II.3-4). It was the Twentieth Century Lutheran Hermann Sasse who declared, “The gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake—this, and nothing but this, is the Gospel.”⁷ This means that human worth is neither earned nor achieved but received—an unmerited gift secured by Christ’s cross and resurrection (Gal 2:20; Col 1:15–20).

Modern ideologies—such as materialism (reducing humans to mere biology), expressive individualism (exalting self-defined identity), or technocratic utilitarianism (treating people as immortality projects to optimize)—promote false views of humanity. These ideologies are modern idols, exchanging the “truth about God for a lie” (Rom 1:25) and venerating creation over worshiping the Creator. Severed

from the Lord's design, they dehumanize, reducing persons to cogs in a machine and obscuring the image of God in which humanity was created (Gen 1:26–27). As Luther taught, “Anything on which your heart relies and depends . . . is really your God” (LC I.2–3). By turning inward, modern humanity rejects the life-giving truth of our identity as God's creation, restored through faith in Christ.

Lutheran theology presents a profound and paradoxical anthropology: the human person is at once declared righteous by grace through faith (Rom 3:23–24; Eph 2:8–9), yet still sinful (Rom 7:15–25; FC SD I.3–14). This realistic view of human fallenness, coupled with trust in Christ's redeeming work, guards against both despair (by assuring forgiveness) and pride (by exposing ongoing sin). Through the doctrine of vocation, the baptized live out their new identity in Christ by loving and serving their neighbor in ordinary callings (1 Cor 7:20; Gal 5:13). Thus, daily life—whether as parent, worker, or citizen—becomes the holy calling where God's grace is both received and shared.

A Christ-centered view of humanity stands firm against every form of dystopian cultural decay—whether moral relativism, self-help trends, or the illusion of autonomous self-justification—by proclaiming the vibrant hope of a humanity redeemed in Christ. This vision restores persons not through futile human effort but through the Gospel alone. It affirms God's original design for humanity, made in His image (Gen 1:26–27), while candidly acknowledging our fallen state: even as believers, we struggle with sin (Rom 7:14–25) yet are pardoned and sanctified in Christ (Rom 8:5–13; FC SD III.13–15).

This restoration is uniquely achieved through our union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom 6:4–6; Gal 2:20), not by our own works or merit (Eph 2:8–9). The Holy Spirit, operating powerfully through Word and Sacrament, grants a new heart and a new life (Ps 51:10; Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26–27). Through these divine means, the Spirit sanctifies believers, conforming them ever more to the image of Christ (Rom 8:28–30; 12:1–2; 2 Cor 3:18). This ongoing work of the Spirit is how God enables us to live out our new identity in Christ, sustaining us in faith and conforming us to His will (SC IV.8–12, 17; SC II.6).

5.2 A Call to Faithful Lutheran Witness: Confessional and Embodied

The Church now stands at a critical juncture. In the face of anthropological confusion and cultural hostility, it must not withdraw in fear or assimilate in silence. Rather, it must confess—clearly, courageously, and compassionately—the truth of God's Word concerning human identity. To reiterate an earlier observation, as the *Augsburg Confession* declares, the Church is the “assembly of saints [*congregatio sanctorum*] in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly” (AC VII.1).⁸ This truth must shape both the Church's teaching and its life.

The Church's mission is to proclaim the full biblical narrative—creation, fall, redemption, and new creation—without reducing it to moralism or self-help. As the *Formula of Concord* declares, the Gospel delivers *grace, righteousness, and eternal life* from Christ (FC SD III.9–11). Through the means of grace—God's Word (Rom 10:17) and Sacraments (SC IV.6–8; LC IV.1–8; LC V.21–22)—the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith, unleashing the Gospel's transformative power.

Lutherans are called to bear witness in their daily vocations—whether in family, work, or society. As part of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), every baptized Christian is summoned to uphold and defend the dignity of human life, from conception to natural death, caring for the marginalized and seeking justice for the oppressed (Isa 1:17; Jer 22:3; Mic 6:8; Gal 6:10). The two kingdoms doctrine provides vital guidance: While the Church proclaims Christ's eternal reign through Word and Sacrament, Christians serve in the temporal realm through faithful citizenship and acts of mercy and justice (Rom 13:1–7; AC XVI.1–2; LC I.1–29, First Commandment; LC I.103–178, Fourth Commandment). Yet, this service is not about political power or cultural dominance but about selfless love for the neighbor, flowing from Christ's cross and sustained by the hope of His resurrection.⁹

In a world chasing identity through expressive individualism—where self-definition is rooted in personal desires—the Church proclaims a better way: identity in Christ, who clothes us in His perfect righteousness (2 Cor 5:21; Rev 19:6–8; AC IV.1–3). This Gospel may appear as foolishness to a perishing world (1 Cor 1:18), yet through the Cross—proclaimed in the Word and Sacraments—God's power and wisdom bring salvation to all who believe (Rom 1:16–17).

