



**A Serious Christian Journal of Life  
and its Significance**

Volume 2, Number 4

Winter 2025

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***Verba Vitae***  
**A Serious Christian Journal of Life  
and its Significance**

*Verba Vitae* is committed to bringing the classical Christian tradition into conversation with life issues now confronting us. Modeling the reasoned *logos* of the theological tradition, *Verba Vitae* explores the truth-claims made by thinkers and examines the grounds upon which these assertions are made.

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# Welcome to the Winter 2025 Issue

**I**N A WORLD WRESTLING WITH PROFOUND questions of meaning, mortality, and moral responsibility, this issue gathers voices that speak courageously and creatively into the heart of our contemporary “culture of death.” Each essay, rooted in deep theological reflection and cultural analysis, invites readers to consider how Christian faith and language can offer hope, clarity, and transformation in the face of existential challenges.

We begin with Dan Lioy’s “Victory Over the Vapor,” which employs a distinctively Lutheran framework to diagnose the pervasive sense of futility and mortality in modern life. Lioy’s essay journeys through key biblical texts, revealing how the Law exposes the limits of human self-sufficiency and how the Gospel proclaims a radical hope: victory over death through Christ’s resurrection. Readers are invited to discover how this Law/Gospel dialectic not only diagnoses our cultural malaise but also offers a transformative cure, empowering believers to engage the world with both realism and confidence.

Dennis Bielfeldt’s “Speaking Life: Luther’s *Nova Lingua* against the Grammar of Death” explores how our culture’s very language has become ill-equipped to speak of life and death truthfully. Drawing on Luther’s insights and recent philosophical work, Bielfeldt argues that only a theological language—liberated from the constraints of autonomy and grounded in the Spirit’s creative word—can name death honestly and proclaim life as divine gift. This essay challenges us to recover a grammar in which life is received, not invented, and where hope is spoken even in the face of negation.

Martin A. Christiansen’s “Inward? – or Upward and Outward? The Problem of Self-Primacy” critically examines the modern prioritization of self-interest and autonomy. Through dialogue with philosophers and theologians, Christiansen explores the tension between self-driven interpretation and the call to love God and neighbor. The essay contends that authentic Christian autonomy is realized not in self-primacy, but in humble, ethical relationship with God and others—a vision that points beyond the culture of death toward a more life-affirming existence.

Finally, M. Anthony Seel’s “Promoting a Culture of Life in America” contrasts the threats of the culture of death with the church’s calling to foster a culture of life. Drawing on the legacy of Pope John Paul II and contemporary thinkers, Seel advocates for a “faithful presence” that seeks the flourishing of all people. Through

historical examples and practical strategies, this essay offers a hopeful vision for how the church can engage society, cultivate shalom, and bear witness to the sanctity of life.

This issue features four engaging book reviews. The first is an in-depth essay by Douglas V. Morton on Klaus Detlev Schulz's *Theological Anthropology and Sin*, the latest addition to the Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics series published by the Luther Academy. Patrick Steckbeck's review of J. Brian Bransfield's *The Human Person According to John Paul II* is the fourth in a thought-provoking series he has written for the journal on books dealing with the Theology of the Body, featuring voices from Evangelical, Lutheran, Orthodox, and now Roman Catholic scholars. Nils I. Borquist offers an insightful review of Eric Metaxas' prophetic *Letter to the American Church*, in which Metaxas draws on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German Church crises of the 1930s to challenge Christians and Christian churches in America to reflect on the perils of "Cheap Grace" and complacency. The dangers have far-reaching consequences. The final review, by Nicholas Hopman, unpacks Dennis Ngien's assessment of select sermons by Martin Luther from 1522, highlighted in his *Paragon of Excellence: Luther's Sermons on 1 Peter*. It's a compelling collection that invites thoughtful engagement.

As you turn each page of this Winter issue, I invite you to enter into dialogue with the voices gathered here. Let these essays and reviews challenge your assumptions, spark new questions, and deepen your understanding of what it means to speak and live faithfully in our time. Whether you are seeking clarity, inspiration, or a renewed sense of purpose, may you find in these writings not only answers but also companions for the journey. Engage boldly, reflect deeply, and discover how the language of life can transform both heart and culture. Welcome to the conversation.

Dennis Bielfeldt  
General Editor, *Verba Vitae*



## A Call for Papers

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

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