

22.-26.5.2025

KELK Europa 2025

Johannesgemeinde Nerchau



PAPERS

MAN CREATED BY GOD

European Meeting CELC

St. John's Church, Nerchau, Germany

May 23–25, 2025

Rev. Timothy R. Schmeling, Ph.D.

Professor of Exegetical and Historical Theology

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, MN

Gustav Wingren once wrote,

Man was created in the beginning by the creative Word, and destined to live by that which comes from the mouth of God. Men understand themselves alright and receive true human life in the hearing of God's Word. The Word reaches the objective for which it was sent out only when it effects an entrance into men. Man reaches the spring out of which he can draw human life only when the Word of the Creator comes to him. ... What is given in faith signifies the deliverance of man from his unnatural condition, his restoration to the estate in which he was created. For Luther, unbelief is *demonic*. It is not "human" to doubt and "paradoxical" to believe; on the contrary, where doubt arises, it is diabolical powers that strive for mastery in human life.¹

Views of Creation

There has been a long history of alternative perspectives on creation that have challenged such Biblical ideas as the Creator-creature distinction, creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*), six-day creation in time, and the goodness of God as well as the goodness of the created order. The first of these perspectives is dualism. It maintains that there are two eternal sources of being, a good and bad one, the latter of which is often associated with material. In the Ancient Near East myth *Enūma Elish*, creation happens when the good Marduk become the chief god by slaying a bad monster goddess named Tiamat, who represents chaotic matter. Marduk then completes creation by forming an ordered world from the dead goddess's body.² Greek religious thinkers like Hesiod,³ Greek philosophers like Plato,⁴ Gnosticism,⁵ and Manicheanism would continue to develop this kind of thought.⁶ Though not the first to argue Genesis was borrowing from *Enūma*

¹ Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 13, 93.

² "Epic of Creation (1.111) (Enūma Elish)," in *Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1:390–402.

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all classical references are to the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1911–). Hesiod, *Theogony* 116ff.

⁴ A benevolent divine demiurge tries to make chaotic matter conform to the eternal forms in Plato's *Timaeus*. However, he has limited success because the material world turns out to be a pale reflection of the ideal world. Plato, *Timaeus* 28aff.

⁵ In the *Apocryphon of John*, the demiurge becomes the God of the Old Testament, a lesser and malevolent god who traps sparks of the divine in human beings. The Father God of the New Testament, conversely, sent his Son to provide the true knowledge that will free human beings from the material world. *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, ed. James M Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 2:12–177.

⁶ *Manichaean Text from the Roman Empire*, ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Elish, Hermann Gunkel popularized the move to read the “battle against chaos” (*Chaoskampf*) motif into Genesis.⁷

The next perspective was monism or pantheism. This typically deterministic view maintains that there is one eternal source of being; namely God, and that creation emanates from him. God is responsible for evil to the degree that the existence of evil is affirmed. The materiality of the world is debated. The Hindu Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad states that Brahman (i.e., ultimate reality) is everything: “Clearly, this self is *brahman*—this self that is made of perception, made of mind, made of sight, made of breath, made of hearing, made of earth, made of water, made of wind, made of space, made of light and lightless, made of desire and desireless, made of anger and angerless, made of the righteous and unrighteous; this self that is made of everything.”⁸ Some forms of Buddhism,⁹ Presocratic thinkers like Parmenides,¹⁰ and Baruch Spinoza would continue to develop this sort of thinking.¹¹ A variation of monism called panentheism understands God to be enmeshed in all reality. At the same time, God has some influence over reality, though he is not in complete control of evil. Idealism and Process Philosophy/Theology would advance this worldview.¹²

The third perspective to arise was naturalism or materialism. This is deterministic monism of another sort. Naturalism is an *a priori* reduction of all reality to eternal matter. In an effort to exclude God, it deifies matter. Diogenes Laertius reports the following ideas of Democritus, one of the founders of Presocratic Greek Atomism, “And it is because of their solidity that these atoms are impassive and unalterable. ... All things happen by virtue of necessity, the vortex being the cause of the creation of all things, and this he calls necessity. ... The qualities of this exist merely by convention; in nature there is nothing but atoms and void space. These, then, are his opinions.”¹³ Charles Darwin,¹⁴ the Marxists,¹⁵ and behavioral science would continue to develop this kind of thinking.¹⁶ Note also that even the Big Bang is not categorically an absolute beginning in current science.¹⁷

The fourth perspective to emerge was the idea that God created all things instantaneously (cf. Sir 18:1 [Vulg.]). Philo of Alexandria writes, “[Moses] says that in six days the world was created, not that its Maker required a length of time for His work, for we must think of God as

⁷ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2006).

⁸ “Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.” in *The Early Upanishads Annotated Text and Translation*, trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 121 (4.4.5).

⁹ “Form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form.” *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sutra, BDK English Tripiṭaka* (Berkeley: Numata Center of Buddhist Translation and Research, 2001), 90.

¹⁰ Parmenides, *On Nature* D5–D8.

¹¹ Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 224 (*Ethics* 1.14).

¹² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, rev. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 364.

¹³ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 9:45.

¹⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859).

¹⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998).

¹⁶ B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1971).

¹⁷ Ethan Siegel, “Don’t Believe These 5 Myths About The Big Bang,” <https://medium.com/starts-with-a-bang/the-top-5-myths-you-probably-believe-about-the-big-bang-ffe5169ca1d3>.

doing all things simultaneously, remembering that ‘all’ includes with the commands which He issues the thought behind them.”¹⁸ Church fathers like Origen, Augustine, and others taught this as well.¹⁹

The fifth perspective is that God created from eternity and that Genesis 1–2 represent two different creations. These views have been attributed to Origen. Many have understood him to be teaching an eternal creation because he feared a creation in time would make God mutable.²⁰ Many have also understood Origen to be teaching an initial immaterial creation populated by pure souls. However, some souls fell because their love for God cooled. A second material creation then became necessary to keep these souls from total destruction and ultimately save them.²¹ Others would posit two different creations for historical critical reasons.

The sixth perspective is old earth creationism. This takes three different forms. Millions of years are squeezed into a supposed gap between Genesis 1:1–2 (i.e., gap theory creationism).²² The days of creation are interpreted as periods over which millions of years occur (i.e., day-age creationism).²³ God creates in bursts of creation over millions of years (i.e., progressive creationism).²⁴

The final perspective is theistic evolution. God brings the building blocks of reality forth via the Big Bang. He then used evolution to complete creation over millions of years.²⁵

¹⁸ Philo, *Creation of the World* 3.

¹⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 375 (6.60); Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle and Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1990–), 1/13:271–75 (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 4.51–55).

²⁰ Current scholarship disputes that Origen is teaching this here: “But if there never is a ‘when’ he was not almighty, by necessity those things must also subsist by which he is called the *Almighty*, and he must always have had those over whom he exercised power and which were governed by him as king or prince....” Origen, *On First Principles A Reader’s Edition*, trans. John Behr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 29–30 (1.2.10). Behr disputes this interpretation on lv–lxi, lxxix–lxxxviii.

²¹ Current scholarship disputes that this is being taught here. “And if [rational creatures] had a beginning such as the end for which they hope, they were undoubtedly from the beginning in those [worlds] that are *not seen* and *eternal*. And if this is so, then there has been descent from the higher conditions to the lower, not only on the part of those souls who have by the variety of their movements deserved it, but also on that of those who, to serve the whole world, were brought down from the higher and invisible condition to these lower and visible one, even against their will. ... For those souls which, because their excessive spiritual defects needed these denser and more solid bodies, and because of those for whom this was necessary, this visible world was founded. ... It must be supposed that the world was created of such a kind and such a size as to be able to contain all those souls which were appointed to be trained in this world....” Origen, *On First*, 219–20 (3.5.4). Behr disputes this interpretation on lxi–lxiv.

²² Thomas Chalmers, *Posthumous Works* (New York: Harper, 1848–49), 1:1. See also Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Bibel und Astronomie*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Justus Albert Wohlgemuth, 1849), 94–96; Franz Delitzsch, *System of Biblical Psychology*, trans. Robert Ernst Wallis, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879), 74ff; A. F. C. Vilmar, *Dogmatik: Akademische Vorlesungen*, ed. K. W. Piderit (Gütersloh: C Bertelsmann, 1874), 1:242ff.

²³ George Stanley Faber, *Treatise on the Genius and Objects of the Patriarchal, the Levitical, and Christian Dispensations* (London: C. & J. Rivington, 1823); Hugh Miller, *The Testimony of Rocks or Geology in Its Bearing on the Two Theologies, Natural & Revealed* (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1873).

²⁴ Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

²⁵ John W. Dawson, *The Origin of the World According to Revelation and Science* (New York: Harper, 1877).

Knowledge about Creation

The Sacred Scriptures say that creation is an article of faith (Heb 11:3). The only sure source of divine revelation about creation is the inerrant and sufficient Scriptures (Luke 16:31; Joh 8:31; 10:35; Gal 1:8; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Pet 1:21). While the apocryphal books are not canonical, they are referenced because they shed light on how the canonical texts were understood. To be sure, God works in history (Ps 78:3–4; John 1:14; 1 Cor 10:11; Eph 1:11). Conscience and creation also provide some law-based and limited natural knowledge of God and his works (Ps 19:1–6; Acts 14:17; Rom 1:20; 2:15). Still, human beings are warned not to seek God apart from God’s Word and especially not to pry into the hidden mind of God (Deut 29:29; Isa 45:15; 1 Cor 1:18–25; Col 2:8). What is more, both conscience and creation have been corrupted by the fall (Gen 3:17; 6:5; 8:21; 9:2; Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12), though they have not become essentially evil and remain God’s good creation (Ps 8:5–9; 24:1; 50:12; 139:13–16; 1 Cor 10:26). To think that finite fallen human beings can have univocal access to the hidden mind of the infinite perfect God via human faculties and nature is an assumption rooted in the false cosmologies articulated above. It presumes man possesses a spark of the divine.

Meaning of “Create”

In contrast to BDB, *TWOT*, and *NIDOTTE*, most lexicographical studies argue that the root בָּרָא “to create” (used in qal and niphal) should be distinguished from the much rarer roots בָּרַח “to cut” (used only in piel [Josh 17:15, 18; Ezek 21:24; 23:47]) and בָּרַח “to be fat” (used only in hiphil [1 Sam 2:29]).²⁶ This would mean that God is always the unique subject of the verb “to create” (בָּרָא). The fact that this word is never used with an accusative of material also suggests it means more than “to make” (עָשָׂה). Andrew Steinmann notes:

While at [Genesis] 2:3 [*created*] is used as a summary for all of God’s activity in this narrative, in the first five instances it introduces new things brought into being: heavens and earth (v. 1), animate life that is endowed with *breath of life* (vv. 21, 30) and human beings bearing *the image of God* (v. 27 [three times]). *Created* is in contrast to the Hebrew word for *do* or *make*, which is used throughout this account for making and forming things from already created items or as a general word for God’s work (vv. 7, 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 31, 2:2, 3).²⁷

²⁶ *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v., “בָּרָא;” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament [TLOT]*, s.v., “בָּרָא;” *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament [HALOT]*, s.v., “בָּרָא;” *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew [DCH]*, s.v., “בָּרָא;” *Hebräisches und Äramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament [Gesenius¹⁸]*, s.v., “בָּרָא.” Exceptions to this would be *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament [BDB]*, s.v., “בָּרָא;” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament [TWOT]*, s.v., “בָּרָא;” and *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis [NIDOTTE]*, s.v., “בָּרָא.”

²⁷ Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 50.

Since there is never any mention of any material from which God “creates,” even Gerhard von Rad and Nahum Sarna recognize that “to create” (בָּרָא) contains the idea of creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*).²⁸

When God “creates” (בָּרָא), he commands something new into being that was not there before. The Bible uses this verb in eight ways: 1) creation from nothing (Gen 1:1), 2) creation from matter that was created from nothing (Gen 1:27), 3) continued creation and conservation of creation (Ps 102:18; 104:30), 4) recreation of human beings (Ps 51:10; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10), 5) recreation of the heavens and earth (Isa 65:17–18), 6) creation of God’s just judgments (Isa 45:7), 7) creation of divine benefits (Isa 41:20; 45:7; 57:19), and 8) creation of new things (Num 16:30; Jer 31:22).

Creator

In the words of the Lutheran fathers, the one true God, who consists of three distinct persons (Deut 6:4; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14), is the efficient cause (*causa efficiens*) of creation.²⁹ This same Trinity is discussed from two different perspectives as the three ancient creeds and other Lutheran Confessions attest.³⁰ The ontological perspective (Immanent Trinity) describes God’s internal works (i.e., God as he relates to himself). Martin Chemnitz explains the old adage *opera trinitatis ad intra sunt divisa* this way, “The works which God does outside of all created things, within Himself, are not common to the three persons, but are peculiar to only one person ... there is reserved for each person His order and His characteristic.”³¹ In other words, only God the Father, who is the font, source, and first person of the Trinity, is unbegotten or born of none.³² Only God the Son, the second person, is begotten or born of the Father (Ps 2:7; John 3:16). Only God the Holy Spirit, the third person, proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26; Gal 4:6). A necessary and substantial relationship exists between the giver and receiver of the internal works. The begotten one shares the same substance with the unbegotten begetter.

²⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 49, 51; Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Genesis*, JPS Tanakh Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 5.

²⁹ Johann Gerhard, *On Creation and Angels, On Providence, On Election and Reprobation, On the Image of God in Man Before the Fall*, trans. Richard Dinda, Theological Commonplaces (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 11–15 (locus 8, par. 8–18); Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand, *Systematis Universae Theologiae ... decidantur*, rev. ed (Leipzig: Johann Hallervord, 1638), 1:192–93; Johannes Rudbeckius, *Loci Theologici: Föreläsningar vid Uppsala universitet 1611–1613*, ed. Bengt Häggglund (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 65–66.

³⁰ *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, ed. Irene Dingel, Bastian Basse, Marion Bechtold-Mayer, Klaus Breuer, Johannes Hund, Robert Kolb, Rafael Kuhnert, Volker Leppin, Christian Peters, Adolf Martin Ritter, and Hans-Otto Schneider, 1st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). Apostles’ Creed; Nicene Creed; Athanasian Creed; SC 2; LC 2; SA I.

³¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, trans. Fred Kramer, Luther Poellet, Georg Williams, J. A. O. Preus, Matthew Harrison, Jacob Corzine, and Andrew Smith (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008–15), 7:105. See also Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works [LW]*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955–), 15:302.

³² Konrad Dieterich, *Institutiones Catecheticae ... Expositio*, ed. August Dieckhoff (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1864), 210, 220.

The economic perspective (Economic Trinity) describes God's external works (i.e., how God relates to his creation). Chemnitz explains the old adage *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* this way, "The external works are common to the three persons, but in such a way that the differences and properties of the person are not confused."³³ In other words, the Father is the Creator (Deut 32:6). The Son is the Redeemer (1 John 1:7). The Spirit is the Sanctifier (Gal 3:5). However, each person has a distinct role to play in creating, redeeming, and sanctifying (John 5:19; Rom 11:36). No necessary or substantial relationship exists between giver and receiver of the external works. The Creator neither shares the same substance as the creation, nor is the creation an emanation from the Triune God. As Athanasius notes, God eternally begets by nature. He creates in time by will.³⁴ Thus, creation is the first external act of the Trinity. If the Immanent Trinity were strictly collapsed into the Economic Trinity as the so-called Rahner Rule might suggest,³⁵ creation would become essential to God and panentheism would result.

The Holy Trinity is the sole efficient cause of creation. First, the Scriptures only speak of God creating all things. As the three ancient creeds and other Lutheran symbols confess, it was God the Father who created the heavens and earth (Gen 1:1). He did so through his Word (Gen 1:3; Ps 148:5; Heb 11:3), that is God the Son (John 1:3, 14; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–16; Heb 1:1–2, 10), and by means of the "Spirit of God" (Gen 1:2; Ps 33:6, 9).³⁶ The "Spirit of God" (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים) cannot be reduced here to the "wind of God" or "breath of God" as the NRSV and Alter translations respectively would have it. The Spirit's "hovering" (מְרַחֵף) implies creative agency (Gen 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps 104:30). These same translations render this Hebrew expression as "Spirit of God" elsewhere in Genesis (Gen 41:38). Hebrew lexicons support "Spirit of God" in Genesis 1:2 and 41:38.³⁷ Second, the Bible reserves the Hebrew word "to create" (בָּרָא) for God alone. Said differently, humans can "make" (עָשָׂה), but only God can "create." Third, the Scriptures state that everything that was ever created was only created by God (Isa 44:24; 45:6–7; Jer 10:16; John 1:3; Acts 14:16; 1 Cor 3:22; 8:6; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb 3:4). Finally, nature itself attests that God is its Creator (Rom 1:20. cf. Wis 13:5; Sir 43:5).

Exegetical Excurses on Genesis 1:1–3

Many false views of creation are rooted in a misunderstanding of Genesis 1:1–3. This study supports the traditional understanding of these verses as expressed in the following translation: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

Genesis 1:1 is the main clause and a complete sentence. Here God creates the building blocks of creation out of nothing (i.e., no preexistent time, space, or matter). Thus, Genesis 1:1 is not a title that introduces events first occurring in the subsequent verses. The word order and construction of this verse are emphatic and unparalleled. "In the beginning" (בְּרֵאשִׁית) is definite

³³ Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works*, 7:108. See also LW 15:302.

³⁴ *NPNF*² 4:364–65 (Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 2.18.31). See also John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1958), 178–79 (*Orthodox Faith* 1.8).

³⁵ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder, 1970), 22.

³⁶ Apostles' Creed; Nicene Creed; Athanasian Creed; SC 2; LC 2; SA I.

³⁷ *HALOT*, s.v., "רוּחַ;" *DCH*, s.v., "רוּחַ."

by context (albeit the later Masoretic pointing suggests it is indefinite or anarthrous). This Hebrew word is also in absolute, not construct form. The omission of the definite article can be found in other adverbial phrases with temporal terms in an absolute sense (Isa 40:21; 41:4, 26). Isaiah 46:10 suggests that this word can also be anarthrous, absolute, and speaking of God's absolute sovereignty over the beginning and end of historical time (cf. Prov 8:23). The disjunctive tipha and vocalized shewa provide additional support for the absolute sense. The unprecedented context shows that Genesis 1:1 is referring to an absolute beginning.³⁸ "Created" (בָּרָא) is pointed as a finite verb, not an infinitive construct. This is the only place where a finite verb follows "in the beginning" (בְּרֵאשִׁית). "The heavens and earth" (הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ) are a merism. Their focus is on the totality of everything that God created in Genesis 1:1 rather than the completeness of the "heavens and earth" in this verse (cf. Col 1:16). The unprecedented context warrants this unique understanding here.³⁹

Genesis 1:2 is a complete sentence that describes the state of what God created from nothing in Genesis 1:1. If Genesis 1:1 were a temporal clause that depended on Genesis 1:2 as its main clause, one would expect the later to open with waw-consecutive + verb + subject word order.⁴⁰ Not only that, the disjunctive word order of Genesis 1:2 (i.e., waw-disjunctive + noun + verb) makes the gap theory creation translation, "then the earth *became*" (וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה), syntactically unlikely (cf. Gen 3:22).⁴¹ There is no mythic battle against chaotic matter in the creation account nor any other deities to be had (Gen 1:14–18). While the created earth of Genesis 1:2 is called "desolate and empty," it is not preexistent "chaos." Unlike BDB, *DCH*, and Gesenius¹⁸, *HALOT* rightly omits the loaded term "chaos" as a translation for תִּהְיוֹ anywhere in the Bible (Jer 4:23–27; Isa 45:18–19), and suggests "wilderness," "wasteland," or "emptiness"

³⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 3, 12; Paul Joüon and Muraoka Takamitsu, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. Muraoka Takamitsu, 2nd ed. (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2016), §137k; Walter Eichrodt, "In the Beginning," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 1–10; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 107n11; Alexander Sperber, *A Historical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 463–64, 627, 637. Note also that Kenneth Mathews argues "in the beginning" (בְּרֵאשִׁית) initiates history. In contrast to "beginning" (תְּחִלָּה) (Gen 13:3; 41:21; 43:18, 20), Genesis 1:1's "beginning" (רֵאשִׁית), which is often paired with "end" (אַחֲרִית) (Job 8:7; 42:12; Eccl 7:8; Isa 46:10), not only suggests that a period of time has commenced, but also that there is eschatological purpose to human history from the beginning as indicated by Isaiah 46:10. See Kenneth A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 119–22, 126–27. While Mesopotamians chronicled their deities' engagement in historical events, Bill Arnold adds this engagement occurred via parallel actions in the divine realm and remained mythic. In the Hebrew Bible, conversely, a transcendent God inaugurates history, has a plan for history, and works through history to reveal that plan. Bill T. Arnold, "The Weidner Chronicle and the Idea of History in Israel and Mesopotamia," in *Faith, Tradition, and History*, ed. A. R. Millard et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 129–48. See also Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation and Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mystical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 11–42; Jakob H. Grønbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam—A Canaanite Creation Fight," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 10, no. 33 (1985): 36.

³⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 15; Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1*, 142.

⁴⁰ Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1*, 137n98.

⁴¹ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *IBHS [IBHS]* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), par. 8.3b; 39.2.3.

for Genesis 1:2.⁴² Lexicographical studies maintain that the “deep” (תְּהוֹם) is not based on the Akkadian feminine Tiamat. Instead both words derive from a common proto-Semitic root.⁴³

Looking at Genesis 1:1–3 as a whole, all recognize that Genesis 1:3 is an independent clause. In contrast to the word order of both Genesis 2:4 and *Enūma Elish*, Genesis 1:1 word order is preposition + finite verb + subject noun. If *Enūma Elish* has any syntactical parallel, it is with Genesis 2:4–7 (preposition + non-finite verb + subject noun).⁴⁴ What is more, Genesis has stylistically shorter sentences. Translations (e.g., NRSV and NJPS),⁴⁵ which make Genesis 1:1–3 vulnerable to mythologizing by rendering these verses as a single cumbersome sentence with a temporal dependent clause, have not stood up to textual and historical scrutiny.⁴⁶ Thus, Genesis 1:1 is unique in Ancient Near East literature. If Genesis is engaging Ancient Near East cosmologies, it is far more likely that it is polemicizing against Egyptian cosmologies.⁴⁷

Motive for Creation

If God is the sole Creator of all things, then the impelling cause (*causa impulsiva*) of creation can only be found in God as well. The Lutheran fathers maintain that God’s motive for creation was his goodness.⁴⁸ The Lord is “good” (טוֹב) (Ps 136:1). There is no unrighteousness in him (Ps 92:15). Creation is a free act of God’s will (Gen 1:3; Ps 115:3; Eph 1:11; Rev 4:11). The refrain “his steadfast love [חֶסֶד] endures forever” is added to his works of creation in Psalm 136:5ff. God describes his work of creation as “good” and even “very good” (Gen 1:14, 31). The Scriptures also indicate that God did not create because he lacked something. There was no internal necessity that compelled God to create (Acts 17:25). The Scriptures further maintain God did not create because he needed to gain control of something preexistent. There was no

⁴² HALOT, s.v., “תְּהוֹם.” The LXX never used “chaos” (χάος) to translate any of the words in Gen 1:1–3. See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* [GELS], s.v., “χάος;” Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2010), 127, 174.

⁴³ TLOT, s.v., “תְּהוֹם;” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* [TDOT], s.v., “תְּהוֹם;” HALOT, s.v., “תְּהוֹם.” cf. NIDOTTE, s.v., “תְּהוֹם.” See also David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

⁴⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 107–8; Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1*, 142.