5.3 Final Reflection: Hope Anchored in Christ's Victory at the Cross

The Church's confidence rests not in cultural influence or institutional power but in Christ, who has “overcome the world” (John 16:33) through His death and resurrection. By His penal substitutionary atonement—bearing the full punishment for sin in our place (2 Cor 5:21; Col 2:13–15)—Christ has become, as Luther boldly asserts, the “greatest sinner” (LW 26: 277),¹⁰ for “He has and bears all the sins of all men in His body—not in the sense that He committed them but in the sense that He took these sins, committed by us, upon His own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with His own blood” (LW 26:277). Thus, Christ is not merely an example for us to emulate, but the very source of our salvation.

Through His victorious resurrection, Christ reconciles humanity to God, defeats death, and renews creation (Rom 1:3; 4:25; 1 Cor 15:20–26; Col 2:13–15; Heb 2:14–15). In Christ, the image of God is not only restored but glorified, as believers are “conformed to the likeness of the risen Son” (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). As Luther teaches, faith “justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure,

the present Christ” (LW 26:130), so that we are declared righteous by faith alone. Thus, the Church stands firm in unshakable hope amid suffering, trusting that “our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake” (Ap IV.48–60; Ap V.86–96) and that “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

The hope of Christ’s return is not a distant abstraction but a living reality, continually mediated through the Church’s ministry of Word and Sacraments. In preaching, Absolution, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, Christ is truly present—forgiving sins, nourishing believers with His body and blood, and strengthening them in faith. As Luther writes, “because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation” (SC V[VI].6), for through these means, “Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers” (SC II.6). In the Supper, believers receive the “true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine” (LC IV[V].1). It is a sacrament whose efficacy does not depend on human worthiness (LC V.61). In the *Small Catechism*, we learn: “The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent” (SC, Office of the Keys, Q 1).¹¹ Likewise, through Baptism, “daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (SC IV.12).

These divine gifts anchor Christians in their true identity: not as autonomous individuals, but as God’s redeemed children, heirs of His eternal promise, and citizens of the coming kingdom (Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:4–6; Phil 3:20–21; Heb 12:28). As Luther teaches in his explanation of the Third Article, in the Christian church, “Daily . . . the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day . . . will raise me and all the dead” (SC II.6), granting believers the firstfruits of the new creation. Here, Christ speaks and acts through His Word and Sacraments, assuring believers of the forgiveness of sins and their eternal inheritance.

Let the Church steadfastly uphold her confession, boldly proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, rightly administering the Sacraments, and living as a people who, through the Spirit’s power, know their Creator, believe in him, and call upon him (LW 43:200). Through the Word and Sacraments, the “Holy Spirit . . . produces faith, where and when he wills” (AC V.1–2). The baptized, though a “perfectly free lord of all” in faith, are also a “perfectly dutiful servant of all” in love, bound to Christ and sent to serve the neighbor in every vocation (LW 31:344).

Scripture assures us that the day approaches when faith shall become sight, and the redeemed will behold Christ in glory, the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15; see also John 1:14, 18; Phil 2:6; Heb 1:3), before whom “every knee will bow” (Phil 2:10) and “every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (v. 11). On that day, he who is seated on the throne will declare, “Look, I am making everything new!” (Rev

21:5), and his servants will “see his face” (Rev 22:4) and “reign” (v. 5) with him “forever.” Until that day, the Church remains steadfast—not in prideful triumph, but in humble joy. The redeemed bear witness to the One who was “pierced” (Isa 53:5) due to “our rebellion,” who “carried our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24), and by “his wounds” we are “healed.” Therefore, let us live with expectant hearts, faithfully proclaiming the gospel until the day we see our Savior “as he really is” (1 John 3:2) and all things are made new.