⁴⁵ “When God began to create heaven and earth—² the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—³ God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light” (Gen 1:1–3 NJPS). “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light” (Gen 1:1–3 NRSV). See also NRSVue.

⁴⁶ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997–99), 2:3n2; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 74ff

⁴⁷ Gordon H. Johnston, “Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165, no. 658 (2008): 178–94, esp. 192. See also Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1*, 90–95; 117–120; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 8–10; John D. Currid, “An Examination of the Egyptian Background of the Genesis Cosmogony,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 204, no. 4 (1991): 18–40; James K. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 and 2 and Egyptian Cosmology,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 15 (1983): 39–49.

⁴⁸ Abraham Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum ... exhibens* (Wittenberg: Andreas Hartmann, Johann Röhner, Michael Wendt, Christian Schroedter, and Johann Wilcke, 1655–77), 3:896–97; Johann Wilhelm Baier and C. F. W. Walther, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae Adjectis Notis Amplioribus ... Confirmatur* (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia Verlag, 1879), 2:96.

external necessity that compelled him to create either (Isa 40:13; Jer 23:18). Not even the Leviathan preexisted God (Ps 104:26).

How Creation Came About

When Christians say that God created all things from nothing, “nothing” is not a name for a material of another sort. Johann Andreas Quenstedt explains,

There was no *material* of creation *out of which*, with respect to things created on the first day. For they were created on the first day, not from preexistent material, either eternal or previously created, but were made from purely negative nothing [*ex nihilo purè negativo*]. ... When it said that the works of the first day were created from nothing, the particle *from* does not designate the material out of which, but excludes it. For by *from nothing*, nothing else is denoted than the starting point [*terminus a quo*]; that is, the *nothing*, from which all things are said to have been made, has respect not to the material, but only to the starting point and ought to be understood of the order of creation, and the particle *from* can be correctly translated by *after*, so that the sense is, as Thomas [Aquinas] says, *After nothing, as the starting point, something was made.*⁴⁹

Gerhard May maintains that creation from nothing only developed when the church fathers like Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Irenaeus of Lyon had to counter the cosmologies of Greek philosophy and the Gnostics. Ironically, he also argues that the Gnostic Basilides was the first to articulate it.⁵⁰ It could just as easily be argued that these church fathers articulated creation from nothing because they were more engaged with the Scriptures than Aristides, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, and Hermogenes as well as less interested in harmonizing the Scriptures with a Platonic cosmology (i.e., *creatio ex materia*).

As already noted in the excursus, the Scriptures implicitly teach creation from nothing already in Genesis 1. Numerous other Old Testament passages maintain that God alone is the eternal and transcendent Creator of all things and that all things depend on him. Only the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 11:17 suggests that God created out formless material (ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης). However, this may be speaking about the created matter that God used to complete the earth (cf. 2 Pet 3:5). The Apocryphal 2 Maccabees 7:28 is the first place to explicitly teach creation from nothing: “God did not make [the heavens and earth and ... everything that is in them] out of things that existed [οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων].” However, the canonical New Testament Scriptures teach it as well. Romans 4:17 speaks of God who “calls into being that which does not exist” (καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα). Though not quite as strong, Hebrews 11:3 concurs, “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that

⁴⁹ Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, Sive Systema Theologicvm ... Divisvm* (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1702), 1:417.

⁵⁰ Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of ‘Creation out of Nothing’ in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (London: T&T Clark International, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all patristic references are to *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325: Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF]*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995) or *The Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF]*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995). *ANF* 2:67 (Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 5–6); *ANF* 2:95 (Theophilus, *To Autolycus* 4); *ANF* 2:359, 370, 412 (Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heresies* 2.1; 2.10; 2.34).

what is seen was not made out of things that are visible [εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγονέναι].”

In some ways, scouring the Scriptures for “from nothing” is to miss the point a bit. William Weinrich explains, “Because God’s free willing is the sole ‘cause’ of the world’s creation, God is said to create *ex nihilo*, ‘from nothing.’ This nothing does not refer to anything outside of God from which or on which God acted. Nor does it refer to a certain void that receives a positive and material existence. This ‘nothing’ is rather the sovereign will of God.”⁵¹ In other words, “from nothing” really means that God created all things from an act of his will (Gen 1:3ff; Ps 115:3; Eph 1:11; Rev 4:11), power (Jer 32:17), wisdom (Ps 104:24; 136:5), and understanding (Jer 10:12). Clearly then, Biblical creation affirms the Creator-creature distinction and the creation’s dependency on God. It rejects dualism, monism, and naturalism. There is also no room for Jürgen Moltmann’s idea that the “nothing” is a space created by God’s self-negation or a God-forsaken space.⁵²

God did not create all things instantaneously. The exegetical evidence for gap theory has already been shown wanting. He also did not use evolution, day-ages, progressive creative bursts, or the like. He created in six days (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). To be sure, the word “day” (יָמִים) does not only mean a twenty-four hour day in the creation account. The account uses “day” to refer to the daylight hours of the six days of creation (Gen 1:5, 14, 16, 18). It also uses “day” as a general reference to time, like the expression “back in Luther’s day” (cf. Gen 2:4). But there is no evidence that days of creation are understood in any other way in the creation account than these three ways. Even the first day of creation had an evening and a morning (Gen 1:5; Exod 16:8; 18:13). In fact, Exodus 20:11 confirms the fact that God created in six normal days. Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 do provide glimpses into what created time means for a timeless God. But the Bible describes the days of creation as six created days, not day-ages or the like.

On the first day, God created from nothing (i.e., immediate creation [*creatio immediata*] or first creation [*creatio prima*]). On the following days, he created from the material that he created from nothing on the first day (i.e., mediate creation [*creatio mediata*] or second creation [*creatio secunda*]).⁵³ Still, Nikolaus Hunnius rightly insists, “The bible teaches us, that, although *man* was formed of the dust of the ground, (Genes. 2, 7.); the *grass* out of the earth, (Genes. 1, 11.); fishes from the water (v. 20.) and birds and other *animals* from the earth (v. 24 and Gen. 2, 19.); they have yet been created out of nothing.”⁵⁴

Creation by God’s Word

⁵¹ William C. Weinrich, “Creation,” in *Confessing the Faith: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, ed. Samuel H. Nafzger, John F. Johnson, David A. Lumppp, and Howard W. Tepker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 1:163.

⁵² Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 86–87.

⁵³ Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, 3:903–5; David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicvm Acroamaticvm Vniuersam Theologiam Thetico-Polemicam Complectens*, ed. Romanus Tellerus (Leipzig: B. C. Breitkopf, 1763), 354.

⁵⁴ Nikolaus Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, trans. Paul Edward Gottheil (Nuremberg: U. E. Sebald, 1847), 44.

There is no instrumental cause of creation. God spoke reality into being. He did so via the second person of the Holy Trinity. To call Christ an instrumental cause would be Arian.⁵⁵ Abraham Calov explains this Creative Word further,

The ‘God said’ denotes not merely a word of command; but inasmuch as God does not command anything or do anything except through His hypostatic Word ‘through whom all things were made’ (John 1:3), the term ‘God said’ must here, where the creation of all things is spoken of, be taken, on the one hand, as the Word by whom God the Father spoke, the hypostatic Word through whom the Father speaks and works and without whom He neither speaks nor works, and on the other hand, as the word which God spoke and uttered, the prophetic word, the word of command, as a divine impulse.”⁵⁶

Creation took place by divine fiat. God spoke all things into being via his effective Word (Gen 1:3; Isa 55:11; Joh 1:3; Heb 11:3). Clearly, this is an active, living personal God, not an unmoved mover or monist God. When God speaks, things happen, new realities come into being. God’s Word is not just sacred information. It is performative as well. God’s word and his deeds cannot be separated. Martin Luther put it this way in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45): “‘Let there be light’ are the words of God, not Moses; this means that they are realities. For God calls into existence the things which do not exist (Rom. 4:17). He does not speak grammatical words; He speaks true and existent realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is a reality with God. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are all words of God...”⁵⁷

Creation with a Special Focus on Anthropology

Over the course of six days, God created everything from the building blocks of creation (i.e., time, space, and matter) to its culmination (i.e., mankind) as well as everything in between. On the first day, God created heavens, earth, and light (i.e., raw materials of creation). God’s work on the second day was the firmament or the expanse between the waters. On the third day, the waters were gathered to one place and dry land appeared along with various kinds of vegetation that reproduce according to their “kind” (מין). God made the sun, moon, and the rest of the heavenly bodies on the fourth day. On the fifth day, God created the different creatures of the water and the birds of the air according to their kind. On the sixth day, he brought forth land animals according to their kind, and finally he created man, the crown of creation (Gen 1:26–28; Ps 8:4–9; 139:13–16). After repeatedly declaring his creation “good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and “very good” (Gen 1:31) once man was created, God rested on the seventh day. This account allows for the development of new varieties of creatures within their kinds. But the cross-kind reproduction of theistic evolution is excluded. The goodness of creation is not of its own making. Rather the good God not only gifts goodness to creation, God’s goodness can be seen in creation as well.⁵⁸ Such goodness excludes all dualisms.

⁵⁵ Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, 3:897; Baier and Walther, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, 2:96–97.

⁵⁶ Calov quoted in Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970–2), 2:171–72. See also LW 1:47.

⁵⁷ LW, 1:21–22. See also LW 37:258.

⁵⁸ Weinrich, “Creation,” 1:166.

There are also not two different creations in Genesis, but the same creation told from two different perspectives. Genesis 1 describes all the six days of creation. Genesis 2 provides more information about the creation of human beings. The specifics of the creation account demonstrate mankind's special status.⁵⁹ God's careful deliberation over man is expressed by "let us make" (Gen 1:26). Man is not just "formed" by God (Gen 2:7), he is said to be "created" (בָּרָא) three times in Genesis 1:27 alone. Just as there is only God, there is only one kind of human. The Triune God created both males and females "in our image, according to our likeness" (בְּצִלְמֵנוּ בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ), which at its core means perfect righteousness, holiness, and knowledge (Gen 1:26–27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). As royal priests (Exod 19:6; 20:7; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), males and females also have mastery and rule of creation (Gen 1:26, 28. cf. Wis 9:2; Sir 17:2). Mankind's unique relationship with the Lord God is fleshed out further in Genesis 2. He created man via a twofold process of forming and inspiring (i.e., filling with life). The Lord God took great care "to form" (יָצַר) the human of the dust from the ground and later from a rib. He himself then breathed into the man the breath of life (Gen 2:7, 21–22; Job 33:4; Ps 104:30). The word for "breath" (נְשָׁמָה) in Genesis 2:7 is only used of God and man (except possibly in Genesis 7:22). Human beings were created to live in a dependent faith-based or trust-based relationship with God (Gen 2:16–17; 3:17).⁶⁰ In contrast to mere animal instinct, they possessed personhood, self-awareness, self-reflectiveness, and the freedom to choose between various good things (Gen 2:16–17, 23).⁶¹

With this in mind, this study shall probe a little deeper into Biblical anthropology. Man is neither an immortal spirit or spark of the divine trapped in a body nor is he a purely material organism or a biological machine.⁶² Instead he is an embodied and composite being. He is comprised of a created immaterial soul and material body (i.e., dichotomy) (Gen 2:7; Eccl 11:5; 12:7; Isa 42:5; Jer 38:16). In contrast to a dichotomy, some have argued that 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 prove man is a trichotomy (i.e., body, soul, and spirit composite).⁶³ The idea is that other forms of biological life may have a soul to animate them, but only man possesses a spirit. However, the Scriptures attribute the same characteristics to soul and spirit. They also only differentiate between soul and spirit to highlight different features of the same soul.⁶⁴ Lutherans have largely supported the traducian understanding of the soul's propagation (i.e., body and soul are both produced from the parents). The creationist understanding (i.e., God creates a new soul once procreation begins) is harder to square with the transmission of original

⁵⁹ Adolph Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. James Langebartels, Heinrich Vogel, Richard A. Krause, Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange, and Bill Tackmier (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999–2009), 2:214–15

⁶⁰ See also Walter Brueggemann on primal trust in his *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 466.

⁶¹ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 224; Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1*, 210–11.

⁶² Johann Michael Reu, *Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Dubuque: Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1963), 81–86; Jerrold A. Eickmann, Jerald C. Joersz, Thomas E. Manteufel, Daniel L. Mattson, and Joel Okamoto, "Anthropology," in *Confessing the Faith: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, ed. Samuel H. Nafzger, John F. Johnson, David A. Lump, and Howard W. Tepker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 1:272–75.

⁶³ Vilmar, *Dogmatik*, 1:333–36.

⁶⁴ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:301–4; Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–57), 1:476.

sin from parent to the whole person of their child.⁶⁵ Ironically, Reformed theologians have insisted on the creationist understanding in part to affirm that ongoing creation is creation.⁶⁶ Sometimes the Reformed tradition's Platonizing of the Biblical concepts of spirit and flesh (Gal 5:16–26) has caused it to forget that created soul is no closer to God than created body. Created soul is neither made of God stuff, nor it is immune to fleshly vices.

What about the heart of what it means to be human? In his glosses on Johannes Tauler's sermons (ca. 1516), Luther defined the human being as "spiritual man who relies on faith" (*homo spiritualis nititur fide*).⁶⁷ Luther said that it was passive (i.e., alien righteousness) alone that make man human before God (*corum dei*) in his 1519 *Two Kinds of Righteousness*. "This righteousness is primary; it is the basis, the cause, the source" of active righteousness (i.e., good works) that only makes man human before the world (*corum mundo*).⁶⁸ In his *Disputation concerning Man* (1536), Luther states, "Paul in Romans 3[:28], 'We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works,' briefly sums up the definition of man, saying, 'Man is justified by faith.'"⁶⁹ But what about before the fall? Luther also speaks of both righteousness and faith before the fall in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45):

Therefore the root and source of sin is unbelief and turning away from God, just as, on the other hand, the source and root of righteousness is faith. Satan first draws away from faith to unbelief. When he achieved this—that Eve did not believe the command which God had given—it was easy to bring this about also, that she rushed to the tree, plucked the fruit, and ate it.⁷⁰

In the 1519 *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, Luther explains that original passive righteousness is basically the same as the post-fall passive righteousness except that the latter had to do more. This is because the passive righteousness necessary to cover human sin could only be based on the sole-salvific atoning work of Jesus Christ. "For this is the [passive] righteousness given in the place of the original righteousness lost in Adam. It accomplishes the same as that original righteousness would have accomplished; rather, it accomplishes more."⁷¹ The Biblical Record concurs with Luther. Adam and Eve were in fact created in the image of God (i.e., spoken into being passively righteous) (Gen 1:31; Eph 4:24). They were also called into a faith-relationship with God (Gen 2:16–17).

Thus, it has always been faith and passive righteousness alone that makes man fully human. Granted the fallen man remains human (Gen 3:9, 22), loved by God (John 3:16), and his good creation (Ps 8:5–9; 24:1; 50:12; 139:13–16; 1 Cor 10:26). He also retains God-given dignity (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jam 3:9). However, fallen man has become a deformed human

⁶⁵ FC SD I, 7, 30; LW 54:401. See also Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:309–313.

⁶⁶ *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, ed. William den Boer and Riemer A. Faber (Landrum: Davenant Press, 2023), 133–34; Johannes Wollebius, "Compendium Theologiae Christianae," in *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John W. Beardslee (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 57–58.

⁶⁷ Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [WA], ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993), 9:103–4.

⁶⁸ LW 31:297–306, esp. 298.

⁶⁹ LW 34:139.

⁷⁰ LW 1:162; etc. FC SD V, 17 concurs, "Since unbelief is a root and fount of all sins worthy of condemnation, the law also condemns unbelief." Robert Kolb adds, "Trust in the creator holds life together." Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 55–56.

⁷¹ LW 31:298–99.

(Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 51:7; 143:2; Isa 6:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12–21; 14:23; Heb 11:6) who treats others in dehumanizing and animalistic ways (Gen 4; Ezek 34). He suffers from an identity crisis because he has rooted his identity in what he does (i.e., lack of active righteousness or good works [Luke 10:29; 16:15]) rather than what God has made him. He lacks true human freedom (except in matters of civil righteousness) because he has forfeited it for license and enslaved himself to sin (John 8:34).

Underneath a supposed “superadded” gift of original righteousness, Roman Catholic theologians have posited the existence of a state of pure nature in human beings.⁷² Enlightenment thinkers went further and claimed the human individual was actually “autonomous” (i.e., independent of external forces and legislating rules for oneself).⁷³ In contradistinction, Genesis maintains that the human faculties (e.g., memory, intellect, and will, etc.) were only created to function properly with passive righteousness and faith. This is why Luther concluded that reasoning apart from grace and faith is intellectual fornication in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518):

29. He who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ. 30. Just as a person does not use the evil of passion well unless he is a married man, so no person philosophizes well unless he is a fool, that is, a Christian. ... Just as lust is the perverse desire for pleasure, so philosophy is the perverse love of knowing unless the grace of Christ is present.... To philosophize outside of Christ is the same as fornicating outside of marriage....⁷⁴

The Garden in Eden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the “Tree of Life” (עץ החיים) serve as a sort of Edenic temple and Torah-filled ark. The later temporary tabernacle/temples, not to mention the eschatological (i.e., already but not yet) new temple, all echo this original Edenic temple.⁷⁵ It appears that Adam and Eve were kept in a righteous

⁷² Robert Bellarmine, *Omnia Opera*, ed. Justinus Fèvre (Paris: Vives, 1870–74), 5:179; Francisco Suarez, *Omnia Opera* (Paris: Vivès, 1856–61), 7:179; Matthias Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2019–23), bk 3, par. 507, 591, 947, 1072–74, 1082–83, 1120–22; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, trans. M. Timothea Doyle (Rockford: TAN Books, 1947–48), 1:288. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1:1124–25 (pt. 1–2, q. 109, art. 2).

⁷³ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor, The Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166ff (AA 5:33ff).

⁷⁴ WA 1:355; 59:410. The first two numbered theses are translated in LW 31:41. The last two unnumbered points come from the untranslated proofs to the philosophical theses found in WA 59:410.

⁷⁵ Ezekiel and John both situate the new temple in a new Eden or the new heavens and the new earth (Gen 1:1; 2:8; Ezek 36:35; Ezek 40–48; Rev 21:1, 22). The later temporary tabernacle/temples are where the Lord would dwell with his people and impart his life-sustaining temple presence to his people by means of a sort of tree of life; namely, the Torah-filled ark of the covenant (Gen 2:9, 16–17, 3:8; Exod 3:1–22; 25:8, 22, 31–40; Lev 26:12; Deut 23:15; 2 Sam 7:6–7; Prov 3:18–20; Ezek 28:14; John 14:6; 1 Cor 1:24; Col 2:3; 2 Tim 3:15; Rev 2:7; 21:3, 22; 22:2, 14; 19). While no atonement was necessary before the fall into sin, Adam was created as an Adamic priestly prophet to mediate God’s Edenic temple presence (Gen 2:9, 16–17, 20) to Eve and their descendants, the other members of this royal priesthood (Gen 1:26–28; 2:18–25; Exod 19:6; 20:7; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), which maintained them all in the image of God and a faith-relationship with him. Since cherubim will assume the role of human beings after the fall, Ezekiel 28:11–19 may indirectly depict Adam in high priestly attire. The rest of this kingdom of priests were to assist Adam in the priestly duties of mediating temple presence, offering the Eucharistic sacrifices (i.e., thank offerings of “cultivating/serving” [עבד] and “keeping/guarding” [שמר] of Eden [Gen 2:15; Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14; Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5]), and reflecting the divine image and making God’s name holy among each other through their helping (Gen 2:20). They further assisted Adam in the royal duties of

relationship with the divine via God's life-giving Word and the sacrament of the tree of life (Gen 2:16). Man's ongoing need for a sacrament life was baked into reality from the start. Luther writes again in the Genesis lectures:

So, then, this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or the place where trees of this kind were planted in large number, would have been the church at which Adam, together with his descendants, would have gathered on the Sabbath day. And after refreshing themselves from the tree of life he would have praised God and lauded Him for the dominion over all the creatures on the earth.... Adam would have extolled the greatest gift, namely, that he, together with his descendants, was created according to the likeness of God. He would have admonished his descendants to live a holy and sinless life, to work faithfully in the garden, to watch it carefully, and to beware with the greatest care of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This outward place, ceremonial, word, and worship man would have had; and later on he would have returned to his working and guarding until a predetermined time had been fulfilled, when he would have been translated to heaven with the utmost pleasure.⁷⁶

Human beings are created to be types of their uncreated archetype. As a result, they cannot help but reflect the divine image and make God's name holy. This occurs via their royal priestly acts and in accord with their vocations (Gen 1:28; 2:15, 18; 3:16–19; Rom 13:1–7; 1 Cor 11:7; 12:28–30; Eph 4:11; 5:21–6:9) and gifts (Rom 12:1–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11). In contrast to the passive righteousness which alone frees man from sin, death, and devil; the purpose of active righteousness has always been to freely serve the neighbor and thank God for what has already been gifted to him (i.e., faith and passive righteousness). Active righteousness could never merit what only a divine act of creation (בְּרָא) could bestow. In contrast to Reformed Covenant Theology's covenant of works⁷⁷ and its justification via law,⁷⁸ the law was never meant to be a

mastery and rule of creation (Gen 1:26, 28). Cherubim assumed this role of temple guards after the fall (Gen 3:22–24; Exod 25:18–22; Ezek 1:5; 10:4). Eden seems to have a tripartite structure (Eden, garden, and world) like the temple (holy of holies, holy place, and courtyard). Eden faced east just like Ezekiel's new temple (Gen 3:24; Ezek 28:14–16; 40:6; 43:4). The temporary tabernacle/temples were to face east and were later situated on a mount just like Ezekiel's temple (Num 2:2–3; 3:38; Ezek 40:2). They had furnishings (Exod 35:31), carvings (1 Kgs 6:18, 29, 32, 35; 7:18–20), and gold and onyx that were reminiscent of the garden (Gen 2:11–12; Exod 25:7, 11, 17, 31). A river flowed out from Eden just like the new temple (Gen 2:10; Ezek 47:1–12; Rev 22:1–2). This river became four, one of which was named "Gihon" (גִּיחוֹן) (Gen 2:13; 2 Chr 32:30; 1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 45; 2 Chr 33:14). Creation concluded with the sanctification of Sabbath to signify the gracious relationship and rest that God created for all. The tabernacle also concluded with rest (Gen 2:2–3; Exod 31:12–17; Ezek 20:12–13). Jon Levenson, "The Temple and World," *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 3 (1984): 275–98; Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986): 19–25; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 617–21; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 65; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the Old Testament Commentary Series (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 31, 36, 43. Daniel I. Block raises some criticisms of this idea in "Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, eds. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2013): 3–30.

⁷⁶ LW 1:105–106. See also Gerhard, *On Creation*, 306 (locus 11, par. 114–15); Brochmand, *Systematis Universae Theologiae*, 1:294–97.

⁷⁷ *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, ed. E. F. K. Müller (Waltrop: Hartmut Spenner, 1999), Irish Articles XXI; Westminster Confession VII & XIX; Helvetic Consensus Formula VIII. See also Dudley Fenner, *Sacra Theologica ... Pietam*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: Eustathium Vignon, 1586), 39; Wollebius, "Compendium," 64; Johannes Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, trans. Casey Carmichael (Grand Rapids:

means of meriting the confirmation of one's bliss, much less earning salvation. Luther explains in the *Freedom of the Christian* (1520):

We should think of the works of a Christian who is justified and saved by faith because of the pure and free mercy of God, just as we would think of the works which Adam and Eve did in Paradise, and all their children would have done if they had not sinned. We read in Gen. 2[:15] that "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." Now Adam was created righteous and upright and without sin by God so that he had no need of being justified and made upright through his tilling and keeping the garden; but, that he might not be idle, the Lord gave him a task to do, to cultivate and protect the garden. This task would truly have been the freest of works, done only to please God and not to obtain righteousness, which Adam already had in full measure and which would have been the birthright of us all. The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become or be righteous; but that he may not be idle and may provide for and keep his body, he must do such works freely only to please God. Since, however, we are not wholly recreated, and our faith and love are not yet perfect, these are to be increased, not by external works, however, but of themselves.⁷⁹

Immanuel Kant regarded the fall to be an evolutionary leap from animality towards autonomous human rationality, freedom, and moral consciousness.⁸⁰ But genuine human rationality, freedom, moral consciousness can only be found in a dependent relationship with God. Not only were Adam and Eve created with perfect righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, they had real potential to grow in God. The Scriptures say that Christ himself grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52).⁸¹ It is the pre-fallen man that had the graced human faculties to choose freedom or condemn himself to license (Gen 3:6). Fallen man lacks graced human faculties and only has the power to choose between civil righteousness (Rom 2:14–15) and license until he is recreated (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 51:7; 143:2; Isa 6:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12–21; 14:23; Heb 11:6). Fallen man is like a drug addict who thinks he can quit the drug of sin at any time. Thus, it is the image of God which allows human beings to realize their individual identity and freedom first of all in a trust-based relationship with God, and secondarily in a trust-based relationship with the neighbor. Finally, the goal posts of the law and needs of the neighbor spell out the true moral limits of freedom (Gen 2:16–17; 4:7). Luther states against the Antinomians in the Genesis lectures:

Reformation Heritage Book, 2016), esp. 27–57; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipburg: P&R Publishing, 1992–97), 1:574–78; Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Book, 2018–), 3:369–403; Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 281–300; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1872–73), 2:117–22; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–8), 2:563–76.

⁷⁸ Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *The Concise Marrow of Theology*, trans. Casey Carmichael (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Book, 2019), 64.

⁷⁹ LW 31:360. See also Abraham Calov, *Theologia Positiva ... Seu Compendium Systematic Theologici* (Frankfurt and Wittenberg: Johann Ludolph Quenstedt, 1690), 274–75; Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:330–36.

⁸⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Mary Gregor et al., The Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 164–69 (AA 8:110–15).

⁸¹ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:326–30. See also LW 1:110–11, 113.

But I also stated above why Adam had need of this command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, namely, that there should be an outward form of worship and an outward work of obedience toward God. The angel Gabriel, too, is without sin, a very pure and guiltless creature. And yet he accepts from God the command to instruct Daniel about very important matters (Dan. 8:16) and to announce to Mary that she will be the mother of Christ, who had been promised to the fathers (Luke 1:26). These are in truth commands which were addressed to a guiltless being. ... But Paul is speaking of another Law; for he clearly states that he is speaking about the Law which was not given to the just but to the unjust. Who, then, is either so ignorant or so deranged as to conclude from this that no Law was given to Adam when he hears it stated that Adam was righteous? For nothing else follows from this than that the Law given to the unrighteous is not the same Law that was given to righteous Adam. Moreover, when a Law is given to righteous Adam, it follows that this is a different Law from the one which later was given to the unrighteous.⁸²

Since man was created as a finite, social, and trust-based creature, the Lord God notes that it is not “good” (טוֹב) for the man to be “alone” (בֶּדֶד). He needs a “helper” (עֹזֵר) “corresponding to him” (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ).⁸³ The Lord God creates woman to facilitate human social and procreative needs (Gen 1:28; 2:18–25; 3:17). It would be a mistake to assume that “helpers” are inferior or unequal with those they assist. God himself served as a “helper” of mankind (Gen 49:25; Exod 18:4; Ps 10:14; 54:6, etc.). What is more, God’s role as a helper of mankind indicates that it is not just husbands that need helpers. All human beings need helpers corresponding to them.⁸⁴ This means complementarity, subordination, and even hierarchy were not contrary to human equality in Eden (Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 15:28).⁸⁵ In fact, human societies cannot function without individuals assuming different roles (Rom 12:3–5; 1 Cor 12:12–31) because human beings are finite, social, trust-based creatures who have different gifts and interests. Differences in roles are not the result of the fall. Rather an asocial desire to eliminate asymmetrical relationships altogether in the name of autonomy (Gen 3:1–8) caused the fall. The resulting fallout was the debasement of God, the dehumanization of human beings (Gen 5:1–3; 6:5; 8:21; 9:6), and disorder in the rest of creation (Gen 3:17–19).

Human beings are to live out their vocations in the context of what Luther called orders, estates, or hierarchies (*Ordnungen, Stiftungen, or Hierarchien*). These are spheres of relationships where God has given one benevolent authority over another who is to act in Christ-like submission (1 Cor 15:28), but where both also have mutual responsibilities or duties to each other. The Scriptures speak of three of these estates: the church (Gen 2:16; 1 Cor 14:40), the home (Gen 2:18, 20–25; Eph 5:24; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5; Luke 2:51; Eph 6:1–3; Tit 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18), and the state (Rom 13:1, 5; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13), which is fleshed out in the *Small Catechism*’s Table of Duties.⁸⁶ Nineteenth century Lutherans have also called these “Creator’s orders” (*Schöpferordnungen*) or “orders of creation” (*Schöpfungsordnungen*) because some of

⁸² LW 1:109. The Formula of Concord agrees, “For our first parents did not live without the law even before the fall. This law of God was written into the heart, for they were created in the image of God.” FC Ep VI, 2. See also Calov, *Theologia Positiva*, 270–74.

⁸³ HALOT, 3rd ed., s.v., “עֹזֵר,” DCH, s.v., “עֹזֵר.”

⁸⁴ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 227.

⁸⁵ Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1*, 213–14.

⁸⁶ SC 6; Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Theological Anthropology and Sin*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics (Ft. Wayne: The Luther Academy, 2023), 223–32.

these relationships are explicitly linked with creation in the Scriptures (1 Cor 11:3–16; 1 Tim 2:11–14). Commenting on Genesis 2:16, Luther recounts the emergence of three of these spheres of relationships,

Here we have the establishment of the church before there was any government of the home and of the state; for Eve was not yet created. Moreover, the church is established without walls and without any pomp, in a very spacious and very delightful place. After the church has been established, the household government is also set up, when Eve is added to Adam as his companion. Thus the temple is earlier than the home, and it is also better this way. Moreover, there was no government of the state before sin, for there was no need of it. Civil government is a remedy required by our corrupted nature. It is necessary that lust be held in check by the bonds of the laws and by penalties. For this reason, you may correctly call civil government the rule of sin.⁸⁷

Oswald Bayer notes that Luther at times modified this assessment of the civil government. Luther also regards civil government to be an extension of the home.⁸⁸

Purpose of Creation

The Bible says that God made creation for himself (Prov 16:4; Rom 11:36; Col 1:16). The ultimate purpose of creation was so that it would declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1; 104; 148; Rev 4:11). Its intermediate purpose was to be of use and benefit to human beings (Psa 115:16). In addition to inhabiting it (Isa 45:18; Acts 17:26), humans were to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue, and have dominion over it (Gen 1:26, 28).

Continued Creation

In contrast to modern Lutheran systematic theologies, early modern ones felt the need to give far more attention to continued creation than they did creation.⁸⁹ As already noted, immediate creation or first creation concluded with the first day. Mediate creation or second creation concluded with the sixth day. But Lutherans also regard providence (Gen 1:11–12; 8:22; Neh 9:6; Matt 5:45, 6:26; Acts 14:17; 17:25; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3) or continued creation (*creatio continua*) to be an act of creation.⁹⁰ God continues to create even after the fall by bringing forth new life, preserving his creation, and governing it. This applies to both the regenerate and unregenerate alike (Matt 5:45).

As noted earlier, the Scriptures use the verb “to create” (בָּרָא) to refer to God’s continued creation or providence too. The Psalmist speaks of people who are yet to be born as created by God (Ps 102:18). He likewise calls all new creatures that are being brought forth created (Ps 104:30). God’s creative word is not limited to first creation. It is still effecting second creation and creating from nothing (i.e., from God’s will, power, wisdom, and understanding). Luther states,

⁸⁷ LW 1:103–4. See also LW 37:363–65.

⁸⁸ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 147–52.

⁸⁹ Preus, *The Theology*, 2:167–68.

⁹⁰ Johann Conrad Dannhauer, *ΟΔΟΣΟΦΙΑ Christiana seu Theologia Positiva in certam, plenam & cohaerentem methodum redacta ... proposita* (Straßburg: Friedrich Spoor, 1649), par. 307.

The Sabbath, or the Sabbath rest, denotes that God ceased in such a way that He did not create another heaven and another earth. It does not denote that God gave up preserving and governing the heaven and the earth which had already been created. For in the preceding chapter Moses very plainly informs us about the manner of the creation when he says that God had created all things through the Word: “Let the sea bring forth fish....” These words are in force until today, and for this reason we see increase without end. Therefore if the world were in existence for an infinite number of years, the effectiveness of these words would not pass away; but there would be continuous increase through the power of that Word or, to express myself so, of the original endowment.⁹¹

Over against epicurean chance and stoic determinism, God remains intimately involved in creation. His general omnipresence in the repletive mode upholds reality (Acts 17:28). He does not create a clockwork universe and then abandon it to the laws of nature to manage. God is free to intervene in his creation (Exod 14:21–22; 2 Kgs 2:8–14; Matt 8:23–27). Secondary causes do not prevent him from doing so.⁹² At the same time, the Lutheran fathers affirmed the concursus of first and secondary causes to distinguish ongoing creation from determinism. Quenstedt states,

God not only empowers secondary causes and uphold them ... but he directly enters into the action and operation of a creature in such a way that the effect is accomplished not by God alone or by the creature alone or by God in part and by the creature in part, but it is accomplished by God and creature in one complete working power with God as the universal and first cause and man as the participating and secondary cause.⁹³

Lutheran continued creation or providence is not the same thing as the Neo-Calvinist doctrine of “common grace.”⁹⁴ First of all, common grace is a category mistake. While continued creation or providence is an undeserved non-salvific gift from God, the Scriptures do not call this “grace” like the Neo-Calvinists do. Common grace restrains sin in Neo-Calvinist theology, but this is the function of the law, not grace. Second, common grace seems to be a way of making Reformed double predestination and limited atonement more palatable. God can be “gracious” to all through common grace, and still withhold saving grace from some (i.e., the reprobate).⁹⁵ Third, common grace seems to imply that the unregenerate can do something more than civil righteousness, albeit not good works which require faith. It likewise fosters an optimistic view of cultural progress. In the Arminian tradition, common grace can refer to a prevenient grace which allows the human free will to synergistically chose God and cooperate in conversion.

Recreation

⁹¹ LW 1:75. See also LW 54:400.

⁹² Philipp Melanchthon, *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 41ff (locus 2).

⁹³ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 1:531.

⁹⁴ Abraham Kuypers, *Common Grace*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephan J. Grabill (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015–20); Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 35–65; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2023), 444–60.

⁹⁵ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:154; Steven P. Mueller, ed., *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 168.

As previously stated, the Scriptures also use the verb “to create” (בָּרָא) to refer to the already but not yet recreation of man that takes place in justification. Just as the first man was forensically spoken into being from nothing and passively righteous, so too the believer is forensically spoken into being from nothing and passively righteous. As Luther would put it, God’s words call into existence the new realities they declare. While this recreation happens already in forensic justification, the believer’s full creation does not happen until the last day.

The Psalmist says, “Create in me [בָּרָא־לִי] a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10). The New Testament uses the noun “creation” (κτίσις) and the verb “to create” (κτίζω) for the recreation of the human being. Paul insists that believers are already “new creations” in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation. The old passed away; behold the new has come [καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινὰ].” He says that believers are already “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς) (Eph 2:10). “By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,” Paul says, “[Christ] might create [κτίσῃ] in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace (Eph 2:15). Finally, Paul connects recreation with the new man and restored image of God in Ephesians 4:24.

There are few better ways to close a reflection on creation than Martin Franzmann’s poetic summary of creation in his hymn “Thy Strong Word.”

Thy strong Word did cleave the darkness;
At Thy speaking it was done.
For created light we thank Thee,
While Thine ordered seasons run.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end!⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 1996), hymn 72:1.

God's Creation of Man and Woman: Wonderful News for Souls Hurting in a Gender-Confused World

We the undersigned, Pastors Luke Wolfgramm and Nikolla Bishka, were asked to work together to prepare a paper on God's creation of man and woman making special application to the transgender movement. From 22 February until 4 March 2025, Niko and I met and studied together in Durrës, Albania.

God blessed our in-person discussions and subsequent online meetings. The Lord not only led us to a fresh appreciation for His wonderful creation, but also to a reverent awe for our Savior's tender, zealous heart. During His ministry, the Lord Jesus constantly reached out to wounded souls – people dismissed as too dirty, too broken, and beyond redemption. The Gospels record numerous examples of how Christ transformed lives with His healing word, "I have come to restore God's perfect creation, to make things right between you and God. Your sins are forgiven."

Niko and I have taken turns writing sections of this paper. I am using Arial font and marking Niko's sections with (bold) Times New Roman. Niko will first share how the transgender movement is affecting society in Albania. (We hope his insights will prepare you to discuss challenges you are experiencing in your own ministry contexts.) Next, we will examine basic transgender theory. Finally, and most importantly, the Savior will encourage and equip us to continue His gospel ministry. Indeed, God's creation of man and woman is wonderful news for souls hurting in a gender-confused world!

Introduction

We start this part of our paper in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Brothers in Christ, I am very happy and at the same time feel a big responsibility to write this paper with Pastor Luke because it is my first paper for a CELC meeting.

In earlier times I would never have thought that during my work as a pastor I would have to deal with a paper or have a discussion with members of the LGBTQ community or Gender-Confused. Up until a few years ago, this seemed very far from Albania and even further from our small churches in Durrës and Tirana. Perhaps in your more developed countries you have had more to do with members of this community in your social circles or in your group around the church. Perhaps you have had discussions or clashes with members of the community, and maybe you have more information than I do about this theme. But we always have to be prepared and stay awake as we do not know when the last day will be. And, in this case, we never know when God will put us in a situation in which we must be ready to give an answer based on the Gospel. "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

In Albania this community is small. It might be bigger, but due to the judgment of society many people do not appear openly. Our society is very conservative and pro-family. People do not tolerate having this community in their social or family circle.

However, on TV we are shown something different. Programs supported by various Western NGOs show the LGBTQ community as very successful with a lot of support from society. This is a problem for all of us because a new generation is growing up with a very wrong spirit. When children in school are asked for family information, they are asked for the names of “Parent 1 and Parent 2” and not “Mom and Dad”. This is a very big problem for all of us because in the family and in the church we preach Adam and Eve, Man and Woman, Mom and Dad. We believe and teach what is written in Genesis 1 and 2, about creation, God’s blessings, and that everything we need from birth to death is given to us from God.

God gives us these days here in this blessed meeting a great opportunity to share with each other as much information as we have about this topic and a way to support each other in understanding how we can reach out to these people, helping them with God’s Word and doing our work to share good news with all.

When Pastor Luke informed me that we were asked to write a paper about this topic, I, not having very extensive information and with a sinful and judgmental mind, immediately started reading. I said that we could very well base ourselves on some parts of the Bible such as Genesis or other chapters which first speak of the creation of man and woman and then of the birth of their descendants, as well as chapters about the family.

During our study in Durrës for about 10 days we started by reading parts of the Bible and some materials from WELS “Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman,”¹ which is very informative material and gives a lot of encouragement about the role of man and woman from creation to the present. Then we read and discussed parts of a book by Pastor Mike Novotny called “Taboo.”² At first I was shocked when I started to read that book, but after a while this book helped me to put myself in the place of that pastor and think about what I could do if I were in a similar situation.

One particular part of the book Taboo surprised me because I have never faced cases like this. It surprised me that a member of the LGBTQ community would ask the pastor if her future family would be welcomed in the church. I couldn’t imagine this happening. I do not know if I personally will ever be in such a situation in the church, but I really think that this could be the most difficult discussion I would ever have since my first day in the church as a pastor.

¹ WELS Instruction, Encouragement, and Guidance Regarding God’s Unchanging Truths as Presented in “Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles.” WELS Conference of Presidents, September 2024.

<https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo/?wpdmdl=3422&refresh=670d7b43ec7b41728936771&ind=1728936748937&filename=Instruction,%20encouragement,%20and%20guidance%20on%20Scriptural%20Principles%20of%20Man%20and%20Woman%20Roles.pdf>

² Novotny, Mike. *Taboo: Topics Christians Should be Talking About But Don’t*. United States of America: Fedd Books, 2024.

Understanding Transgenderism

By His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus defeated the father of lies and rescued all people from Satan's gloomy dungeon of death. In order that everyone would hear His living, life-giving news, the Savior sends us believers out. "Go! Go and make disciples of all nations!" That little word "Go!" implies great effort. God's people do not wait for the wounded to find us, we actively seek them. We do not wait for hurting souls to identify and diagnose their spiritual needs, we listen. We stretch ourselves to become "all things to all people" so that we can understand hurts and properly care for souls with Law and Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19ff). We make this effort for one grand reason. St. Paul says, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might SAVE some." With Christ's mission in mind, let us investigate basic gender theory.

At the beginning of time, almighty God spoke His creation into existence. "Let there be light!" And there was. "Let the land produce vegetation!" And immediately trees and shrubs, fruit, grain, and vegetable plants sprang up out of the earth. "Let birds fly in the air! Let the land produce living creatures!" And so, it happened.

To finish His creation, God could have continued this pattern. He could have simply spoken a word and called our first parents into existence. Instead, He did something different, something wonderful. Like a skilled artisan, the Lord God carefully, intentionally formed a body from the dust of the earth. He got His hands dirty (as it were) for us – so close He desires to be with us! Then He breathed into the body He had crafted, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).

But God's work was not finished. "It is not good for the man to be alone." After leading the man to understand the need to complete His creation, the Lord God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. He took flesh from the man's side. And from the rib, just as carefully, just as intentionally, the Lord God made a woman.

"Dear Father, endless praise I render for soul and body strangely joined!"³ Humankind, the brilliant work of God Himself. Man and woman, the crown of creation. Male and female created in the image of God. "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). With these words, brothers and sisters, the Lord God created you and me – yes, all the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. God created two – only two – sexes. And it was very good!

Then tragedy struck.

Sin ruined God's good creation. Perversion. Decay. Sorrow. Pain. Death. We feel it in our bones. We see it in the mirror. And we groan. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-23).

³ Verse 6 of the hymn, "Oh, That I Had a Thousand Voices," Accessed 6 May 2025 <https://www.lutheranchoragebook.com/texts/oh-that-i-had-a-thousand-voices/>.

In our fallen world, defect and disease mar the perfect human body which God originally created in the Garden of Eden. We observe consequences of the fall also in human sexual biology. The vast majority of children are born with physical traits that clearly mark them as either male or female. In other words, most children are born with male or female reproductive organs. Every cell of their bodies possesses either XY (male) or XX (female) chromosomes. These children grow to become sexually mature men and women with all the biological characteristics typical of male and female. Here we are speaking of “biological sex,” or simply, “sex.”

However, sometimes medical problems strike individuals even before birth. “[W]e freely affirm that there are some people who are born in such a way that their innate biology does not clearly indicate whether they are male or female.”⁴ Such a biological malady is called “intersex.”⁵ Intersex describes a wide spectrum of conditions affecting a person’s sexual capabilities and development. For instance, some individuals – about 1 out of 1,666 – are born with neither XY nor XX chromosome sets. Others – about 1 out of 1,000 – are born with Klinefelter syndrome, i.e. with XXY chromosomes. Some are born with ambiguous or irregular genitalia. Some must deal with abnormal hormone levels. Sometimes intersex issues are immediately apparent at birth. In other cases, problems appear only later in life.⁶ “With intersex, people are truly ‘born that way’⁷ and doctors and parents notice something unusual about [the affected person’s] bodies.”⁸

This leads us to the concept of “gender identity,” or simply, “gender.” “Gender Identity” is defined as an “individual’s internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one’s gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.”⁹ “[A] person’s gender identity (a person’s consciousness of being a male or female, and appropriate behavior as such) can be affected a great deal by parental expectations, by social and cultural contexts, as well as by various emotional and physical traumas that can occur in life. To illustrate: conceptions of being a man in 21st century America may differ widely from that of 19th century England. Abuse and sexual violence can undoubtedly have life-altering impacts. In short, we see some value in the sex/gender distinction.”¹⁰

⁴ Wendland, Paul O. “A Pastoral Statement on the Transgender Movement,” 2019, p. 4. <http://essays.wls.edu:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/4507/WendlandTransgender.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

⁵ *Intersex Society of North America (ISN)*, *FAQ Sheet*, “What is Intersex,” Accessed 3 May 2025. https://isna.org/faq/what_is_intersex/.

ISN FAQ Sheet, “How Common is Intersex,” Accessed 3 May 2025 <https://isna.org/faq/frequency/>.

⁶ “If you ask experts at medical centers how often a child is born so noticeably atypical in terms of genitalia that a specialist in sex differentiation is called in, the number comes out to about 1 in 1500 to 1 in 2000 births,” i.e. between 0.07% and 0.05% of births. *ISN FAQ Sheet*, “How Common is Intersex,” Accessed 6 May 2025. <https://isna.org/faq/frequency/>

⁷ A reference to a 2011 song by Lady Gaga, “Born This Way.” “In 2023, *Rolling Stone* named “Born This Way” the Most Inspirational LGBT Song of All Time ... “Born This Way” has sold 8.2 million copies worldwide, making it one of the best-selling singles of all time.” *Wikipedia* “Born This Way (song),” Accessed 6 May 2025.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born_This_Way_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Born_This_Way_(song)).

⁸ Wendland, p. 4.

⁹ Wordell, Nathan A. “Are Transgender People Sinning?” 2016, p. 5. <http://essays.wls.edu:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/4250/Wordell.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁰ Wendland, p. 4.

“It was, in fact, from a biomedical examination of the intersex condition that the term ‘gender identity’ first began to be used.”¹¹ To assist parents in raising children born with intersex,¹² the Intersex Society of North America recommended “giving an intersex newborn a **‘gender assignment as boy or girl’** [emphasis added]. They did not want to involve surgery. Rather parents and diagnosticians would decide to treat the child as a boy or a girl based on what the child was likeliest to feel as his or her gender upon growing up. The ISN believed that marking an intersex child as a third gender would cause them to be discriminated against. They were also against sex re-assignment surgery on the very young, believing that it ought not to be considered until the child was mature enough to make an informed choice on his own.”¹³

Sin has ruined God’s perfect creation of the human body. Scripture and experience demonstrate that our bodies are subject to defect, disease, injury, deterioration, and finally death. Now we must speak of sin’s effects on the mind. Because of the fall, God’s wonderful creation of the human mind is also subject to defect and deterioration ending in death.

For the purposes of our study, we note a malady formerly called *gender identity disorder*.¹⁴ Simply put this is a condition where a man, despite his masculine biology, feels that he is really a woman. Or a woman, despite her feminine biology, feels that she is really a man. “This condition, to be diagnosed as such, had to be accompanied by persistent discomfort with regard to one’s physical sexuality or a sense of inappropriateness when one was urged to participate in the gender roles typically associated with their physical sex. In addition to these diagnostics, a person with gender identity disorder had to experience clinically significant distress and social impairment. **Of no small importance was the fact that this diagnosis specifically excluded those who had been born intersex** [emphasis added].”¹⁵

In March 2022, the American Psychological Association (APA) published the fifth edition of their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5). This edition includes an important change. No longer does the APA diagnose individuals with *gender identity disorder*, instead they speak of *gender dysphoria*. “Euphoria” is strong word defined as “a state of intense happiness.”¹⁶ “Dysphoria” is the opposite. Merriam-Webster defines *gender dysphoria* as, “a distressed state arising from conflict between a person’s gender identity and the sex the person was identified as having at birth.”¹⁷

¹¹ Wendland, footnote on p. 5. Here Wendland is citing information from a book. See Marina Cortez, Paula Gaudenzi, and Ivia Maksud, “Gender: pathways and dialogues between feminist and biomedical studies from the 1950s to 1970s,” in *Physis: Revista de Saúde Coletiva*, Vol.29 no.1 Rio de Janeiro (2019).