Dan Lioy is Professor of Biblical Studies at ILT Christ School of Theology. He holds the Ph.D. from North-West University (South Africa) and is a teaching pastor at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church (NALC) in Salem, Oregon.

Notes

1. All quotes from the Lutheran Confessions are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). Arabic numbers at end of Lutheran Confessions references refer to paragraphs. For Luther’s Works (LW), Arabic numbers at the end of references refer to pages.
2. Lutheranism confesses that Scripture alone is the inspired rule and norm of all doctrine and the sole source of revealed truth necessary for salvation. At the same time, Lutheran theology acknowledges that Scripture is rightly interpreted within the community of faith—the Church—which received, preserved, and has been illumined by the Holy Spirit to understand Scripture’s meaning. This perspective upholds three core principles: (1) the Lord Jesus as the central focus of Scripture; (2) the divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testaments; and (3) the Lutheran Confessions, as contained in the *Book of Concord*, as a true and faithful exposition of God’s Word. This commitment ensures the clear proclamation of the gospel—Christ’s life, death, and resurrection for the justification of sinners by faith alone. It also reflects the ecclesial mission of the Institute of Lutheran Theology, which is evangelical in its preaching, creedal in its confession, and sacramental in its worship and theology.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Evangelical Heritage Version, © 2019 Wartburg Project, Inc. All rights reserved.
4. In this essay, the Augsburg Confession is cited from the English translation of the German version, rather than the Latin translation in Kolb and Wengert’s *Book of Concord*, with one exception. The Kolb/Wengert *Book of Concord* includes translations of both the German and Latin texts.
5. Paul teaches that Christ’s resurrection is the sure pledge and guarantee of the resurrection of all believers (Rom 8:23). As the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20), Christ’s resurrection is both the beginning and the pattern of the bodily resurrection to come. His rising from the dead is not an isolated event but the promise that all who die in faith will likewise be raised on the Last Day. For those who trust in Christ, His victory over death assures the same triumph: the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

6. In some versions of the Small Catechism, “The Sacrament of the Altar” is number V, while in others it is number VI.
7. Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), 111.
8. This quote is from the English translation of the Latin text in the Kolb/Wenger *Book of Concord*.
9. In Lutheran theology, God governs all creation through two divinely instituted realms, each with its own means and purposes. In the spiritual kingdom (the “right-hand kingdom”), God delivers forgiveness, life, and salvation through the Church by means of the Gospel—Word and Sacraments. In the temporal kingdom (the “left-hand kingdom”), God restrains evil, maintains order, and upholds justice by working through civil authorities, laws, and—even when necessary—coercive power. Though each kingdom operates by different principles—grace in the spiritual realm and law in the temporal—they both function under God’s sovereign rule. Christians live as dual citizens. In the temporal realm, they honor civil laws, serve their neighbors, and pursue vocations that build up society. In the spiritual realm, they give ultimate allegiance to Christ, cling to the Gospel, and gather around the Word and Sacraments for eternal life.
10. Luther’s “greatest sinner” language is a rhetorical emphasis on Christ’s substitutionary atonement.
11. From *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986/1991), 29. At the bottom of the page is the note that the question on the Office of the Keys “may not have been composed by Luther himself but reflects his teaching and was included in editions of the catechism during his lifetime” (ibid.).

Select Bibliography for Further In-Depth Study

- Anderson, Ryan T. *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*. New York: Encounter Books, 2018.
- Arand, Charles P. *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics III.1: The Doctrine of Creation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics III.2: The Doctrine of Creation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960.
- Bayer, Oswald. *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Benne, Robert. *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Berkouwer, G. C. *Man: The Image of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Ethics*. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Chemnitz, Martin. *Loci Theologici*. Translated by J. A. O. Preus. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989.
- Elert, Werner. *The Structure of Lutheranism*. Translated by Walter A. Hansen. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962.
- Forde, Gerhard O. *Theology Is for Proclamation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Gassmann, Günther, and Scott Hendrix. *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Jenson, Robert W. *Systematic Theology*. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997–1999.
- Kilner, John F. *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015.
- Kolb, Robert, and Charles P. Arand. *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Lazareth, William H. *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Lioy, Dan. "Paul's Theology of the Cross: A Case Study Analysis of 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10." *Conspectus* 20, no. 10 (2015): 89–133.
- Lioy, Dan. "A Pauline Response to the Myth of the Autonomous, Normative Self." *Verba Vitae* 1, no. 1–2 (2024): 53–65.
- Lioy, Dan. "The Imago Dei: Biblical Foundations, Theological Implications, and Enduring Significance." *Verba Vitae* 1, no. 3–4 (2024): 45–72.