¹² Let us please take a moment to acknowledge the heartache and confusion such parents must feel as they wrestle to raise children with this kind of intensely personal medical issue.

¹³ Wendland, footnote on p. 5. Here Wendland is citing information from *ISN FAQ Sheet*, “What does ISNA recommend for children with intersex,” Accessed 28 September 2019. <https://isna.org/faq/patient-centered>.

¹⁴ This was the terminology used by the American Psychological Association in the fourth edition of their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) published in 1994.

¹⁵ Wendland, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Dictionary.com*, entry under “euphoria.” Accessed 6 May 2025, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/euphoria>

¹⁷ *Meriam-Webster*, entry under “gender dysphoria,” Accessed 6 May 2025, from

The updated diagnosis *gender dysphoria* avoids pronouncing moral or ethical judgments on patients.¹⁸ But there is more. Notice that the two diagnoses identify different targets for treatment. In the case of *gender identity disorder*, the problem is “the **mismatch** [emphasis added] between gender identity and biological sex ... [But in the case of *gender dysphoria*, the problem] is the **emotional distress itself** [emphasis added] – the anxiety, the restlessness, and depression – that one feels. The therapeutic solution is therefore not necessarily to work towards a realignment of ... feelings with ... bodies. It may rather be to align ... bodies with ... feelings.”¹⁹

And so, we have arrived at the topic of transgenderism itself. Transgenderism seeks to remedy an individual’s internal distress, i.e. *gender dysphoria*, by making his/her body “cross over” from male to female or female to male. Matching external physical presentation to internal gender perception is called “gender affirming care.”

“When gender dysphoria happens, there are a number of options that vary in effort, visibility, and reversibility. You could just deal with it and hope it goes away, which it does for many kids as they grow older. Or you could change your outfit to experiment with clothing normally worn by the other gender, hoping that what you see in the mirror feels better to your brain. Or you could change your ID and ask others to use a new name that lines up with your felt gender. Or you could change your hormones, taking puberty blockers or testosterone boosters that would alter your body in various ways. Or you could go all the way and surgically change your body, your facial structure, your voice, your private parts, etc., so that your body would match your brain.”²⁰

Transgender theory is harmful because it contradicts Scripture’s beautiful teaching of creation in at least four ways.²¹ First, transgenderism presupposes that our world came into existence merely by chance through a random, meaningless process of evolution. Transgenderism rejects God’s good purpose in creation, especially His wise, intentional design of creating individuals as male and female.

Second, transgenderism flows from extreme postmodern philosophy which dismisses the concept of objective truth. “It is simply not true to say that people are radically free to re-shape their world in any way they please, based upon their thoughts, feelings, and desires ... There can be no compromise with a philosophy that rejects the objectivity of God’s purpose and design for the world he has made.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender%20dysphoria>.

The entry defining *gender dysphoria* includes this example: “I am a 24-year-old transgender woman, and I know *gender dysphoria* very well. My distress over my physical body, my feeling that it doesn’t always match up with my gender identity, often lurks in some far corner of my mind. It doesn’t matter how well I’m dressed, how much I brush my hair, how many compliments I receive, or how well my hormone therapy treatment is working. When *gender dysphoria* hits, it packs a punch. – Serena Sonoma”

¹⁸ “This same argument was made regarding the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973.” Wordell, footnote on p. 10.

¹⁹ Wendland, p. 3.

²⁰ Novotny, pp. 109-110.

²¹ Here I am relying on the WELS *Statement on Human Sexuality, Personhood, Identity, and the Historic Christian Faith*. Approved by the Conference of Presidents, October 21, 2019.

<https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo/?wpdmdl=3422&ind=1574366466395>

Our words do not make the world; God's Word does (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26; Ps 33:6-9; Heb 11:3)."²²

Third, transgenderism is a modern version of Gnostic heresy. Like the ancient Greeks, transgenderism teaches that "the body is a mere 'meat-skeleton' and that what you feel defines your essence ... that people are free to discard, reshape, and transform [their bodies] in any way that best pleases their minds. ... To believe these untruths is to reject the goodness of our Creator and to despise the gifts of body and soul he has given us (Rom 1:21; 9:20). ... Matter matters."²³

Finally, it is neither right nor possible to change one's God-given sex or gender.²⁴ Although it may be possible to distinguish the concept of "gender" from "biological sex," nevertheless, "it is morally wrong to assert that one's sex can be *separated* from gender identity so radically that one's 'true' gender is derived from what one feels without reference to body."²⁵ "While we reject the false ideology of transgender theory as contrary to natural law and Scripture, we retain every sympathy for individuals whose sinful natures are adversely influenced by the powerful voices of their peers and their culture. We pledge to express our love to them in every way possible that remains consistent with our biblical confession."²⁶

There are many useful questions and topics which we cannot explore now in this paper. We cannot investigate the causes of transgenderism. Is there a biological or genetic disposition that leads to *gender dysphoria*? Are psychological or social causes at work? We cannot present rational, apologetic arguments against transgenderism.²⁷ We cannot expound the dangers transgenderism poses to society. Nor is our purpose to advocate political reform to defend society.

Suffice it to say that transgender philosophy threatens individual perception of self, the institution of marriage, the legitimacy of the family, and even the nature of truth. "The overall goal for many in this movement is to destroy a blinkered binary worldview that holds people captive to rigid categories such as male and female. Binary language like this is seen as oppressive, an attempt to lasso free spirits and to keep [them] from expressing their true identities in a preferred multi-valent, gender-fluid universe."²⁸ We are "dealing with an ideology that changes perceptions of reality and that creates entirely new cultural norms for society which have no precedents in human history."²⁹

Instead of focusing broadly on the transgender movement, let us turn our attention to bringing God's good news to wounded individuals.

²² *Statement on Human Sexuality*. p. 3.

²³ *Statement on Human Sexuality*. p. 3. The phrase "meat-skeleton" comes from a BBC interview with a young woman as quoted in Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019, p. 197.

²⁴ Please note that the discussion here is not directed toward individuals with intersex.

²⁵ Wendland, p. 8. He later adds that transgender advocates claim "one's gender identity ... is more determinative of one's personhood than one's biological sex." p. 11.

²⁶ *Statement on Human Sexuality*. pp. 3-4.

²⁷ Logical arguments based on human reason are useful for exposing weaknesses in transgender thinking. See pp. 7-19 of Prof. Em. Wendland's "Pastoral Statement."

²⁸ Wendland, pp. 5-6.

²⁹ Wendland, p. 1.

God Prepares Us to Be His Witnesses in a Gender-Confused World

I have heard conservative Bible commentators say something like this: “Homosexuality is the lowest rung on the ladder. It is a sin against nature, open rebellion against God. It is not only a sin, but the punishment for sin.” Preparation for this paper has led me to see that these statements are incomplete. In fact, such thinking may cloak anti-evangelical arrogance.

In her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into the Christian Faith*, Rosaria Butterfield describes her life as an atheist, lesbian, social activist. Before she came to faith, Rosaria viewed Christians as ignorant bigots. “The closest I ever got to Christians during these times were students who refused to read material in university classrooms on the grounds that ‘knowing Jesus’ meant never needing to know anything else; people who sent me hate mail; or people who carried signs at gay pride marches that read ‘God Hates Fags’. ... The lesbian community was home and home felt safe and secure; the people that I knew the best and cared about were in that community; and finally, the lesbian community was accepting and welcoming while the Christian community appeared (and too often is) exclusive, judgmental, scornful, and afraid of diversity.”³⁰

Even worse for Rosaria was a later experience:

“Shortly after becoming a Christian, I counseled a woman who was in a closeted lesbian relationship and a member of a Bible-believing church. No one in her church knew. Therefore, no one in her church was praying for her. Therefore, she sought and received no counsel. There was no ‘bearing one with the other’ for her. No confession. No repentance. No healing. No joy in Christ. Just isolation. And shame. And pretense. Someone had sold her the pack of lies that said that God can heal your lying tongue or your broken heart, even your cancer if he chooses, but he can’t transform your sexuality. I told her that my heart breaks for her isolation and shame and asked her why she didn’t share her struggle with anyone in her church. She said: ‘Rosaria, if people in my church really believed that gay people could be transformed by Christ, they wouldn’t talk about us or pray about us in the hateful way that they do.’

Christian reader, is this what people say about you when they hear you talk and pray? Do your prayers rise no higher than your prejudice?”³¹

Rosaria’s question hits hard. I have come to apply her question to myself this way: If one of my children was struggling with a sexual sin,³² would he or she find courage to share their burden with me? Or have I unintentionally signaled that I am dangerous, that I will only add to their hurt and shame?³³ “Don’t tell Dad!” God forbid

³⁰ Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into the Christian Faith*. Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2012, pp. 4-5.

³¹ Butterfield, p. 24.

³² The sin need not be sexual. Mike Novotny’s book, *Taboo*, provides good food for thought.

³³ How might struggling souls interpret our comments about politics and social issues? What do the collective social media postings of church members contribute to congregational reputations? How well are we balancing left-hand and right-hand kingdom issues? Is the gospel predominating?

that I would lead my children to seek support from the world – friends, teachers, or counselors – instead of Christ!

Self-righteous arrogance erects barriers against evangelism. The cure for arrogance is humility, and the Lord Jesus provides that cure. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5).

“But, Lord, we’re talking about transgenderism! These people insist men can become pregnant!³⁴ They demand that I affirm their delusion, that I call him, “her,” and her, “sir”! I confess I still have a speck or two in my eyes, but transgenderism must be the plank in this discussion!”

Besides, doesn’t St. Paul point out homosexuality (let alone transgenderism!) as the lowest of sins? “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error” (Romans 1:26-27).

If St. Paul were with us today, he would encourage us to keep reading. Yes, God delivered sinners over to homosexuality. But because of their “depraved minds” fallen people commit other, more familiar sins – sins like greed, envy, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, arrogance, boasting, and disobedience to parents (see Romans 1:28-30). We don’t often equate greed and gossip with homosexuality. We don’t often label those sins as “depravity.” But God does.

There is more. The Apostle Paul springs his trap and catches all of us with the first words of Romans 2. “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ... So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?” (Romans 2:1, 3). Can it really be? By judging homosexuals and transgender individuals as the worst sinners, am I only condemning myself? That’s hard to accept. My head knows, “We are all sinners.” But it is difficult (at least for me) to acknowledge the full evil of my heart.

That is why the Lord Jesus preached about Sodom in Matthew 11.³⁵ “And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:23-24). Of course, Jesus is not

³⁴ “Can Men Become Pregnant” 18 December 2023. *Medical News Today*, Accessed 13 May 2025. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/can-men-become-pregnant>.

³⁵ There are more passages where God compares the sins of Sodom with the sins of His people. Consider Ezekiel 16:48-50. That passage starts this way, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.”

excusing Sodom; He is making a comparison. In a way, the sins of those who know Him are more offensive than the sins of the godless. Believers sin against better knowledge. How might the Lord Jesus preach this truth to me today? Might He first point out the incredible spiritual blessings He has given me? Might He then say, “Luke, do you see those godless transgender activists? If they had enjoyed your spiritual privileges, they would have repented. They would be more dedicated, more fruitful believers than you!”³⁶

I notice that all of us are wearing clothes. Things were different in the perfection of Eden. “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). Sin changed our concept of sex. Immediately after the fall, the man and woman felt shame. They felt guilt. They were confused about their bodies and their sexuality. They couldn’t even look at each other anymore. They sewed fig-leaf clothing in a ridiculous attempt to cover themselves. God recognized this new reality and provided our first parents with more durable leather garments.

The lesson is clear: We – all of us – are fallen creatures. Because of sin it is difficult even to imagine God’s pure design in creating us male and female.³⁷ When we compare our present state to our original perfection now lost, the difference between us and others fades. Yes, each of us has unique weaknesses, temptations, histories, and sins, but we are all equally confused sexually. Without Christ our ideas about sex become grotesque and selfish. Lust displaces love. This is perversion, the opposite of God’s design. And so, we wear clothes. And Jesus asks, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” “Ah, Lord, I’m starting to understand. Have mercy on me.”

What does the Lord Jesus say to fallen sinners like us? At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was teaching inside a crowded house (Mark 2). Four men lowered their paralyzed friend through the roof. To this helpless man, the Savior said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Then He restored the man’s broken body, “Get up and walk!”

On another occasion a man fell at Jesus’ feet. The man’s flesh was ugly with decay that refused to wait for the grave (Luke 5:12). (No wonder the Bible uses leprosy to illustrate the horror of sin!) “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Jesus touched the man. (*He touched him!*) “I am willing. Be clean!”

Another day Jesus was tired and thirsty – and He had work to do. As He rested by the well, a Samaritan woman came out to draw water (John 4). “Could you please give Me a drink? If you knew Me, you would ask Me for My living water, and you would never thirst again. Go call your husband. You are right to say you have no husband. In fact, you have had five husbands and the man you are with now is not your husband. Oh yes, what you say is entirely true ... I am He! I have come for you.”

On still another day Jesus stood looking up at a rich man perched in a fig tree (Luke 19). “Zacchaeus, come down! I must stay at your house today.” “But Lord, why eat with a sinner? This man is living in open rebellion against God!” “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”

³⁶ St. Paul also reserves his sharpest preaching for lifelong believers, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Romans 2:24).

³⁷ Have you been tempted (like me) to omit Genesis 2:25 when telling how God instituted marriage?

For each of these individuals, the Son of God forsook the infinite euphoria of heaven. For you, for me, He took on flesh and embraced the dark dysphoria of sin – every shameful sin we have committed with our bodies and against our bodies. In your place, in place of everyone who has ever lived in defiance against God, the Lord Jesus offered His body to be broken on the cross. And His work was a success. It is finished. All things are new. Our bodies are redeemed and whole, washed and restored. He lives. His promise is true. By faith in Him who cannot lie, we grasp Christ's victory already today. Clinging to His promise, we defy deformity and injury, disease and old age, the grave and every physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual scar.

We are children of the resurrection. We live to do Christ's great mission.

God Sends Us as His Witnesses into a Gender-Confused World

Several weeks ago, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary – Grow in Grace posted the April edition of "The Four Branches Review." This newsletter contains the final installment of a four-part series written by Pastor Steven Lange on God's creation.³⁸ I had been paying special attention to these articles since I was preparing for this paper, and Steve was my classmate in college (1993) and seminary (1997).³⁹

In his concluding article, my dear, gifted brother shared a personal revelation. He was the victim of childhood sexual abuse. As a result of this abuse, Steve had suffered for years from *profound body dysmorphia*. (Note this condition is not *gender dysphoria*.) Steve explains, "For decades, I hated my body, saw it as defective and deficient, and wished I could have any body other than the body God gave me."

He wants us to know that he is not the only one struggling.

"[The] survivors of sexual trauma ... are sitting in your pews. They are there, brothers, in shocking numbers. Some of you are among those survivors. Not every survivor of sexual trauma develops body dysmorphia as I did. But my conversations with many fellow survivors have shown me that sexual trauma has a way of making a person feel separate from and antagonistic toward the body God has given them. Sometimes this sexual trauma can lead a person to want to abandon their God-given sex and reshape their body so that it resembles the opposite sex. Multiple studies have shown that a substantial number of adolescents who struggle with their gender identity have experienced childhood sexual trauma. These people are sitting in your pews as well.

³⁸ Lange, Steven. "Systematic Theology: The Value of Valuing Our God-Given Bodies," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary – Grow in Grace, *The Four Branches Review*, April 2025. Accessed 24 April 2025. Pastor Lange's four articles are posted at the following sites:

<https://www.wisluthsem.org/four-branches-jan-25/#systematic>.

<https://www.wisluthsem.org/four-branches-feb-25/#systematic>.

<https://www.wisluthsem.org/four-branches-mar-25/#systematic>.

<https://www.wisluthsem.org/four-branches-apr-25/#systematic>.

³⁹ Steve was our only class president. We consistently elected him by unanimous vote.

Then there are the young men and women who haven't experienced sexual trauma but are in the middle of that difficult phase of life we call puberty. Their bodies are changing, often in ways that they don't like. The culture we live in tells them that the discomfort they're feeling toward their body means that they must have been born in the wrong body. These young people may not go down the path of trying to change their bodies. But that doesn't mean they're not struggling."

People inside our congregations – children, adolescents, parents, and adults – desperately need God's good news.⁴⁰ And there are many more suffering outside the Savior's flock. The Bible describes their pain: "[T]he agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes. During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them"⁴¹ (Revelation 9:5-6). Certainly, this end-time prophecy includes the pain of *gender dysphoria*.

"It is agonizing to feel out of sorts with one's biological gender, to be a stranger in one's own body, to feel alienated from one's own natal gender, and to identify with a sex not yours by birth. To feel the shame and stigma of not meeting the behavioral expectations of peers, parents, and society. This psycho-social pain is not to be minimized, much less disdained or mocked by caring Christians. Add to this the greater incidence of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse within the transgender community.⁴² One benchmark figure alone is deeply sobering: 'The rate of **lifetime suicide attempts** across all ages of transgender individuals is estimated at **41%** [emphasis added], compared to under 5% in the overall U.S. population.'⁴³

In the face of such pain, Jesus' Church must act. We must act. We have wonderful news – the only news – that relieves the world's pain.

"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5). The Lord God carefully, intentionally formed Adam from dust. In the same way (Jeremiah uses the same verb), our Creator carefully formed you in your mother's womb. He gave you the exact body needed to make you, you.

And take a moment to enjoy Psalm 139:13-17. "You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are Your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!"

⁴⁰ Because of the personal nature of their hurts, our people might be slow to disclose their needs.

⁴¹ Pastor Jonathan P. Bauer has written an excellent article on bringing Christ's relief to modern anxiety. See "Bringing Christ into the World of the Scream: Communicating the Gospel to Products of a Post-Christian World," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 116, No. 3 (Summer 2019).

⁴² Not to be overlooked are those who obtained irreversible "gender affirming care" and now regret their decisions. (Imagine their pain.) How can we seek and welcome these hurting souls? How can we introduce them to the Good Shepherd? How can we love and encourage them?

⁴³ Wendland, pp. 6-7.

Do not underestimate the power of these words! Keep preaching the wonderful news of God's creation.

Finally, we suggest two practical ways that Christian congregations can serve as witnesses in our gender-confused world: Celebration and Safety. Let's publicly celebrate God's creation of man and woman. And let's work to make our churches welcoming refuges where all of us sinners rejoice together in Jesus' mercy.

Celebration: Jesus' Church Celebrates God's Creation of Man and Woman

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see how in the beginning God created everything perfect starting with the earth, the sky, the sun and the moon. He then created the seas and rivers and the places where we live. Then he made sure that we had food, so he created the trees, the fruits, and the different animals. He created everything perfectly so that when he created man, everything that he consumed would be something perfect that God had created for him. So God created Man. Then he gave him a helper and life partner – Woman. The two together could continue to create life under the blessing of God.

Although God created them and gave them everything good so that the whole world was under their feet, the first man sinned. Every man after him sinned as well. Our sinful flesh is present with us in every action we do. When Adam and Eve sinned, God promised to punish them and also their descendants because of their sin.

But besides all the punishments and evils that God told them would happen because of the fall into sin, God promised them that even though they would die because of their sin, he would still bring a Savior to forgive the sins of all. When we have the opportunity to talk with transgender people or Gender-Confused who have doubts about whether or not they can be saved from their sins, we can remind them that God sent the Savior to die for all people, to forgive the sins of all people.

The WELS doctrinal statement "Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles" shows how God created us as human beings. He created our biological sex and he gave us different responsibilities, but he designed us to be Better Together, Different and Equal at the same time. He designed Man as the head and Woman as his helper. And he designed Marriage for us.

In the marriage section of Ephesians 5 we see very clearly in all the verses how God describes marriage. He divides the work of the husband and wife in marriage and in the family. Here we also see the comparisons that God gives to the husband as Christ and the wife as the church.

In Albania in previous years even though people did not have knowledge about the Bible they were more devout in marriage. The husband and wife respected each other and before living together they performed a marriage. Although it was not a church marriage, it was an official marriage. In today's times many young couples live together and create families without getting married. After a few years they might get divorced. This is not good because it affects both children and people in society who follow this wrong example.

Living a Christian life is a blessing in sinful society. Nowadays it is so easy to fall into sin. We Christians know it is very important to be a light in our neighborhood, in our group of friends, in our workplace, etc., so we can make a way as the people of God to share his Good News.

We Christians have a lot of good news in our lives to share with others, starting with the creation of man and woman and continuing with marriage. Here in Albania we have a specific word that is very significant “Te Trashëgoheni,” which means to be fruitful and have descendants. God’s creation of the family and its continuation with descendants is more good news. But that’s not all. We even have a place where we can all gather and thank our God who created us, gave us life, forgives us, and protects us every day. That is the Church. Best of all, we have a Savior who came for us, and not just for us here in this meeting, but for all the people he created in the world. Our Savior was born as a man, lived a life without sin, suffered on the cross, died, and was resurrected just to save us from our sins so that we would have eternal life. So we no longer have to fear the day of judgment, because we know that Jesus was resurrected for us and will take us to be with him. This is a free gift.

How can we as a church celebrate God’s creation of man and woman in Albania? We can celebrate marriage. In our church we have couples who have been married a long time. They can live their lives according to Ephesians 5. Husbands can love their wives and sacrifice for them, just like Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her. Wives can submit to their husbands and show them respect, just like the Church submits to Christ. Also we can show young people the blessings of marriage and encourage them to get married instead of living together without being married.

If we live a life according to God’s will and also the members of our church live a life where they show Jesus first in their lives, this can be a way to help others come closer to Jesus. Let society see that we are different. Our lives are like “sermons without words” that open doors to share God’s good news. “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Safety: Jesus’ Church is a Hospital for Sinners Not a Museum of “Saints”

Do you remember Rosaria? Are you wondering how the Lord Jesus won that militant atheist? Rosaria was a well-known figure in her town. As an outspoken activist for the LGBT community, Rosaria got two kinds of letters. She dutifully sorted those letters into two piles: fan-mail and hate-mail.

Then one day she got a letter that didn’t fit. It sat on her desk unsorted for a week. The letter came from a conservative Presbyterian pastor. Pastor Ken’s letter was not fan-mail, but it was not hate-mail either. Without condoning her sin, Pastor Ken demonstrated respect and concern. He was courteous. He and his wife invited Rosaria for supper at their home. Rosaria accepted the invitation. She talked, and Pastor Ken listened. And so began an unlikely dialogue that eventually led to repentance, faith, and new life in Christ.

Do you remember how the Lord Jesus spoke with the woman at Jacob’s well? In a conversation charged with (one-sided) racial prejudice, the Savior didn’t fit. He refused to condone the woman’s sins (“Go call your husband”) or her bad Samaritan

theology (“Salvation is from the Jews”). But He did not attack the woman. Everyone knew that Jews don’t associate with Samaritans, nevertheless, He initiated a friendly conversation (“Can you please give Me a drink?”). He spoke winsomely. (“If only you knew Me! I would give you living water.”) And He reaped a great harvest. The concluding words of the men of Sychar astound us, “We know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). *The Savior of the world?!*

Jesus didn’t only die for the world. He speaks to the world – the whole world. He wants to speak through us.

Perhaps Jesus’ perfectly balanced reputation is a miracle that deserves more attention. How did He do it? Everyone knew that the Rabbi opposed prostitution, but the prostitutes knew He would welcome them and share good news. And they loved Him. They clung to His words. And He transformed their lives.

In a world polarized politically, socially, racially, etc. let’s (with God’s help) be the church that doesn’t fit. No, we aren’t the church that condones sin. Nor are we the judgmental church of hate. Instead, we gladly, humbly, earnestly seek and welcome sinners – all sinners. Jesus’ mercy is our great love, our treasure, our boast.

Conclusion

Our study has application beyond serving people who identify as transgender. We have explored the heart of our evangelical mission. Brothers and sisters, rest in Christ’s promises. Enjoy His grace. We have a real Savior who welcomes, forgives, and heals real sinners. And may the risen Christ give you joy to proclaim His good news to all people.

Pastor Luke Wolfgramm (Leipzig, Germany)
Pastor Nikolla Bishka (Durrës, Albania)

The Creation of Man with Body and Soul: today's challenges

Uģis Sildegs (Riga, Latvia)

The biblical doctrine of creation is a crucial one. It is a truth that holds our bones together. It is a truth that stirs our breath. We have to speak of the creation story where God Himself steps into the dirt to craft something new. Picture the earth, fresh from God's hand, its rivers sparkling, its hills humming with life. On the sixth day, the Creator pauses, having spoken light, seas, and stars into being, ready to craft His crowning work: humanity (Genesis 1:3–14). But now, He kneels. From the ground, He gathers dust. Yet in God's hands, this dust, this clod, this earth becomes a human body. This body is God's creation, no accident of chance, but a form deliberate and good, as Luther saw it, “wonderfully united” with what's to come (LW 1:62). Simply put, this body is not an accident, but God's good and perfect design.

But a body without life is clay, not man. Here's where the tale turns wondrous, and doctrine deepens. The Almighty drawing near the dust, His glory veiled in love. From His own being flows the breath of life, a divine wind that enters the nostrils of the clod (Genesis 2:7). Moses calls this breath God's own, not mere air but the soul itself. Luther would say, “The whole man, soul and body, is God's work” (LW 33:64). The doctrine stands: the soul is no floating spirit, no Gnostic escapee, but the life God gives, wedded to flesh so tightly that to part them is to end both. The separation means death.

The man asks, with eyes wide open, what or who is he? Humble, frail, destined for ashes and dust. Yet more: man bears God's image (Genesis 1:26–27). This image, while debated, reflects God's relational, rational, and moral likeness, expressed through body and soul in harmony. It means: in body and soul, man reflects his Maker—not in pride, but in a divine form, a stamp of fidelity that sets him apart. Luther saw this as grace, not merit (LW 31:352). So man's likeness to God is our blessedness. The body's curves, the soul's longing—they point to the invisible God, a masterpiece of dust and spirit working and playing together. Likewise, the church father Augustine in his *City of God* affirmed that the soul, though distinct, is not superior to the body but united with it by God's good design.

However, we should always be reminded—this life is not ours to claim. Every breath is a gift, held in God's hand, as the Scriptures remind us (Psalm 100:3, Psalm 104:24). “The gift of our breath rests in His palm,” a thread tied to the Giver. Without His Spirit, we would be void—“earth, without form, empty, darkness upon the deep,” as it echoes Genesis 1:2. The soul, linked to higher realms, feels this pull, a mystery that makes us strangers to ourselves until we seek and find the First Cause: God Himself.

Imagine a world where God's hand withdraws, a world unstirred by His breath—a human figure, lifeless on a barren plain. No light dances in its eyes, no warmth pulses in its veins. This is man without God, and the sight chills the heart. Moses whispers a serious warning: without God's influence, the whole man seems to be nothing but earth, without form, empty,

and darkness upon the face of the deep (cf. Genesis 1:2). Consider it now—the body, once a clod shaped by divine fingers, crumbles back to dust, shapeless and void. This paints a grim truth about humans: apart from God, humanity is mere clay, no spark within, no purpose to hold it fast. It is as if the earth reclaims what was never truly alive, a shadow of the creation God intended.

Luther reminds us why these warnings are so serious: sin has corrupted the whole being, twisting both body and soul, turning man inward, away from his Maker (LW 31:352). Without God's grace, the soul lies dormant, not soaring but sinking into the dust it joined. The body—its arms, its face—becomes a hollow shell, what J.G. Hamann has called the “hidden figure,” pointing to a “hidden person within” that fades without divine light. No breath animates it, no Spirit stirs it. It is a form, but not a life. It is a form stripped of vitality, a silhouette of life bereft of the divine spark. Like a tree withered at its root, man spiritually dead stands motionless, his heart a silent sepulcher, his eyes blind to the glory above.

However, even in this imagined void, the memory of God's breath still lingers, a promise that humanity was never meant for darkness. The body, though dust, still bears the soul God breathed into it. Luther points to grace—he points to the merciful hand of God which can breathe anew the life that sin has quenched: “God works through this flesh” (LW 31:352). This spiritual emptiness is not the end, but a warning—a call to turn back to the One who forms, enlivens, redeems. Without God, man is and remains earth, shapeless, empty—a deep shrouded in night.

But this is no final word, only a shadow cast to reveal the truth: humanity's identity, its purpose, hangs on the breath of God, the grace that refuses to let dust lie still. Yet, as we marvel at this divine design, we cannot ignore the forces that seek to unravel it. The biblical vision of humanity—body and soul united—stands in stark contrast to the fragmented philosophies of our age. These modern ideologies, echoing ancient errors in new forms, threaten to tear apart what God has joined.

Chief among them is what Francis Schaeffer called the “two-story worldview,” a divided lens that splits truth into a lower realm of scientific facts (biology, matter) and an upper realm of moral values (choice, identity). This fracture, born of Enlightenment precision and Romantic longing, distorts our understanding of personhood and fuels moral crises—abortion, euthanasia, hookup culture—where the body is reduced to a machine and the self reigns supreme.

The moral challenges

Thus, there is “below” and there is “above.” Here below, the body is mere biology, a fact to be studied, optimized, or discarded. And here above, the “person” reigns, defined by choice, feeling, or cognition. This dichotomy assumes the body belongs to the lower story, while the authentic self floats in the upper story. Here the world has separated what God joined together.

The challenges of this worldview unfold in stark clarity across today's moral landscape. In **abortion** debates, the lower story measures a fetus's cells—heartbeats, DNA—yet denies it personhood until the upper story grants cognitive or sentient status.

Euthanasia arguments mirror the same divide. The body, racked by pain, is reduced to a lower-story “machine”—failing organs, measurable suffering. The person, aloft in the upper story, seeks dignity through choice, framing death as compassion. While proponents argue that choosing death preserves dignity, Holy Scripture counters that true dignity lies in God's sustaining grace, even in suffering (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Hookup culture, too, bears the two-story mark. Bodies are reduced to images—swiped in apps, used, abused and discarded—while the upper story's “self” seeks pleasure free of all commitments. Sex, stripped of procreation or covenant, becomes merely a lower-story act.

The two-story worldview fuels broader cultural tides. Modernism, enthroning the lower story, crowns science as truth—think of AI algorithms dictating health policies or genetic edits redefining “human.” Postmodernism, flipping the script, lifts the upper story higher, casting facts as cultural constructs. The further that goes, the more the truth is revealed: without God's Spirit and influence, man is earth, empty, darkness upon the deep. Abortion, euthanasia, and hookup culture thrive in this void, each a symptom of a body/person split that denies Genesis's unity.

To all of that we confess that God shaped humanity with care, breathing life into dust to unite body and soul as one (Genesis 2:7). We are a unity. This is His beautiful design: a seamless whole of body and soul. Against abortion, we cherish the sacred life God sparks at conception; against euthanasia, we honor the body's holiness in every circumstance; against hookup culture, we uphold love and sex as God intended, rooted in marriage and mirrored in His own self-giving. We reject the false divide that tears apart what God has woven together, standing boldly for His unified vision of humanity.

Modern shadows of an ancient heresy

Yet, this is not the only shadow cast across our time. Another ancient heresy, **Gnosticism**, reemerges in a modern guise, subtly weaving its divisive threads through our culture. Condemned by the early church, Gnosticism scorned the physical as evil, exalting the spiritual as divine. It whispered that matter is a prison, the body a flawed cage, and the soul the true prize, destined to escape a world crafted not by God but by a lesser, malevolent force. Most gravely, it denied the Incarnation—how could most holy God take on flesh, as John 1:14 proclaims? Instead, it claimed that Jesus *merely appeared* human, a phantom too pure for the taint of earth. Today, neo-Gnosticism takes new forms, no less fracturing, shaping secular tides and cultural trends with a disdain for the body and a longing to transcend its limits.

In this whirlwind of modern shadows—**neo-Gnosticism's** rejection of flesh, the two-story worldview's divided truth, postmodernism's fluid mirages—we find a steady guide in Irenaeus (particularly in his work *Against Heresies*), the early church father whose battle against Gnosticism helps to light our path today. Irenaeus gazed upon creation through the radiant lens of Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), seeing in Genesis not merely a beginning but a story woven by the Father through His Son and Spirit, Holy Trinity. For Irenaeus, John 1:3—“all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made”—rang clear: the God of Jesus Christ, not some *demiurge*, has shaped humanity from Eden's dust with His deliberate love. When Genesis 2:7 sings, “God formed man, taking dust from the earth,” Irenaeus saw the Father's hands—the Son and Spirit—kneading clay with divine care, and crafting body and soul as one.

Irenaeus's vision binds creation to redemption in a seamless thread. He saw the dust of Genesis mirrored in the mud Christ used to heal the blind man (John 9:1–12), proclaiming that the Word who formed Adam stooped again to touch earth, restoring sight, recreating and affirming creation's goodness. This act, Irenaeus taught, reveals the “original fashioning of man,” where Christ, the second Adam, reclaims and perfects humanity's story. His theology looks backward and forward: the incarnation and resurrection illuminate Adam's birth, showing body and soul not as rivals but as God's unified art, bearing His image (Genesis 1:26–27). To read Scripture otherwise, Irenaeus warned, is to miss the Christ-centered truth that holds all things together.

This ancient fight against Gnosticism speaks directly to our modern struggles. Neo-Gnosticism, like its ancient predecessor, scorns the body as a mere husk, exalting the inner self as the true essence. In **transgender narratives**, this manifests as a view of the body as a neutral or even hostile shell, misaligned with the “real” self within. The soul—or, in modern terms, the self—becomes the arbiter of identity, while the body's form, its chromosomes (XX or XY), or its biological design is deemed incidental, a canvas to reshape at will. This framing echoes Gnosticism's claim that matter is a prison, detachable from the spirit's truth. Yet, Genesis 1:27 declares that God created humanity “male and female,” weaving sexual difference into the fabric of His “very good” design (Genesis 1:31). Irenaeus, with his Christ-centered lens, would point to the incarnation—God taking flesh as a man (John 1:14)—to affirm that the human body is no accident but a divine gift, integral to who we are. To pit self against body is to fracture what God has joined, denying the harmony of His creation.

This neo-Gnostic drift also touches debates around **same-sex marriage**, where the body's procreative purpose is often sidelined. The biblical mandate—“Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28)—roots human love in the physical reality of male and female, designed for union and new life. Yet, when love is abstracted into mere feeling or choice, detached from the body's God-given *telos*, the physical fades into irrelevance. Neo-Gnosticism whispers that the body's design is secondary, that the soul's desires reign supreme. Irenaeus's theology counters this by grounding human purpose in the Creator's act: the same Word

who formed Adam's dust (Genesis 2:7) entered flesh to redeem it, affirming the body's role in God's redemptive story. The resurrection promises not a disembodied escape but a renewed body on a new earth (1 Corinthians 15:44), where creation's purposes, including sexuality, find their fulfillment.

The “**spiritual but not religious**” movement carries this same shadow, chasing inner enlightenment while shrugging off the physical. Seekers turn to meditation apps, self-help gurus, or vague notions of “energy,” declaring, “My truth lies within.” This quest mirrors Gnosticism's escapist salvation, where the soul seeks liberation from a world deemed unworthy. Physical community—church, sacraments, shared worship—is dismissed as unnecessary, replaced by a privatized spirituality that floats free of flesh and ritual. Yet, Irenaeus reminds us that God's Spirit works through matter: the dust of Eden, the mud that healed the blind (John 9:1–12), the bread and wine of the Supper. The incarnation declares that God embraces the physical to redeem it, not to bypass it. To shun embodied worship is to miss the truth that body and soul together reflect God's image (Genesis 1:26–27), designed for communion with Him and one another.

Transhumanism pushes this neo-Gnostic impulse further, dreaming of a future where the soul—or consciousness—escapes the body entirely. Advocates envision “uploading” minds to digital realms, shedding flesh for “silicon immortality.” The body, reduced to a flawed machine, is seen as a barrier to transcendence, a relic to discard in pursuit of a “higher” self. This vision echoes Gnosticism's myth of a flawed creation, crafted by a lesser force. Yet, Irenaeus's voice cuts through: the Father of Jesus Christ, through His Word and Spirit, shaped humanity's dust as “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The body is no prison but God's temple (1 Corinthians 6:19), destined for resurrection, not replacement. Christ's risen body, tangible and glorified (Luke 24:39), points to our future—a renewed creation, not a digital void. Transhumanism's promise of salvation through technology denies the Creator's design, trading God's art for a sterile mirage. Postmodernism, too, amplifies these neo-Gnostic echoes, claiming truth is constructed, not found. This mirrors Gnostic myths of a flawed world, where human will reshapes reality to fit inner desires.

Irenaeus equips us to confront these challenges with clarity and hope. Against transgender narratives and same-sex marriage debates, we affirm the body's God-given form and purpose, inseparable from the soul. Against “spiritual but not religious” trends, we embrace embodied worship, where sacraments and community ground us in God's truth. Against transhumanism, we proclaim the body as God's masterpiece, destined for resurrection, not obsolescence. This Christ-centered reading of Scripture—where the Incarnation and resurrection illuminate creation—cuts through modern distortions, anchoring us in the unchanging Word (Hebrews 4:12). As we navigate these shadows, we stand firm: we are God's dust, breathed-into life, redeemed by His Son, and called to live as His unified creation—fully embodied, fully His.

We confess that embodiment is no curse but God's deliberate design—humanity as body and soul, not soul alone. Genesis 1:28's call to “be fruitful and multiply” roots us in physical vocations: family, work, and care for creation, all flowing from our embodied nature. The resurrection, tangible and real, assures us of a future where our bodies, like Christ's, will rise renewed (Phil. 3:21), not discarded and thrown away. Spiritual and physical disciplines—prayer, fasting, worship, service—honor both body and soul, as Scripture urges us to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

To those swayed by neo-Gnosticism's pull, we extend a gentle call: feel the weight of your flesh, the pulse of your heart, the ache of your loneliness. These are not flaws to flee but signs of a body God crafted with love, a body He entered to redeem, a body He will raise to glory. The Christian story—creation, incarnation, resurrection—offers the only true balm for their longing. It affirms that body and soul together were created in God's image (Genesis 1:26–27), designed for communion with Him and one another. The sacraments—Baptism's washing, the Supper's feeding, Absolution's freeing—anchor us in this embodied grace, countering the world's fleeting promises with the solid hope of Christ's cross.

The shadows of neo-Gnosticism may swirl, but they cannot dim the light of God's truth. Against its lies, we stand with Irenaeus, Luther, and the cloud of witnesses who proclaim a God who kneads dust with divine hands, breathes life into clay, and redeems flesh through His own. We are His masterpiece—body and soul woven together—called to live, love, and hope in the One who formed us, sustains us, and will raise us anew. Let us confess this boldly, live it fully, and invite all to embrace the goodness of their God-given flesh, trusting the Creator who declares, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

The Mirror's Lie—Body Image

Now, even as we stand in this truth, another shadow looms, distorting the beauty of God's design: the tyranny of body image. This modern affliction twists how we see ourselves, turning the mirror into a liar that obscures the Creator's handiwork. Where God beholds dust lovingly shaped, culture's warped lens reveals only flaws, chaining us to ideals that betray the unity of body and soul.

Moses tells us that God formed humanity from the earth, breathing life into clay to forge a living soul—body and spirit intertwined, bearing His image (Genesis 2:7). This is no mere frame but a masterpiece, declared “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Yet a modern curse distorts our vision: body image, the mind's picture of our form, twisted by cultural demands. People become obsessed and fixated only on physical bodies, measuring worth by mirrors that lie. Where God sees dust well-formed, our distorted visions see only flaws.

Statistics paint a grim picture: 95% of men and women grapple with body dissatisfaction, with young people and teens especially vulnerable and troubled. Taunted by peers, bombarded by media, nudged by family, they learn to despise their bodies, convinced that

weight, shape, or features define their value. “I’m not enough,” they say, even when their friends see beauty and brilliance in them.

Social media, with its 4 billion daily users, pours fuel on this fire. Filters sculpt impossible faces, ads peddle flawless forms, and influencers parade curated perfection. The result is a relentless chase: skipped meals, grueling workouts pushed past exhaustion, or cosmetic surgeries—driven by “selfie dysmorphia” tied to filtered ideals. Eating disorders plague women with anorexia or bulimia; compulsive exercise grips gym-goers who overtrain, harming the body they seek to perfect. Some turn to substances, others to tattoos or scalpels, mistreating the flesh God called good. Instagram’s parade of polished images crushes spirits, yet Psalm 139:14 counters with a gentle truth: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made,” a divine whisper that shatters culture’s cruel mirror.

We are not called to conquer our bodies but to dwell in them as God’s gift. The “cult of the young body,” as some call it, masks a subtle hatred of real flesh, treating the body as a tool to subdue rather than a treasure to steward. This “instrumentalizing” of the body breeds strife, not peace—more than a half of dieters relapse into worse health, chasing ideals that mock God’s design. Our embodiment is no flaw but a holy calling. Genesis 1:28’s charge to “be fruitful and multiply” weaves the body into vocations of love and labor: parenting, planting, caring for creation. The resurrection, promised in 1 Corinthians 15:44, glorifies this dust, not discards it, promising a renewed body on a new earth. The Spirit dwells within us (1 Corinthians 6:19), sanctifying every breath, hallowing the body frame culture bids us reshape.

Culture’s mirror blinds us, spawning fear, shame, and disorders, but Christ’s salvation heals this wound. God’s image is not a form to sculpt but a divine life to live. Scripture rejects cultural dictates—men must be tall, women thin, faces flawless—and roots our identity in Christ, where we are “re-created” in Christ’s own likeness (Colossians 3:10). This truth transforms body image from a curse to a holy calling: please, care for your body, yes, indeed, but as God’s art, not society’s canvas. We honor our body through rest, nourishment, and movement, not to chase fleeting ideals but to steward the temple where God’s Spirit dwells.

To those caught in the mirror’s lie, we extend a compassionate call: see your body through God’s eyes, not the world’s. The scars, the curves, the lines—they are threads in His design, fearfully and wonderfully made. The Christian story—creation, redemption, resurrection—frees us from culture’s tyranny. Baptism washes away shame, the Supper feeds and strengthens body and soul, and Absolution speaks worth over our wounds. As Irenaeus saw, the Word who shaped our dust entered it to redeem it, and He will raise it anew. Let us reject the false mirrors of media and markets, embracing our bodies as God’s gift, living fully as His image-bearers, anchored in the One who calls us His own.

Consumerism and Materialism

Furthermore, even as we affirm this truth, another challenge arises, clouding the vision of our God-given embodiment: the seductive pull of consumerism and materialism. This modern idol distorts the purpose of our bodies, reducing them to mere instruments for pleasure, status, or acquisition, and pulls us further from the Creator's design. Where God shaped humanity to reflect His image in body and soul (Genesis 1:26–27), consumerism tempts us to define ourselves by what we own, wear, or display, fracturing the unity of our created purpose.

Materialism whispers that worth lies in possessions: designer clothes, sleek gadgets, luxurious homes. It transforms the body into a billboard, a canvas to advertise wealth or success. Social media amplifies this lie, with influencers showcasing curated lifestyles that equate happiness with the latest trends. Studies reveal that 60% of young adults feel pressure to buy products to “keep up” with peers, driven by the pursuit of status-driven purchases. This relentless chase leaves hearts empty, bodies exhausted, and souls adrift, as people trade God's calling for fleeting treasures that “moth and rust destroy” (Matthew 6:19).

This consumerist mindset echoes the neo-Gnostic disdain for the body's true purpose, treating it as a tool to enhance rather than a temple to treasure and steward (1 Corinthians 6:19). Fashion brands market “perfect” silhouettes, urging us to reshape our bodies to fit their molds—through diets, surgeries, or gym regimens that prioritize appearance over health. Rapidly changing fashion, producing 100 billion garments annually, contradicts Genesis 1:28 call to care for creation. Meanwhile, the tech industry peddles devices that tether us to screens, distancing us from embodied relationships and the physical world God declared “very good”. In this frenzy, the body becomes a means to an end, not a gift bearing God's image.

Yet, Scripture offers a clearer vision. The Creator who formed us from dust (Genesis 2:7) calls us to live as stewards, not slaves, of our bodies and resources. Jesus warns, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24), urging us to seek first His kingdom, where true worth resides. The Incarnation—God taking flesh (John 1:14)—reveals the body's sacredness, not as a status symbol but as a vessel for love and service. To those ensnared by consumerism's lure, we speak with compassion: your body is not a showcase for wealth, nor your worth tied to what you own. Feel the restlessness of chasing empty trends, the ache of a soul seeking more than material gain. These are signs of a deeper longing—for the God who shaped you, loves you, and calls you His.

We are called to live differently. Genesis 1:28's mandate to “be fruitful” invites us to use our bodies for vocations that honor God—building families, serving neighbors, tending the earth. Practical disciplines—generosity, simplicity, Sunday rest—counter consumerism's grip, aligning body and soul with God's rhythm. Rejecting culture's dictates—newer, bigger, better—we treat our body as a vessel for His mission. In a world chasing fleeting wealth, we

proclaim a richer truth: we are God’s masterpiece, body and soul, called to steward His gifts, trust His provision, and await His promise about making all things new (Revelation 21:5).

The threat of technology

Yet, even as we reject the hollow promises of materialism, another shadow looms, one that threatens to erode the very essence of our embodied humanity: the rise of technology’s dehumanizing grip. This modern force, with its algorithms, screens, and artificial intelligence, risks reducing our bodies to data points and our souls to mere computations, pulling us further from the Creator’s design. Where God crafted humanity as a living unity of dust and breath, bearing His image (Genesis 1:26–27), technology tempts us to trade our flesh for digital shadows, fragmenting the wholeness of our God-given nature.

Technology, in its pleasant promise of convenience and connection, often delivers isolation and detachment. Over 5 billion people now spend hours daily tethered to screens—smartphones, tablets, virtual realities—where relationships are filtered through pixels and presence is replaced by posts. Studies show that 40% of teens report anxiety linked to social media overuse, while adults average seven hours daily on digital devices, eroding time for embodied interaction. Algorithms curate our desires, predicting preferences with eerie precision, yet they strip away the mystery of the soul God breathed into us (Genesis 2:7). Artificial intelligence, heralded as a new frontier, now powers chatbots, virtual assistants, and even “digital companions,” blurring the line between human and machine. Some futurists claim that consciousness could soon be “uploaded” or replicated, echoing neo-Gnostic dreams of escaping flesh.