- Lioy, Dan. “Embodied Souls: Exploring Human Personhood in the Age of AI.” *Verba Vitae* 2, no. 1 (2025): 31–62.
- Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Translated by Roy A. Harrisville. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1–5*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 13: Selected Psalms II*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*. Edited by Hilton C. Oswald. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 28: Selected Pauline Epistles*. Edited by Edward A. Engelbrecht. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 31: Heidelberg Disputation and The Freedom of a Christian*. Edited by Harold J. Grimm. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 33: The Bondage of the Will*. Edited by Philip S. Watson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 44: Treatise on Good Works*. Edited by James Atkinson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works. Vol. 45: Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*. Edited by Walther I. Brandt. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962.
- Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations. *Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria in Christian Perspective*. St. Louis, MO: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 2014.
- Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations. *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*. St. Louis, MO: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1981.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Meilaender, Gilbert. *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020.
- Meilaender, Gilbert. *Neither Beast nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*. New York: Encounter Books, 2009.
- Middleton, J. Richard. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005.
- Nestingen, James Arne. *Martin Luther: A Life*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 2003.
- Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*. 4 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1957.

- Preuss, Eduard. *The Justification of the Sinner Before God*. Translated by Julius A. Friedrich, slightly updated and edited by Mark Taylor, John Sias, and Heidi Sias. Introduction by Roland Ziegler. Fort Wayne, IN: Lutheran Legacy, 2001.
- Sasse, Hermann. *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*. Translated by Theodore G. Tappert. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946.
- Schlink, Edmund. *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*. Translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961.
- Schulz, Kalus Detlev. *Theological Anthropology and Sin*. Volume V in Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics. Fort Wayne, IN: The Luther Academy, 2023.
- Smith, Christian. *What Is a Person?: Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Trueman, Carl R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.
- Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994.
- Wengert, Timothy J. *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Wingren, Gustaf. *Luther on Vocation*. Translated by Carl C. Rasmussen. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957.
- Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015.

Annual Print Subscriptions!

Verba Vitae will make physical hard copy issues available beginning with the Spring 2026 issue.

Annual subscriptions include the entire volume year, to be sent to the subscriber regardless of when the subscription is placed during that volume year.

- \$50 for 1-year subscription
- \$95 for 2-year subscription
- \$45/year continuous subscription
(3-year minimum: \$135)
- \$100/year institutional/library

Annual subscriptions do not auto-renew

Subscribe soon at
library.ilt.edu/verba-vitae/

Any questions or communication should be directed to:
verba-vitae@ilt.edu



A Call for Papers

***Verba Vitae* is seeking essay submissions
for the following upcoming issues:**

Volume 2, No. 4 (Winter 2025):

“Engaging a Culture of Death: How Shall We Live?”

Volume 3, No. 1 (Spring 2026):

“Christian Vocation as an Antidote to Radical Contemporary Critical Theory”

Volume 3, No. 2 (Summer 2026):

“Christian Medical Ethics in a Secular Medical Environment”

Volume 3, No. 3 (Autumn 2026):

“Christianity and Transhumanism: Ethical Considerations”

Volume 3, No. 4 (Winter 2026):

“Artificial Intelligence: A Rigorous Examination”

Volume 4, No. 1 (Spring 2027):

“The Issue of Gender: Old and New Perspectives in Conflict”

Volume 4, No. 2 (Summer 2027):

“The Dawn of Life: Pre and Neonatal Life in Modern Society”

Volume 4, No. 3 (Autumn 2027):

“The Power of Language: Navigating Ethical Communication
in the Era of Newspeak”

Volume 4, No. 4 (Winter 2027):

“Facing the Final Frontier: Divine Perspectives and Social Narratives
on Mortality”

All essay submissions should be made at

<https://verba-vitae.org/index.php/vvj/index>

Submitting authors need to register with a *Verba Vitae* account

Please see the Submissions Guidelines for important information!

Any questions should be directed to:

Douglas V. Morton, Associate Editor

dmorton@ilt.edu