This technological tide carries a subtle but profound distortion: it treats the body as obsolete, a limitation to transcend rather than a gift to embrace. Virtual reality platforms invite us to inhabit avatars—idealized, ageless, untethered from physical constraints—while wearable tech quantifies every step, heartbeat, and calorie, reducing the body to a machine to optimize. The biotech industry, with its tools like CRISPR, a gene-editing technology, promises to redesign humanity itself, altering DNA to eliminate “flaws” or enhance traits. These innovations, while offering medical hope, risk echoing the Gnostic lie of human reengineering rather than divine redemption. By prioritizing efficiency and control, technology subtly demotes the body to a tool and the soul to a dataset, undermining the Creator’s design.

Scripture, however, calls us back to our embodied truth. Humanity was designed for physical presence, not digital abstraction. Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), lived among us—touching, eating, weeping—affirming the body’s role in God’s redemptive story. The resurrection, promised in Scriptures, assures us of glorified bodies, not virtual avatars, on a new earth where we dwell with God (Revelation 21:1ff.). The Spirit indwells our flesh (1 Corinthians 6:19), making each body a temple, not a circuit to reprogram.

To those lost in technology's glow, we speak kindly: feel the ache of loneliness behind the screen, the restlessness of a soul craving more than likes or metrics. These are whispers of your true calling: to live as God's image-bearer, embodied and whole. The Christian story reorients this longing: creation roots us in God's good design, redemption restores us through Christ's flesh, and resurrection promises a future where technology serves, not supplants, our humanity. Sacraments remind us that God works through matter—water, bread, wine, flesh—not algorithms.

We are called to engage technology with wisdom, not worship. Genesis 1:28's mandate to "subdue the earth" includes stewarding tools for God's glory: using tech to connect, heal, and create, but never to replace the embodied vocations of love, work, and worship. Practical disciplines—screen-free hours, face-to-face fellowship, sincere and serious prayer—reclaim our bodies from digital distraction, aligning us with God's rhythm. Scripture anchors our identity in Christ, where we are "re-created" to reflect His image (Colossians 3:10), not a programmer's design. This reframes technology: a servant, not a savior, enhancing our humanity rather than erasing it. Let us reject the lie that we are mere data, embracing our bodies as temples of the Spirit, living fully for the One who formed us.

Mental health struggles

Furthermore, the epidemic of mental health struggles wounds the heart of our embodied existence, distorting the unity of body and soul. Fueled by isolation, pressure, and a fractured sense of self, this crisis pulls us from the Creator who designed us for communion and peace. Where God breathed life into dust, forging a living soul to reflect His image (Genesis 2:7), mental health challenges cloud our minds, burden our bodies, and obscure the wholeness of His design. In order to heal, we must slow down, learn God's rhythm, and anchor ourselves in deep trust and reliance on Him, as theologian Kosuke Koyama in his book *Three Mile an Hour God* urges, embracing the unhurried pace of the Creator who walks with us.

The scale of this crisis is stark. Globally, over 1 billion people grapple with mental health disorders: depression, anxiety, and burnout leading the toll. In 2025, 25% of young adults report persistent loneliness; 40% of workers cite chronic stress from relentless demands. Social media, with its endless scroll of comparisons, deepens the wound—70% of teens tie declining mental health to online platforms. Trauma, loss, and societal upheaval further strain the mind, with 1 in 5 adults showing signs of post-traumatic stress. The body bears this weight: insomnia, fatigue, and chronic pain intertwine with mental distress, revealing the inseparable bond of soul and flesh. This suffering echoes the neo-Gnostic lie that the inner self can be detached from the body, ignoring the embodied reality of our pain and the need for healing of the whole person.

Culture's remedies often falter, offering quick fixes—mindfulness apps, medications, or self-help trends—that treat the mind as a circuit to reboot, not a soul to nurture. The mental health industry promotes solutions that, while aiding some help, rarely touch the deeper

hunger for meaning and connection. Stigma lingers—30% of those struggling avoid help, fearing judgment in a world that equates worth with productivity. This approach isolates the spiritual from the physical, sidelining the body’s role in healing and the community’s role in support. It rushes toward solutions, neglecting the slow, sacred work of restoration God invites us into. By fragmenting mind from body, we drift from the Creator’s vision of humanity as a unified whole, designed for trustful rest in Him.

Scripture, however, beckons us to a truer path, one of slowing down to learn God’s rhythm. The Lord is our shepherd, leading us to rest by still waters (Psalm 23:1–2), restoring body and soul in His care. The God who formed us from dust and breath (Genesis 2:7) knows our frame, calling us to “cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus, bearing our sorrows (John 11:35), modeled an unhurried life, retreating to pray and lingering with the broken, trusting the Father’s timing (Mark 1:35). Jesus wept with Mary and Martha (John 11:35), in the end, enduring the cross’s anguish—showing that God enters our pain, not bypasses it. He modeled an unhurried life, retreating to pray, lingering with the broken, trusting the Father’s timing. To heal, we must rely on the One who shapes and sustains us.

I cannot recommend (Japanese theologian) Kasuke Koyama’s liberation theology in general, yet I kind of like his critical call, urging us to reject the world’s frantic pace and embrace God’s “three-mile-an-hour” rhythm: the walking pace of Jesus, who moved slowly enough to see, touch, and heal. In a culture that demands constant hustle, slowing down becomes an act of trust, a reliance on God’s provision over our striving. Mental health struggles often stem from this mismatch: our bodies and souls, designed for God’s tempo, are strained by society’s relentless speed. Slowing down—pausing to breathe, to pray, to be present—realigns us with the Creator’s design, where body and soul find rest in His care. This deep trust, Koyama teaches, roots us in the God who is not pressed or hurried by our chaos but walks with us, step by step, toward wholeness.

To those wrestling with mental health struggles, we speak tenderly: your pain is real, your body weary, your heart heavy with unseen burdens. These are not signs of failure but consequences of our sin and cries of a soul longing for the God who shaped you, sees you, and loves you. Slow down and hear His voice, His Word in the stillness. The Christian story restores this hope: creation affirms your worth as God’s image-bearer, redemption through Christ’s suffering binds your wounds, and resurrection promises a future where tears are wiped away. Baptism washes you into God’s family, the Supper strengthens you with His presence, and Absolution speaks forgiveness over shame. Sacraments thus ground us in embodied grace, countering isolation with the tangible love of Christ’s body, the church, where we learn to rely on God and one another.

A big part of the mental health crisis is spiritual. We are called to live as whole persons, mind and body united, trusting God’s rhythm. Genesis 1:28’s call to fruitfulness includes

caring for our mental and physical health—resting, seeking help, fostering community—as acts of stewardship. Practical disciplines—prayer, confession of sins, friendship, honest fellowship, time in nature—nurture the soul while honoring the body, countering culture’s quick fixes. Slow practices like Sabbath-keeping or shared meals teach us to pause, to trust God’s provision, and to rely on His strength. Scripture roots our identity in Christ, where we are “re-created” to reflect His peace (Colossians 3:10), not the world’s chaos. This reframes mental health: not a puzzle to solve, but a journey to walk with God and others, at His unhurried pace.

Individualism vs. Community

Yet, even as we seek God’s unhurried peace to heal our minds, another shadow stretches across our path: the erosion of authentic community. This modern drift toward isolation and superficial connection frays the bonds God wove into our embodied existence, distancing us from the Creator who designed us for communion with Him and one another. Where God shaped humanity from dust to live as a unified body and soul, bearing His image in relationship (Genesis 1:26–27), the loss of community fragments our purpose, leaving us adrift in a world that prioritizes individualism over the shared life He intended.

The scope of this disconnection is profound. In 2025, over 30% of adults globally report feeling profoundly lonely, with urban centers, despite their density, breeding isolation at unprecedented rates. Social media promises connection but delivers shallow interactions: likes, comments, and emojis replace the warmth of face-to-face presence. Studies reveal that 50% of young adults crave deeper relationships but struggle to form them, citing busyness, mobility, and digital distraction as barriers. The decline of communal institutions—churches, civic groups, even family dinners—further unravels the fabric of togetherness: 40% of households now eat meals alone, a sharp rise from a decade ago. This isolation taxes both body and soul, with loneliness linked to higher risks of depression, heart disease, and weakened immunity, underscoring the embodied nature of our need for others.

Culture’s response often leans into individualism, echoing the lie that the self is sufficient, detached from the physical and relational world. Self-care trends, while promoting wellness, sometimes glorify solitude over community, urging us to “find ourselves” in isolation rather than in shared life. The gig economy with its temporary, flexible, or freelance jobs, employing 20% of workers in 2024, fosters transient relationships, reporting higher loneliness than traditional employees. Even churches, meant to embody Christ’s body, face declining attendance: 25% of congregations report fewer than 50 regular members, reflecting a broader cultural shift toward “spiritual but not religious” autonomy. This fragmentation treats relationships as optional, ignoring the truth that God created us for interdependence, where body and soul flourish in communion.

In Scripture, however, we are given a different design and purpose. The God who formed humanity from dust and breath declared it “not good” for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18), crafting Eve to share in the vocation of stewarding creation (Genesis 1:28). Jesus Himself,

the Word made flesh (John 1:14), lived in community—eating, praying, and serving with His disciples—showing that God’s kingdom unfolds in shared life. The Spirit binds us as one body (1 Corinthians 12:13), indwelling each person (1 Corinthians 6:19) to build up the whole. We are shaped for fellowship, crafted by the Father’s hands—Son and Spirit—to reflect the Trinity’s own communion. To live apart from each other is to deny the image we bear.

Community, of course, requires time: unhurried moments to listen, share, and bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). The world’s frantic pace, driven by schedules and screens, crowds out these sacred encounters, but God’s three-mile-an-hour rhythm invites us to linger, to rely on His provision for relationships as we do for daily bread. Trusting God means trusting His design for deeply interconnected community, where our bodies and souls find strength in mutual dependence. Slowing down to share a meal, pray together, or simply be present realigns us with the Creator’s tempo, where love, not efficiency, shapes our days.

To those yearning for connection yet trapped in isolation, we say compassionately: feel the ache of loneliness, the hunger for a hand to hold, a voice to hear your story. These are not weaknesses but signs of your God-given design: to live in communion, as body and soul, with others. The Christian story restores this hope: creation affirms your pressing need for fellowship, redemption through Christ’s cross unites you to His body, and resurrection promises an eternal community where no one is alone. The Spirit unites us. Baptism welcomes you into God’s family, the Supper binds you to brothers and sisters, and Absolution heals the wounds of broken bonds. These sacraments ground us in embodied love, countering digital shallowness with the weight of Christ’s presence in His church. Let us reject the lie that we are meant for solitude, embracing our whole selves as part of Christ’s body, living fully for the One who formed us.

We are called to live as one body, body and soul united in shared purpose. Genesis 1:28’s call to fruitfulness includes building communities—families, churches, neighborhoods—where love and service reflect God’s image. Practical disciplines, such as hospitality, smaller communities, volunteering, and unplugging from screens, nurture connection, countering culture’s individualism. Slow practices like communal worship, family devotions and biblical storytelling teach us to trust God’s provision for relationships and rely on His Spirit to knit us together. Scripture roots our identity in Christ, where we are “re-created” to belong to one another (Colossians 3:10), not to stand alone. We are called to embody God’s love, walking together at His pace.

The Gift of Friendship

Yet, even as we seek the communal bonds of Christ’s body, another shadow dims our path: the erosion of authentic friendship. In an age where relationships are vital for mission, outreach and evangelism, as leaders emphasize, we increasingly rely on impersonal digital means—texts, likes, virtual chats—to forge connections, distancing us from the embodied

intimacy God designed for friendship. Where God shaped humanity to bear His image in relational unity (Genesis 1:26–27), the loss of true friendship fragments our purpose, leaving souls craving the face-to-face love that reflects His heart.

Friendship, rooted in Trinitarian communion, is no mere luxury but a divine gift woven into our embodied existence. In 2025, 60% of adults report having fewer than three close friends, a sharp decline from a decade ago, with 35% of young adults citing social media as primary “connection” tool. Yet, studies show that those relying on digital platforms for relationships feel emotionally unfulfilled, longing for the warmth of physical presence. Missionary “gurus” note that authentic relationships are the cornerstone of bringing people into faith: 70% of new believers cite a trusted friend’s influence as pivotal to their conversion. Impersonal outreach—mass emails, automated church apps, or social media ads—yields very little engagement compared to personal invitations. God calls us to embody physical presence.

Scripture reveals friendship as a sacred calling. Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), called His disciples “friends” (John 15:15), sharing meals, tears, and prayers in embodied intimacy. Proverbs 17:17 declares, “A friend loves at all times,” reflecting God’s steadfast love. David and Jonathan’s covenant bond (1 Samuel 18:1–3) models friendship as soul-knit loyalty, a physical and spiritual unity mirroring the Trinity’s communion. The early church thrived on such bonds, breaking bread house to house (Acts 2:46), their friendships a beacon to a fractured world. These relationships, requiring time and presence fostering unhurried love, counter the world’s rush and digital shallowness.

To those yearning for true friendship, we speak with love: feel the ache of shallow chats, the hunger for a friend who sees you. These are signs of your God-given design—to love and be loved in body and soul. The Christian story restores this hope: creation affirms your relational nature, redemption through Christ’s cross binds you to His friends, and resurrection promises an eternal fellowship. Baptism welcomes you into God’s family, the Supper gathers you with friends at His table, and Absolution heals the wounds of broken trust. Practical disciplines—hospitality at home and in church, or simply sharing coffee—nurture friendship’s embodied joy. Slow practices like listening without screens or praying together teach us to trust God’s provision for relationships, relying on His Spirit to knit hearts. Let us reject the lie of digital substitutes, embracing friendship as a witness to Christ’s love, walking together at His pace.

Sacramental life

To summarize the overall message, Scripture reveals the sacramental heart of God’s work. The God who formed humanity from dust and breath used physical means to sustain His people: manna in the desert (Exodus 16:4) and water from the rock (Numbers 20:11). Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), healed with touch, spit, and mud (John 9:6), showing that God’s grace flows through matter. His institution of Baptism (Matthew 28:19) and the Supper (Luke 22:19–20) ties salvation to tangible elements, affirming the body’s role in redemption. The resurrection, promised in 1 Corinthians 15:44, points to a new earth where

our glorified bodies partake in eternal worship (Revelation 21:3), not a disembodied escape. The Spirit, indwelling our flesh (1 Corinthians 6:19), enlivens these sacraments, making them “visible words,” as Augustine called them, that proclaim Christ’s victory. Irenaeus, with his Christ-centered vision, saw creation’s dust as sanctified by the Incarnation, where God embraced matter to redeem it, making sacraments the natural extension of His love.

The world’s frantic pace—driven by schedules, screens, and self-reliance—leaves no room for the slow, deliberate grace of God’s gifts. Sacraments invite us to pause, to receive, to rely on God’s provision rather than our efforts. Baptism, received once, calls us to rest in our identity as God’s children for the rest of our life, trusting His covenant. The Supper, received regularly, slows us to savor Christ’s presence, relying on His nourishment. Absolution, delivered in confession, teaches us to wait on God’s mercy, trusting His forgiveness. This unhurried rhythm of sacramental life aligns body and soul with the Creator’s tempo, where grace flows not through our striving but through His faithful promise.

Let us reject the lie that spirituality is merely inward, because true faith embraces our whole selves as vessels of His grace, living fully for the One who formed us. We are called to live sacramentally, body and soul united in God’s grace. We are called to participate in these practices, offering our bodies in worship (Romans 12:1) as we receive His mercy. Practical disciplines—regular church attendance at sacramental services, private confession, teaching children the rites—nurture the soul while engaging the body, countering culture’s spiritual shallowness. Slow practices like reflecting on one’s Baptism, meditating on the Supper’s promise, or lingering in Absolution’s assurance teach us to trust God’s provision and rely on His Spirit, not our inventions.

Conclusion

Amid all the shadows we have mentioned, the Gospel stands as a rock, unmoved by time. God’s sovereignty shines in creation’s hum, where every birth bears His breath, every labor moves by His might (Psalm 46:1). Though global conflicts rage, and our reason sees chaos, Christ gathers all things in His time (Ephesians 1:10). Genesis 1:28 calls us to care for the world—planting gardens, building homes, spreading kindness—but Romans 7:18 reminds us our hearts need His grace to trust God’s rule, guided by His wisdom.

The sacraments—Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution—embody this gospel, countering the world’s lies with God’s touch. They join us to Christ, body and soul, healing the fracture sin introduced. The shadows of postmodernism, transhumanism, and technology’s idolatry tempt us to redefine, escape, or diminish our bodies, but the gospel calls us back to our true identity: God’s dust, breathed into life, redeemed by His Son, and destined for resurrection. Against the mirage of constructed truths, Genesis 1:27 roots us in God’s design: “male and female,” body and soul, one in Christ (Colossians 3:10). Against

dreams of digital ghosts, the Spirit dwells in our flesh (1 Corinthians 6:19), affirming its dignity. Against tech's relentless tick, there is a call to slow down in order to trust God's three-mile-an-hour rhythm, relying on His provision as we walk in His love.

Sacramental practices anchor this life. Baptism washes away the world's lies, declaring us God's children. The Supper feeds our hunger for presence, uniting us to Christ's body. Absolution frees us from shame, speaking worth over our wounds. These gifts, Luther insists, are God's real touch—water, bread, wine, and words—binding body and soul in His redemptive plan (LW 31:351). They counter the emptiness of secular spirituality, the isolation of digital communities, and the anxiety of permissiveness, offering a love that tech cannot match (1 John 4:19).

As Christians, we live mindfully, using technology as a servant, not a god, as Luther saw tools as holy when serving God's purposes (LW 1:103). We plant gardens, share stories, and pray, trusting God's sovereignty while taking faithful steps (Psalm 90:12). When screens scream "be yourself," Christ calls us to "deny ourselves" (Luke 9:23), finding true life in Him (Galatians 6:2). Against the world's rush, we slow down—lingering over meals, folding hands in prayer, serving neighbors—rooted in God's time, not tech's hurry.

View	Body	Soul	Implications
Biblical	God's art, good	God's breath, united	Embodied life, resurrection hope
Neo-Gnostic	Prison, evil	Divine, trapped	Escape flesh, deny Incarnation
Postmodern	Malleable canvas	Fluid identity	Constructed self, no fixed truth

Literature:

Holy Bible: ESV, NIV

Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*

Irenaeus of Lyons. *Against Heresies*

Jeffreys, Sheila. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*

Koelpin, Arnold J. *Teaching History From A Christian Perspective*

Koyama, Kosuke. *Three Mile an Hour God*

Luther's Works (*American Edition*)

Pearcey, Nancy. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*

Schaeffer, Francis. *The God Who Is There; Escape from Reason; A. How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*

Scharf, Jonathan *I Believe that I am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*

Wagner, Mark C. *Our Pastoral Response in an Age of Permissiveness*

Wendland, Paul *Coping With Change in the Age of Technology*

Zabell, Eric *Breaking the Spell: Investigating Screen-Based Media for Gospel Driven Outreach*

MAN CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

European Meeting CELC

St. John's Church, Nerchau, Germany
May 23–25, 2025

Rev. Timothy R. Schmeling, Ph.D.

Professor of Exegetical and Historical Theology
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, MN

Gustav Wingren once wrote: “To become like Christ is to become man as the Creator intended he should be (Gen 1:26). Those who are called are intended to be images of God’s son, likenesses of him (Rom 8:29). The new man is created in the likeness of God (Eph 4:24). The growing likeness to Christ leads man ... into the true life of man which is fully attained in the resurrection of the dead.”¹

Views of the Image of God

Man has often read into the image of God (*imago Dei*) whatever his culture thinks distinguishes the human being from the rest of creation. What follows are the predominate approaches to the divine image. The structural view understands the image of God to be about what humans are. It equates the image with something embedded into human nature itself. Irenaeus of Lyon introduced this view into Christianity when he distinguished between the image and likeness of God. In the fall, man lost the likeness, but it is being restored in Christ. The image, conversely, is always retained.² Irenaeus’s other idea about Edenic mankind would also fuel speculations. He opined that man was created imperfect so that he could grow.³ Soon Tertullian affirmed this distinction between image and likeness, and it remained dominate until the Reformation.⁴ Augustine of Hippo built on this distinction. He gave the image a more psychological and Trinitarian dimension. He regarded the image to be memory, intellect, and will, which he associated with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively.⁵

Drawing on Aristotelian substance ontology (i.e., metaphysical categories), medieval theologians, especially in the west, came to associate the image of God with natural qualities of man (e.g., will and reason) which were part of man’s “substance” (*substantia*, i.e., something capable of existing by itself). Thus, the image was deemed essential to being human. The likeness of God, conversely, came to be regarded as a “superadded gift” (*donum superadditum*) that piggybacked spiritual gifts (e.g., righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, or simply original righteousness) on top of a human nature.⁶ For the Dominicans, this superadded gift was bestowed

¹ Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 75.

² Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic Unger et al. (New York: Newman Press, 1992–2024), 5:138–39, 142, 162–63 (*Against the Heresies* 5.6; 5.8; 5.16).

³ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against*, 115–18 (*Against the Heresies* 4.38).

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all patristic references are to *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325: Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF]*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995) or *The Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF]*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995). ANF 3:672 (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 5).

⁵ Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle and Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1990–), 1/5:491 (*The Trinity* 14.15).

⁶ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007–10), bk. 2, dist. 24; Bonaventure, *Opera Omnia* (Florence: ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi, 1882–1902), 5:229–30 (*Breviloquium* 2.11); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province

at creation. For the Franciscans, it was bestowed after creation as a reward for the meritorious use of natural powers. Consequently, the likeness was deemed an “accident” (*accidens*, i.e., something contingent and only capable of existing in something else). Thus, the likeness was deemed not essential to being human.

In contrast to the likeness of God, John of Damascus associates the image of God with intellect and free will.⁷ For Bonaventure, the image is primarily realized with the will.⁸ For Thomas Aquinas, the image is primarily realized with the intellect or reason. He also speaks of three states or stages of the divine image in man. In the natural state, all humans have a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God. In the graced state, the image bearers actually and habitually know and love God imperfectly. In the heavenly state, the image bearers know and love God perfectly.⁹

As Roman Catholic Second Scholastics and Neo-Scholastics thought more about the substance ontology that undergirded their anthropology, they began to posit the idea of a state of pure nature (*status purorum naturalium*).¹⁰ On the one hand, a state of pure nature seemed necessary to defend the Roman Catholic idea that the image of God (i.e., memory, intellect, and will) was a substance that retained its integrity after the fall because original sin was only an accidental deprivation of original righteousness. On the other hand, a state of pure nature also seemed necessary to defend the Roman Catholic idea that the likeness was merely an accidental superadded gift.

As Roman Catholics were permitted greater “freedom” in exegesis with *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, they came to recognize the exegetical problems with an image and likeness distinction. Thus, Vatican II recombined them, but maintained that the likeness (*similitudinem*) was only deformed (*deformatam*) in the fall.¹¹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines this likeness as being “capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons.” “It is in Christ ... that the divine image, disfigured in many by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God.”¹²

The anthropomorphic view understands the image of God to be about man’s physical resemblance with God. During the Origenistic controversies of the late fourth century, some illiterate Egyptian monks radically distanced themselves from Origen. On the basis of Bible

(New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1:482–83 (pt. 1, q. 95, art. 1); *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. J. Donovan (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1908), pt. 1, chap. 2, q. 19.

⁷ John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1958), 234–235 (*Orthodox Faith* 2.12).

⁸ Bonaventure, *Opera Omnia*, 2:404–8 (Sentences II, dist. 16, art. 2, q. 3).

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1:471–72, 477 (pt. 1, q. 93, art. 4, 9).

¹⁰ Robert Bellarmine, *Omnia Opera*, ed. Justinus Fèvre (Paris: Vives, 1870–74), 5:179; Francisco Suarez, *Omnia Opera* (Paris: Vivès, 1856–61), 7:179; Matthias Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholics Dogmatics*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2019–23), bk. 3, par. 507, 591, 947, 1072–74, 1082–83, 1120–22; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, trans. M. Timothea Doyle (Rockford: TAN Books, 1947–48), 1:288. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1:1124–25 (pt. 1-2, q. 109, art. 2).

¹¹ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N. P. Tanner, G. Albergo, J. A. Dossetti, P. P. Joannou, C. Leonardi, P. Prodi, and H. Jedin (London and Washington: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:1081–82.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), par. 357, 1701ff.

passages that describe God with human characteristics (e.g., Gen 3:8–9), these Anthropomorphites (Audians) insisted that God had a material form. Thus, they concluded that man was made in the physical image of God.¹³

Rationalistic theologians took some interest in this idea. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider regarded man's upright and external form to be part of the divine image.¹⁴ Orthodox theologians have drawn attention to this too. But they did not make it part of the image of God.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day saints teaches God was once a human being. Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 states, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's...."¹⁵ Accordingly, the Mormons also associated the image of God with a physical resemblance to God, albeit for different reasons than the Anthropomophite monks.

The functional view understands the image of God to be what humans do. It equates the image with dominion which is man's mastery and rule over creation as God's representative. Human dominion coupled with man's upright form had long been accepted as a definition of the divine image in the ancient pagan religions of the Levant. John Chrysostom offers one of the earliest Christian articulations of this view. He writes, "So 'image' refers to the matter of control, not anything else, in other words, God created the human being as having control of everything on earth, and nothing on earth is greater than the human being, under whose authority everything falls."¹⁶

Some early Reformed theologians included dominion in their conception of the image of God, but they did not exclude original righteousness.¹⁷ The Socinians or Polish Brethren, conversely, did reduce the image of God to dominion. They did so because they insisted man was created mortal.¹⁸ Under the influence of Socinianism, some early Remonstrant (Arminian) theologians like Philipp van Limborch denied that the image of God consisted of original righteousness and taught that dominion was the image instead.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, rationalist theologians associated dominion with the image too.²⁰

¹³ Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion*, trans. Frank Williams, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2009–13), 3:412–28 (3.70); John Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Newman Press, 1997), 371–74 (*Conferences* 10.2–5).

¹⁴ Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, *Systematische Entwicklung aller in der Dogmatik vorkommenden Begriffe*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1825), par 88; Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, *Handbuch der Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1838), par. 115.

¹⁵ *The Book of Mormon ... Doctrines and Covenants ... The Pearl of Great Prince* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981). See also Book of Ether 3:6.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1986), 110 (*Homilies on Genesis* 8.9)

¹⁷ Wolfgang Musculus, *Common Places of Christian Religion*, trans. John Man (London: Henry Bynnenman, 1578), 29; Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The Peter Martyr Vermigli Library*, ed. John Patrick Donnelly and Joseph C. McLelland (Kirkville: Thomas Jefferson University, 1994–2006), 4:42–43.

¹⁸ *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (London: Longman, Hust, Rees, Orme, and Brown, Paternoster Row, 1818), 2.1.

¹⁹ Philipp van Limborch, *Compleat System, or Body of Divinity, Both Speculative and Practical, Founded on Scripture and Reason*, trans. William Jones, 2nd ed. (London: John Darby, 1713), 1:142–45.

²⁰ Bretschneider, *Handbuch*, par. 115.

The relational view understands the image of God to be about human relationships with God and other creatures. Martin Luther's understanding of the image of God was the first articulation of a relational understanding of the image of God. He understood the image to be original righteousness via a faith-relationship with God.²¹ Man lost this image in the fall,²² but it is being restored in Christ. The *Book of Concord* only specifically teaches an image of God in the strict sense (*imago Dei stricta dicta*) as well.²³ Eventually, Philipp Melanchthon, conversely, came to the conclusion that the image of God continued after the fall in some sense.²⁴ In addition to a relational understanding of the image of God in the strict sense, some Lutheran theologians have also taught a structural understanding of the image of God in the wide sense that persists after the fall.

The chief Reformed Confessions (i.e., Three forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards)²⁵ and some of their significant theologians teach only a relational understanding of the image of God as original righteousness via a faith-relationship with God.²⁶ While John Calvin did not explicitly teach a structural understanding of the image of God in the wide sense, he also does not think the image of God is completely lost in the fall.²⁷ That being said, the majority of Reformed theologians came to teach a relational understanding of the image of God in the strict sense coupled with a structural understanding of the image of God in the wide sense.

²¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works [LW]*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955–), 1:61–65.

²² Luther says, "Until [this image of the new creature] is accomplished in us, we cannot have an adequate knowledge of what that image of God was which was lost through sin in Paradise. ... Even this small part of the divine image we have lost, so much so that we do not even have insight into the fullness of joy and bliss which Adam derived from his contemplation of all the animal creatures." *LW* 1:65–66. However, Luther does add this seeming contradictory remark. "Thus, even if the image has been almost completely [*pene tota*] lost, there is still a great difference between the human being and the rest of the animals... What we achieve in life, however, is brought about, not by the dominion of which Adam had but through industry and skill." Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [WA]*, ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993), 42:50; *LW* 1:67.

²³ *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, ed. Irene Dingel, Bastian Basse, Marion Bechtold-Mayer, Klaus Breuer, Johannes Hund, Robert Kolb, Rafael Kuhnert, Volker Leppin, Christian Peters, Adolf Martin Ritter, and Hans-Otto Schneider, 1st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), Ap II.17–22; FC SD I, 10–11.

²⁴ Philipp Melanchthon, *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 321 (locus 13).

²⁵ *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, ed. E. F. K. Müller (Waltrop: Hartmut Spenner, 1999), Belgic Confession XIV; Heidelberg Catechism q. 6; Canons of Dordt III/IV, 1–4; III/IV, R2; Westminster Confession IV, 2; Westminster Large Catechism q. 17; Westminster Short Catechism q. 10.

²⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades*, trans. H. I. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849–52), 3:377, 394; William Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge* (London: John Legatt, 1626), 1:150–51, 162; Johannes Cocceius, *Svumma Theologiae Ex Scripturis Repetita*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: Widerhold, 1665), locus X, chap. 26; R. L. Dabney, *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1878), 206, 293; G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 54–63. For others that shared this minority view in Reformed theology, see Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson, rev. ed. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 232, 237–38.

²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1:186–92 (1.15.3–4).

Karl Barth argued for a different understanding of the relational view of the image of God. The divine image does not consist in anything man is or does. It is also not tied to original righteousness, nor is it anchored in faith. For Barth, “The *tertium comparationis*, the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.”²⁸ In other words, the image of God is about being addressed and responding to that address. It is human interpersonal relationality that reflects the relationality between the persons of the Trinity. The specific relationships that image bearers engage in are between God and man (Gen 2:8–17) as well as man and other people (Gen 2:21–25). Others have stressed the relationship between man and creation too (Gen 2:15, 18–20), though this is not an I and Thou encounter.²⁹ Scripturally speaking, Barth sees the image chiefly expressed in the way man’s relationship with woman corresponds to the Trinitarian persons’ relationships with each other. Even though all of these human relationships are damaged in fall (God [Gen 3:8]; people [3:7, 12, 16]; creation [3:18–19]), the image is not lost.

He Who Bears the Image of God in an Essential Way

Nikolaus Hunnius points out that only God is omniscient (1 Cor 2:11), perfectly righteous (Deut 32:4), totally holy (1 Sam 2:2), completely free (Psa 115:3; 135:6), immortal (1 Tim 6:16), and completely sovereign (Psa 24:1; 33:9). Hunnius goes on to add that man was created to have right perception of God, right perception of creation, complete righteousness, true holiness, free will, immortality, and dominion in some sense as well.³⁰ The Scriptures also say that Christ “is the image of God” (ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3. cf. Wis 7:26). But man is said to be made “in [God’s] image, according to [God’s] likeness” (בְּצֶלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמְיוֹתָנוּ) (Gen 1:26). The Hebrew prepositions “in” (בְּ) and “according to” (כְּ) provide some helpful insight here. They imply man is a copy of an original prototype. He is a human type meant to correspond to a divine archetype.³¹ Finally, Christ cannot lose the image of God. In the fall, humans did lose the image (Gen 5:3; 1 Cor 15:49. cf. Wis 2:23–24) and only regain it in Christ. For this reason, Christ is the essential image of God. Humans are the derived, normed, copied, patterned, and (accidental, or better) concreated image of God (cf. also Exod 25:40; Heb 8:1–6; 10:1) who bear the characteristics of the image in a derived, normed, copied, patterned, and (accidental, or better) concreated way.³²

Those Who Bear the Image of God in a Non-Essential Way

²⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 3/1:183–91, esp. 184–85.

²⁹ Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma and James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 264–65.

³⁰ Nikolaus Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, trans. Paul Edward Gottheil (Nuremberg: U. E. Sebal, 1847), 48–50.

³¹ David Chytraeus, *A Summary of the Christian Faith*, trans. Richard Dinda (Decatur: Repristination Press, 1994), 50; Johann Gerhard, *On Creation and Angels, On Providence, On Election and Reprobation, On the Image of God in Man Before the Fall*, trans. Richard Dinda, Theological Commonplaces (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 257 (locus 11, par. 14); Johann Friedrich König, *Theologia positive acroamatica* (Rostock 1664), ed. Andreas Stegmann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 118 (pt. II, par. 4).

³² Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, Sive Systema Theologicvm ... Divisvm* (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1702), 2:2–3; David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicvm Acroamaticvm Vniversam Theologiam Thetico-Polemicam Complectens*, ed. Romanus Tellerus (Leipzig: B. C. Breitkopf, 1763), 462; August Grabner, “Doctrinal Theology: Cosmology Anthropology,” *Theological Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1899): 139.

The Bible says that the Triune God created man in his image (Gen 1:26). Some medieval theologians thought the divine image could be found in the human soul or mind because God is not corporal (save in the person of Jesus Christ).³³ Johann Gerhard points out that the image of God is not only found in the human soul. It is also found in the human body because man was created for immortality (Gen 2:16–17; Rom 2:7; 1 Cor 15:53–54; 2 Tim 1:10. cf. Wis 1:13; 2:23).³⁴

St. Paul writes, “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor 11:7). What does this mean if both the man and the woman are clearly said to be created in the divine image (Gen 1:27)?³⁵ Nikolaus Hunnius explains that this refers to how the husband as the head of the wife (Eph 5:23) is empowered via the image of God to exercise dominion differently than his wife does (Gen 1:28). “... [A]s God governs the world, so also is the husband (*Mann*) to rule the house.” Hunnius adds that this nuance of the image is so unique that “In this sense, again the term is applicable but to husbands (*Ehemännern*); and in no way to females, children, unmarried persons or widows etc.”³⁶

Other Ancient Near East cultures applied the divine image only to kings.³⁷ Genesis 1:26–29 indicates that all humans are created in the image of God and have dominion. While Genesis insists that all people are equal regardless of their sex, race, or social rank, it also recognizes the need for complementarity and subordination (Gen 2:18).

Some Lutherans have thought the good angels must have the divine image because they share the same characteristics that the Scriptures use to define it. Martin Chemnitz states, “All the angels were created in truth, John 8:44; in holiness, because they were called the holy angels; in righteousness and in the image of God, which had to be restored in man, Eph 4:34.”³⁸ Be that as it may, David Hollaz notes that the Scriptures do not clearly affirm or deny whether angels have the image or not.³⁹ But the fact of the matter is that God only explicitly says that mankind was created with it. It is man and ultimately Christ in the state of humiliation that are a little lower than God (Ps 8:5; Heb 2:6–9). Only human beings are called to carry out all the purposes or effects of the divine image (i.e., faith, active righteousness, procreation [Matt 22:30], and dominion [Ps 8:6–9]).

States of Man

The Augustinian states of man have often been used to explicate the human condition. The *Book of Concord* lays out the four traditional states as follows: “before the fall,” “before ...

³³ See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1:473–74 (pt. 1, q. 93, art. 6).

³⁴ Gerhard, *On Creation*, 300 (locus 11, par. 104).

³⁵ Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand, *Systematis Universae Theologiae ... decidantur*, rev. ed (Leipzig: Johann Hallervord, 1638), 1:314–15.

³⁶ Nikolaus Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum ... wort verfasst* (Wittenberg: Paul Helwig, 1628), 135; Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 47–48. See also Johannes Rudbeckius, *Loci Theologici: Föreläsningar vid Uppsala universitet 1611–1613*, ed. Bengt Häggglund (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 109; Gerhard, *On Creation*, 301 (locus 11, par. 105–7).

³⁷ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 153.

³⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works*, trans. Fred Kramer, Luther Poellet, Georg Williams, J. A. O. Preus, Matthew Harrison, Jacob Corzine, and Andrew Smith (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008–15), 7:301.

³⁹ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 469–70.

conversion,” “after they have been reborn,” and “when they arise from the dead.”⁴⁰ Abraham Calov adds to these a fifth state of eternal condemnation for unbelievers in hell. However, Calov rightly rejects a sixth state called the “state of pure nature.”⁴¹

Image of God in the Strict Sense

It should come as no surprise that Luther advocates for restraint when trying to spell out the image of God in the strict sense. While the Bible has some clear teachings about its nature and purpose, the human faculties of memory, intellect, and will have been so distorted by the fall that they are not able to fully grasp this Edenic gift, which is only eschatologically (i.e., already in justification, but not yet fully until glorification) restored in Christ.⁴² Needless to say, Biblical anthropology has not fared well in the procrustean bed of fallen worldviews. It should also be recognized that Genesis 1:26–27 does not explicitly define the image of God. The meaning and function of the image of God become clearer when its immediate context is read in light of the rest of the canonical Scriptures, especially those passages treating its restoration in Christ. Certain texts from the apocrypha are also worth referencing because they shed light on how the canonical texts were historically understood.

The distinction between the image and likeness of God is partially rooted in a misunderstanding of Genesis 1:26–27. The LXX added the conjunction “and” (καί) between “in our image” and “according to our likeness,” obscuring the Hebrew parallelism. The Masoretic text reads, “in our image, according to our likeness (בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ), which shows that these two terms refer to the same concept. Both “image” and “likeness” are used without the other to refer to the same idea in Genesis 1:27 and 5:1. Whereas the Hebrew preposition כְּ governs “image” in Genesis 1:26, and כְּ governs “image” in Genesis 5:3; the Hebrew preposition כְּ governs “likeness” in Genesis 5:3, and כְּ governs “likeness” in Genesis 1:26. Finally, the LXX uses εἰκὼν and ὁμοίωσις to translate צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת in Genesis 1:26 respectively. It uses εἰκὼν and ἰδέα to translate these same two words in Genesis 5:3. But it uses εἰκὼν to translate both Hebrew words in Genesis 1:27 and 5:1.

The divine image is the image of the Triune God. God the Father created all things through his Son and by his Holy Spirit (Gen 1:1–3, Ps 33:6, 9; 148:5; John 1:3, 14; 1 Cor 8:6, Col 1:15–16; Heb 1:1–2, 10, 11:3). When the Triune God made man, he said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” (נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ) (Gen 1:26). The image is renewed in Christ (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:47, 49; 2 Cor 3:18), but the renewed image is not the image of Christ as Andreas Osiander and other have claimed.⁴³ It is the image of the Triune God. After all, Christ is the essential image of the Triune God. He who sees Christ, sees the Father (John 14:8–10).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ FC SD II, 2.

⁴¹ Abraham Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum ... exhibens* (Wittenberg: Andreas Hartmann, Johann Röhner, Michael Wendt, Christian Schroedter, and Johann Wilcke, 1655–77), 4:385–88.

⁴² LW 1:60–65. See also Johann Gerhard, *Succinct and Select Theological Aphorisms*, trans. Paul A. Rydecki (Malone: Repristination Press, 2018), chap. 8, aphorism 2–4.

⁴³ Andreas Osiander, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Gottfried Seebaß and Gerhard Müller (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1975–97), 9:465, 471–72.

⁴⁴ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–57), 1:515–16; John P. Meyer, “The Image of God, Genesis 1,” in *Our Great Heritage*, ed. Lyle W. Lange (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 2:185.

A dependent faith-relationship with the Triune God (Gen 2:16–17) presupposes that humans were created with the original passive righteousness necessary to be capable of trusting. After humans lost the image of God in the fall, unregenerate humans are unable to self-create trust in the Triune God (Gen 3:17; 6:5; 8:21) and can only self-generate trust in false gods (e.g., self, idols, etc.). While humans retain their natural faculties (e.g., memory, intellect, and will), unregenerate humans no longer have the graced human faculties necessary for expressing active righteousness in properly-ordered free and responsible service to God and others (Gen 3:7–8, 12, 16–17). Consequently, their ability to execute dominion over creation (Gen 1:26, 28) is damaged as well (Gen 3:17–19, 9:2).

With the aforementioned in mind, later Old Testament and apocrypha texts conclude that the image of God in the strict sense is comprised of uprightness, immortality, holiness, righteousness, strength, and knowledge. Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, “God made man upright.” Wisdom 1:13; 2:23; 9:2–3 states, “God did not make death ... God created the human being to be immortal/incorruptible, and he made him to be an image of his own eternity” ... “to administer the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgement in uprightness of soul.” Sirach 17:2–3, 7 says the image includes “strength like [the Lord’s] own” and “understanding.” See also 2 Esdras 8:44, which is not found in the apocrypha of the Luther Bible or the LXX.

An image of God that consists of uprightness, righteousness, and holiness accords with Genesis 1:31; 3:17; 5:3; 6:5; and 8:21. The creation of man in God’s image made the creation “very good” (Gen 1:31; Ps 139:14). But Adam’s fall broke faith with God, distorted human relationships, and cursed the creation (Gen 3:17). Thereafter, man could only procreate children in fallen Adam’s unrighteous image (Gen 5:3). An evil inclination was also injected into all human beings (Gen 6:5; 8:21).

A divine image that consists of immortality and strength is congruent with Genesis 2:16–17; 3:19; 5:3; and 5:5ff. The Lord God himself states that humans would only die if they broke faith with God by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:16–17).⁴⁵ Five major objections have been raised to this claim. First, Genesis assumes that even Edenic humans were naturally mortal and would eventually die. Hebrew thought has not yet developed a notion of the afterlife.⁴⁶ This contradicts Genesis 2:17 which only speaks of death resulting from sin. This view also tries to impose the same Ancient Near East religious thought on Genesis that Genesis is combating. What is “natural” to fallen man is not natural to Edenic man.

Second, Paul says that only God is immortal (1 Tim 6:16).⁴⁷ In addition, humans cannot be immortal because that would imply they are autonomous secular beings who find their true identity and freedom apart from God. However, humans are clearly not essentially immortal.

⁴⁵ See also Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 64–65, 69; Walter R. Roehrs and Martin Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 19; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 67–68, 83; Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 72.

⁴⁶ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910), 84; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 223–25; 266–65.

⁴⁷ Kidner, *Genesis*, 64–65; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 173; Kenneth A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 211–12.

They derive their immortality from God. That being said, Genesis never calls pre-fall humans mortal. The rest of the Scriptures actually do describe both the restored image (1 Cor 15:47, 49, 53–55) and re/created life as “immortality” (Rom 2:7; 2 Tim 1:10. cf. Wis 2:23).⁴⁸ Moreover, human beings (whether they know or it or not) cannot exist in any of the aforementioned states of man without being sustained by one or more of God’s various presences (e.g., gracious sacramental presence [Gen 2:9, 16–17; Exod 25:22; 29:43; 40:34–35; John 14:23; 15:4–5], providential presence [Gen 6:3; Jer 23:23–24; Ps 139:7–12; Acts 17:28], wrathful presence [Ps 139:7–12; Rev 14:10], and glorious presence [Rev 21:3–4; 22:5]).⁴⁹ Human autonomy is a fiction of fallen man.

Third, human immortality could only be activated by eating from the tree of life.⁵⁰ Genesis never actually says eating from the tree of life activated immortality, it only says that eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil deactivated immortality. The fact that Adam and Eve were permitted to eat from the tree of life from the start suggests that regular partaking of the tree of life sacramentally preserved human life in a dependent faith-relationship with God before the fall (Gen 2:9, 16–17).⁵¹ Fallen humans were only barred from the tree of life so that they would not enter into an unalterable state of eternal death (Gen 3:22–24).

Fourth, God retracted the death penalty for eating the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:17) because humans did not immediately die.⁵² Humans actually did experience spiritual death in the fall (Gen 2:17; Matt 8:22; Luke 9:60; Rom 5:12–19; 6:13; Eph 2:1). This triggered the inevitability of temporal death (Gen 3:19; 5:3). Had God not remedied their spiritual death with the protoevangelium (Gen 3:15), they would have experienced eternal death (Gen 3:22; Ezek 33:11; Dan 12:2; Matt 10:28; Joh 8:51; 11:25–26; 2 Pet 3:9; Rev 20:6, 14–15; 21:8).⁵³

Fifth, the reference to “dust” (Gen 2:7; 3:19) indicates that humans were always supposed to die.⁵⁴ However, the far more significant literary allusion is Genesis 3:17’s clear reference (“which I commanded you, saying, ‘you shall not eat of it’” [לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ]) to Genesis 2:17 (“you shall not eat from it” [לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ] for in that day that you eat of it you will surely die”). In fact, Genesis 3:17’s reference to Genesis 2:17 expects the reader to recall the rest of the Genesis 2:17 quotation which explicitly links death only to eating the forbidden fruit. The omission of the “breath of life” in Genesis 3:19, conversely, does just as much to undermine a

⁴⁸ Orthodox Lutherans often said that man only lost his physical immortality in the fall. After the final judgment, believers regain their physical immortality and the damned suffer eternal death with an immortal soul and resurrected body (Gen 3:22; Dan 12:2; John 5:29; Rev 20:11–15). Balthasar Mentzer, *Handbook*, trans. Walter Hamester (Decatur: Johann Gerhard Institute, 1998), q. 66.

⁴⁹ For God’s wrathful presence in hell, see John Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 73–150* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 458–59.

⁵⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Genesis*, JPS Tanakh Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 21; John A. Goldingay, *Genesis*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 61–62, 82.

⁵¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 81–82; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 79.

⁵² David J. A. Clines, “Themes in Genesis 1–11,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976): 490; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 172–74, 203–4; Goldingay, *Genesis*, 62.

⁵³ Kidner, *Genesis*, 69, 72; Roehrs and Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study*, 20. Gunkel too recognizes that God is acting to keep humans from achieving an irreversible permanent state (i.e., “immortality”) in Gen 3:22–24. However, Hermann Gunkel thinks God was trying to keep a humanity that was always destined to die from becoming gods. See his *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 23–24.

⁵⁴ Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 83.

literary connection between Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 as the mention of “dust” does in both passages to promote it.⁵⁵ If the tree of life would have never sustained ongoing life in the first place, why would human beings now need to be barred from it (Gen 3:22–24)?

An image of God that consists of understanding and knowledge accords with Genesis 2:16–17, and 3:22. Just as Christ grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), humans were created to grow in experiential knowledge.⁵⁶ This does not mean that Adam and Eve lacked knowledge and understanding. God himself indicates that they had the compacity for making moral decisions in Genesis 2:16–17, though the crafty serpent would dupe them (Gen 3:5). It is also true that human beings only became like God “knowing good and evil” after the fall (Gen 3:22). When humans tried to usurp the autonomous understanding and knowledge that only the infinite God is capable of having, they lost the genuine human understanding and knowledge associated with the image of God. As a result, their finite minds were only obfuscated by evil because they were not created to have autonomous understanding and knowledge of good and evil.⁵⁷

Most importantly, the New Testament’s renewed image of God does not just affirm the later Old Testament and apocrypha image of God, but it also comports with Genesis’s image of God. Death is only the result of Adam’s fall according to Romans 5:12; 8:10; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 53–55; and Revelation 21:4. Ephesians 4:23–24 defines the restored divine image as being “renewed in the spirit of your mind and putting on the new man, which according to [the likeness of] God has been created in true righteousness and holiness.” Luke 1:74–75 concurs with Ephesians 4:23–24. Colossians 3:10 states, “the new [man]” ... “is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created him.” Finally, Romans 8:29 speaks of the renewed image in terms of being “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son.” Similarly, 1 Corinthians 15:47, 49 says, “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly [first man], we will also bear the image of the heavenly [second man].” Likewise, 2 Corinthians 3:18 states, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

In sum, the image of the Triune God in the strict sense refers to concreated (Gen 1:26–27) righteousness, holiness, uprightness (Gen 1:31; Eccl 7:29; Eph 4:24; 2 Cor 3:18. cf. Wis 9:3), understanding, knowledge (Gen 2:16–17; Col 3:10. cf. Sir 17:7), immortality, and strength (Gen 2:16–17; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 47, 49, 53–55. cf. Wis 2:23; Sir 17:3) with which human beings, both males and females (Gen 1:27), reflect their Creator. Christ is the essential image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3. cf. Wis 7:26); humans are the derived, normed, copied, patterned, and (accidental, or better) concreated image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Humans also bear the image in different ways among themselves (1 Cor 11:7). All believers have it fully before the fall and after the resurrection (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18) but eschatologically after justification (Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 5:17). Without a faith-relationship with the Triune God, the divine image cannot exist in man (Gen 2:16–17). God’s Life-giving Word and the sacrament of the tree of life sustained both the image and faith in Edenic man (Gen 2:16–17), just like the means of grace sustain both the image and faith in the regenerated man.

⁵⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 83.

⁵⁶ Adolph Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. James Langebartels, Heinrich Vogel, Richard A. Krause, Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange, and Bill Tackmier (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999–2009), 2:326–30. See also *LW* 1:110–11, 113.

⁵⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 97; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 165–66, Steinmann, *Genesis*, 66.

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession agrees with this definition:

Thus original righteousness was intended to include not only a balanced physical constitution, but these gifts as well: a more certain knowledge of God, fear of God, and confidence in God, or at least the uprightness and power needed to do these things. And Scripture affirms this when it says [Gen. 1:27] that humankind was formed in the image and likeness of God. What else does this mean except that a wisdom and righteousness that would grasp God and reflect God was implanted in humankind, that is, humankind received gifts like the knowledge of God, fear of God, trust in God, and the like? This is how Irenaeus interpreted the likeness of God. After having discussed many other things related to this topic, Ambrose then says, “That soul is not in the image of God in which God is not always present.” And in Ephesians [5:9] and Colossians [3:10] Paul shows that the image of God is the knowledge of God, righteousness, and truth. Even Peter Lombard is not afraid to say that original righteousness is the very likeness of God, which was implanted in the human creature by God. The statements of the ancients that we cited do not contradict Augustine’s interpretation concerning the image of God.⁵⁸

Luther and the Lutheran Fathers also support this understanding of the image of God in the strict sense.⁵⁹ Still they often use “original righteousness” as shorthand for the image of God because they recognize the divine image was fundamentally passive righteousness.⁶⁰ The Formula of Concord concurs with this shorthand: “Original sin is a complete absence or ‘lack of the original righteousness acquired in paradise’ [Ap II, 15] or of the image of God, according to which the human being was originally created in truth, holiness, and righteousness.”⁶¹ Calov so recognized that human beings were created passively righteous and in a faith relationship with God that he spoke of “justification in the state of integrity” (*justificatione in statu integritatis*).⁶² Of course, Calov did not mean that man had to be redeemed from sin before the fall.

Critique of Other Views of the Image of God

A sort of structural view of the image of God in the strict sense might be possible if it only meant that original righteousness was concreated. Since the structural view of the image of God does not mean this, it fosters a number of difficulties. The distinction between image and likeness is not exegetically tenable. Likewise, the distinction between an essential image and an accidental likeness is not contextually defensible. Johann Gerhard adds, “Since [righteousness and holiness of truth] are a list of qualities and virtues, it is clear that the image refers more to likeness in virtues than to nature.”⁶³ Since man loses these qualities and virtues in the fall, the image of God in the strict sense cannot be understood structurally.

Memory, intellect, and will cannot constitute the image of God in the strict sense. Luther observes, “If these powers are the image of God, it will also follow that Satan was created according to the image of God, since he surely has these natural endowments, such as memory

⁵⁸ Ap II.17–22.

⁵⁹ LW 1:61–65; Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:321.

⁶⁰ Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1899), 219, 226.

⁶¹ FC SD I, 10.

⁶² Abraham Calov, *Theologia Positiva ... Ceu Compendium Systematicus Theologici* (Frankfurt and Wittenberg: Johann Ludolph Quenstedt, 1690), 268, 274–75.

⁶³ Gerhard, *Succinct*, chap. 8, aphorism 5–6.

and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them.”⁶⁴ Moreover, if these same powers are what makes a man human even after the fall, then some people would seem to be more human than others given the fact that some (e.g., unborn, handicapped, etc.) people are not able to exercise these powers as well as others. Thomas Aquinas’s tendency to reduce humanity to rationality seems especially dangerous. Memory, intellect, and will cannot be the image of God in the strict sense. After man lost the image in the fall, these powers remain, albeit corrupted.

The problems with the structural view of the image of God were compounded by Aristotelian substance ontology (i.e., metaphysical categories). Like Roman Catholics and the Reformed, Early Modern Lutherans used Aristotelian philosophy. Despite its positive uses, Lutherans recognized how substance ontology distorted Biblical anthropology. It was not just Roman Catholic anthropology that forced Lutherans to explicate Biblical anthropology in modified Aristotelian terms, the Flacian Controversy and Syncretistic Controversy necessitated this conversation as well. To counter synergism, Matthias Flacius maintained that man’s “material substance” (*substantia materialis*) remained intact after the fall. However, the image of God, which had been his “formal substance” (*substantia formalis*), had been replaced with original sin, which was his new “formal substance.”⁶⁵ Georg Calixt, conversely, propagated a Roman Catholic notion of a “state of pure nature,” original righteousness as a superadded gift, and original sin as a “deficiency” (*carentia*) to advance irenicism in Lutheranism.⁶⁶

The Lutherans confessed that the image of God (i.e., original righteousness) cannot be a substance because man loses the image in the fall.⁶⁷ They maintained that God would become the origin of evil and Christ would have to assume original sin to save mankind if original sin were substantial.⁶⁸ Besides passing remarks about fallen man being stamped with the “image of the devil,”⁶⁹ Luther does refer to original sin as “nature-sin” or “essential sin.” Here Luther uses “nature” in the sense of “disposition,” not “nature” in the sense of “substance.” In other words, man’s character rather than his essence has been fundamentally altered by the fall.⁷⁰ Now if the image of God and original sin are not substantial, then they can only be “accidental” in substance ontology. The Formulators and Orthodox Lutherans did reluctantly call them accidents,⁷¹ but they warned that they were not mere accidents. In fact, Chemnitz writes, “There are many who so weaken the doctrine of original sin that they imagine that it is only a corruption consisting of accidents.”⁷²

The problem with calling original righteousness and original sin “mere accidents” is that it suggests there is a state of pure nature underneath them. A state of pure nature understands original righteousness to be a mere accidental superadded gift for bridling the conflict between

⁶⁴ LW 1:61–62.

⁶⁵ Matthias Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae Seu de Sermonibus Sacramentorum* (Basel: Eusebius Episcopus, 1581), 2:368–82.

⁶⁶ Georg Calixt, *Epitome Theologiae* (Goslar: Johann Vogt, 1619), 94–95, 105–6, 113.

⁶⁷ Ap II, 15–23; FC SD I, 10–12; Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:510; Gerhard, *On Creation*, 293–95 (locus 11, par. 98).

⁶⁸ FC SD I, 30–34; FC SD I, 40–46. See also FC SD II, 81.

⁶⁹ LW 1:63.

⁷⁰ FC SD I, 51, 53.

⁷¹ FC SD, I, 50, 54, 60.

⁷² Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:579. See also Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:62.

the lower sensual and higher spiritual nature rather than something co-natural, or better concreated, in human beings (Gen 1:26–27). This idea, meant to guard against Pelagianism, suggested that God did not make a fully good creation.⁷³ If that were not bad enough, a state of pure nature also understands original sin to be an accidental deprivation of original righteousness rather than the total corruption of the human nature (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 51:5; Jer 17:9; John 3:6; Rom 7:18; Eph 2:3).⁷⁴ This idea implies that human nature largely retained its integrity after the fall and has some active compacity to orient the unregenerate human to God. This innate ability to do more than civil righteousness apart from original righteousness is Semi-Pelagian. The impact of the state of pure nature does not end here. The concept paved the way for Immanuel Kant's deist idea that autonomy, even from God, was a necessary precondition for human freedom and morality.⁷⁵ Secularism would develop these ideas further to justify the privatizing of Christianity and ultimately the claim that a dependent-faith relationship with the Triune God only dehumanizes human life. Henri de Lubac led the charge against the state of pure nature in Roman Catholicism for this very reason.⁷⁶

All of this was why Flacius wanted to make the problematic argument that original sin was a formal substance, and Chemnitz warns against calling original sin a mere accident. It is also why Lutherans rejected a state of pure nature. In accord with other Lutheran theologians, Calov says, “The Papists err, who invent still another state, which they call purely natural (*purorum naturalium*), which is nothing more than a pure figment of the Scholastics; since, indeed, a man never did exist, nor could exist, with the simple negation both of integrity and grace and of sin and misery, who was neither just nor unjust, and who neither pleased nor offended God.”⁷⁷ It is further why the Formula of Concord calls the divine image and original righteousness “concreated” (*concreata*) and not a superadded gift.⁷⁸ In accord with other Lutheran theologians, Calov explains further:

... [B]y this term [righteousness] ... is now meant, according to the use of theological writers, that universal and exceedingly delightful agreement, *συμφωνία*, in the first man, of mind, will, and heart, with the intellect, will, and heart of God. ... Righteousness is called original because it was first of all in man and because from the beginning he possessed the same after the manner of a concreated habit (*habitus concreati*); also, in order that the righteousness of man's first and original state may be distinguished from moral, imputed, and beginning righteousness, from what is perfected in another life, and from every other whatsoever; and finally, because it needs to be transmitted to posterity by generation ... just as now in the state of sin, original sin is propagated....⁷⁹

⁷³ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:12–15, 38–43; Johann Michael Reu, *Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Dubuque: Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1963), 87–88.

⁷⁴ FC SD 1, 6, 20, 22–23, 30. See also CA II; Ap II, 7–8.

⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor, The Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166ff (AA 5:33ff).

⁷⁶ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder: Crossroad Herder, 1998).

⁷⁷ Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, 4:386–87, 467ff. See also LW 1:142, 164–67; 12:308; Hollaz, *Examen Theologicvm Acroamaticvm*, 482–84; E. Hove, *Christian Doctrine* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1930), 131–32. Similarly, Hunnius adds, “Man has not been created in the state of sin and misery, nor as being subject to death, as he now actually appears to us.” Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 47.

⁷⁸ FC, SD, I, 10, 27.

⁷⁹ Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, 4:598. See also LW 1:164–67; Konrad Dieterich, *Institutiones*

In other words, the original passive righteousness was concreated (i.e., not essential or merely accidental). The post-fall passive righteousness remains imputed as long as man is “at the same time saint and sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*). That said, the Lutherans did acknowledge the mystical union or indwelling of the Trinity in pre-fall and regenerate man is a superadded gift.⁸⁰

The anthropomorphic view of the image of God in the strict sense has a number of problems. It overlooks most of what Scripture actually says about the image. God is spirit (John 4:24). He does not have a physical body except in the person of Jesus Christ. The Father may have revealed himself twice in a visible manifestation (Gen 18:1–33; Dan 7:9–14). The Holy Spirit assumed the visible manifestation of a dove (Matt 3:16). Yet, neither the Father nor the Spirit ever became incarnate or have a material body. The Scriptures use anthropomorphic language to communicate the uncommunicable in terms that humans can understand. Believers certainly are called to reflect the divine image to others (Gen 1:26–27). What is reflected to others is righteousness, not the material form of God.

The functional view of the image of God in the strict sense equates image with dominion which is man’s mastery and rule over creation as God’s representative (Gen 1:26, 28–29). This view is so focused on what Genesis 1 says about the image that it ignores what Genesis 2 and the rest of the Bible say about the image. Genesis 1:26–28 never equates dominion with the image. Instead these verses suggest that the image is what makes dominion possible.⁸¹ It is only after the image is bestowed that dominion is granted with another distinct word. Thus, dominion is framed as a purpose or effect of the image and is included among other such purposes or results of the image (Gen 1:28). Dominion is also not the core of the image in Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9.⁸² It is not the core of the image in any of the New Testament passages that speak about the image’s renewal either. Even though dominion is diminished by the fall (Gen 3:17–19), it is not completely lost like the image (Gen 3:23; 9:1–3). The unregenerate perform some measure of dominion (Gen 10:1–31).⁸³ If dominion were the essential mark of humanity after the fall, that would raise questions about the humanity of those who fail to exercise it optimally. Contrary to many critics of the Bible today, dominion properly understood does not foster patriarchy, exploitation, racism, colonialism, and environmental catastrophe. Sin is the origin of all that is truly disordered about the world.

Catecheticae ... Expositio, ed. August Dieckhoff (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1864), 233–34; Rudbeckius, *Loci Theologici*, 107–9; Gerhard, *On Creation*, 273, 307 (locus 11, par. 57, 116); Balthasar Meisner, *Anthropologia Sacra*, 3rd ed. (Wittenberg: Tobias Mevius, 1663), 45; Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:9; Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:520. Other Lutherans used the word co-natural for the same idea. Heinrich Schmid calls all the excellences associated with the image of God “*natural* to man in his original state, not indeed in the sense that if he lost them he would no longer be the same being; but yet in this sense, that they were created along with him, and that they cannot be separated from him without making his whole condition different from what it formally was. This is expressed in the statement, that the image of God is a natural perfection, and not an external, supernatural, and supplementary gift.” Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology*, 219. See also Hieronymus Kromayer, *Theologia Positivo-Polemica* (Frankfurt: Friedrich Knoch, 1688), art. 7, thesis 3; Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:324–25.

⁸⁰ Gerhard, *On Creation*, 282 (locus 11, par. 79); Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, 4:467.

⁸¹ Gerhard, *Succinct*, chap. 8, aphorism 67; Meyer, “The Image of God,” 2:178–79.

⁸² *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament [TDOT]*, s.v., “צִלְמִי.”

⁸³ LW 1:67–68; William C. Weinrich, “Creation,” in *Confessing the Faith: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, ed. Samuel H. Nafziger, John F. Johnson, David A. Lumppp, and Howard W. Tepker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 1:2801–81.

The Lutheran view of the image of God in the strict sense defended so far is a relational view. However, Karl Barth's relational view is problematic. He seems to base his view exclusively on Genesis 1:27. His relationality is really about how interpersonal relationships reflect the relationships of the person of the Trinity. His image does not require the original passive righteousness or faith. As a result, Barth's image of God can survive the fall. Barth's mixed gospel-law only further problematizes his conception of the divine image.

Some Irenaeus-influenced theologians have argued that the renewed image of God cannot be used to explicate the pre-fall image of God which is in some sense imperfect. They insist the image renewed in Christ is something greater and different that will only fully manifest itself in the human community at the end of time.⁸⁴ However, Ephesians 4:23–24 makes it clear that the “new man, which according to [the likeness of] God has been created in true righteousness and holiness” is the lost likeness being “renewed” (*ἀνανεοῦσθαι*). The same is true for the “new self, which is being renewed (*ἀνακαινούμενον*) in knowledge according to the image of its Creator” (Col 3:10). Of course, the “new man” is also being distinguished here from the old man. But the way the new man is “new” is by being a restoration of the divine image that was lost.⁸⁵ To suggest that God created man imperfect so that he could accomplish something more in man via Christ not only contradicts Genesis 1:31, it imposes a process theology framework on the Biblical text.

Purpose of the Image of God in the Strict Sense

The divine image bearer in the strict sense is a passively righteous type called into being to reflect an archetype (Gen 1:26–27; 2 Cor 3:2–3). In other words, the divine image's purpose is to foster a recognition that human beings (i.e., type) have a responsibility first and foremost to God (i.e., archetype [Gen 2:8–17]), then to other human beings (i.e., fellow types [Gen 2:21–25]), and finally to creation itself (Gen 2:15, 18–20).⁸⁶ Passive righteousness drives human image-bearers to freely respond in these relationships with faith, active righteousness (Gen 2:16–17), vocation (Gen 2:8, 15), procreation (Gen 1:22, 28; 9:1, 7), and dominion (Gen 1:26, 28–30; 9:2–3; Ps 8:6–8. cf. Wis 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3, 7) as defined by the framework of the law (Gen 2:16–17; 4:7) and the needs of the neighbor. In other words, human beings long to reflect the divine image and make God's name holy via their royal priesthood (Gen 1:26–27; Exod 19:5–6). God, moreover, perpetuates his providence and grace through the vocations and eucharistic (i.e., thank) offerings of these very same image bearers.

Loss of the Image of God in the Strict Sense

The Scriptures clearly say that Adam's progeny was created in his fallen image after the fall (Gen 5:3). Paul says, “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly [first man], we will also bear the image of the heavenly [second man]” (1 Cor 15:49). If Jesus Christ, the essential image

⁸⁴ Kooi and Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, 263–64. See also Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 178–80; Wolhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–93), 2:10–15. Others have advocated that the image of God should be defined by wisdom literature rather than Genesis. See David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

⁸⁵ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:334–35, R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 566–70.

⁸⁶ See also Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 23–29.

of God, came so that the fallen would “be conformed,” “bear,” “be transformed into,” “be renewed,” and “put on” Christ’s image because they only have the fallen image of Adam (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), then the image of God in the strict sense must have been lost in the fall.⁸⁷ While man remains human (Gen 3:9, 22) and God’s good creation (Ps 8:5–9; 24:1; 50:12; 139:13–16; 1 Cor 10:26),⁸⁸ his humanity is deformed and curved in on itself. In the aftermath of the fall, Adam passed to all his progeny an “evil inclination” or original sin (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 51:7; 143:2; Isa 6:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12–21; 14:23; Heb 11:6). They experience death (Gen 3:19; Gen 5:5ff; Rom 5:12; 8:10; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 53–55; Rev 21:4. cf. Wis 2:23–24). Finally, mankind has lost created faith (Gen 3:17). For this reason, the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran fathers conclude that the divine image has been lost.

That not only is original sin (in human nature) such a complete lack of all good in spiritual, divine matters, but also that at the same time it replaces the lost image of God in the human being with a deep-seated, evil, horrible, bottomless, unfathomable, and indescribable corruption of the entire human nature and of all its powers, particularly of the highest, most important powers of the soul, in mind, heart, and will.⁸⁹

While this study has argued that passive righteousness and faith are fundamental to being fully human, the loss of the image shows why there are two kingdoms. To be sure, Christ is the Lord of the kingdoms of the right and the left. There is overlap between the kingdoms. Christians do not stop being Christians in the left-hand kingdom. Some dominion persists. That being said, there is no state of pure nature or common grace to fuel an optimistic notion of cultural progress. God’s Word and Sacraments are the sole source of grace. There is only law and providence in the left-hand kingdom. Unbelievers are not capable of applying the gospel (Rom 14:23; 1 Cor 2:15; 2 Cor 3:5–6; 2 Tim 2:15; Heb 11:6). When the left-hand kingdom attempts to administer the gospel, it excuses assaults on natural law and fails to correct injustices (Gen 9:6; Rom 13). When the right-hand kingdom makes the law its focus it become legalistic. This is why theocratic (e.g., Catholic Integralism and Protestant Dominion Theology) attempts to integrate the right-hand kingdom with the left-hand kingdom only end up preventing both kingdoms from performing their God-given duties.

Image of God in the Wide Sense

Many Lutherans have never addressed whether or not there is a structural image of God in the wide sense. Still, some have explicitly rejected it.⁹⁰ Others have explicitly affirmed an image of God in the wide sense that is essential or substantial to human beings.⁹¹ Those that have

⁸⁷ LW 1:339–40; Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:515.

⁸⁸ FC SD 1, 30–34.

⁸⁹ FC SD I, 10–11. See also Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:509–10; Gerhard, *On Creation*, 322–23 (locus 11, par. 129–132).

⁹⁰ The following theologians rejected the image of God in the wide sense: Friedrich Adolf Philippi, *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1854–82), 2:371ff; Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:518–19; Meyer, “The Image of God,” 2:189–91; Hove, *Christian Doctrine*, 125–26; Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 190–91.

⁹¹ The following theologians taught the image of God in the wide sense: Johann Wigand, *SYNTAGMA, Seu Corpus Doctrinae ... ueteri Testamento ... cinnatum* (Basel: Johann Oporinus, 1564), 402; Gerhard, *On Creation*, 326 (locus 11, par. 137); Johann Gerhard, *Confessio Catholica* (Frankfurt: Christian Genshius, 1679), 1371 (bk. II, pt. III, art. 20, chap. 2); König, *Theologia positive acroamatica*, 120 (pt. II, par. 8); Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-*

affirmed it typically call it the “remnant” of the divine image (e.g., Gerhard, Hollaz, Bengel, Meyer, and Giese), the “lesser principal or secondary conformity” (e.g., Gerhard), the divine image in the “improper sense” (e.g., König, Quenstedt, and Linsenmann), the “image of God in the wide (general) sense” (e.g., Wigand, Baier-Walther, Löber, Luthardt, Rohnert, Jacobs, Hoenecke, Lindberg, Dau, Lenski, A. Pieper, and Mueller), the “*character indelebilis*” even after the fall (e.g., Keil, Delitzsch), “certain external characteristics” of the likeness (e.g., Kretzmann), or the “shell of God’s image” (e.g., Deutschlander). Those that have affirmed it have also noted that the wide sense is really what the church fathers meant by the substantial divine image (i.e., memory, intellect, and will) as opposed to the accidental divine likeness.

Two concerns have driven the debate about a structural image of God in the wide sense: Can this be affirmed without suggesting that the image of God in the strict sense partially survived the fall (i.e., without suggesting an active compacity for orienting oneself towards God remains in the unregenerate)? Is there any actually Scriptural support for the wide sense? The *Book of Concord* does not explicitly teach the wide sense. But the Formula of Concord maintains that there is something that remains in fallen human beings that distinguishes them as a “rational creature” in terms of the law and makes them “capable of conversion” without coercion by God’s grace alone.⁹² While the Formula rejected Viktorin Strigel’s synergistic “*modus agendi* or way of accomplishing something good and beneficial in divine matters,”⁹³ it recognized with Luther that the unregenerate still have a “capacity not active but passive” (*capacitatem [non activam, sed passivam]*) for God.⁹⁴

Do the Scriptures even speak about an image of God in the wide sense? Genesis 9:6, 1 Corinthians 11:7, and James 3:9 are typically cited as the Scriptural support for the image of God in the wide sense (cf. Wis 2:23; Sir 17:3; 2 Esd 8:44). Lutheran exegetes recognize the perfect verb in “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God he made [עֶצֶר] man” (Gen 9:6) could be understood as man only had been created in the image of God. However, Lutheran exegetes recognize that the present participle in “[man] is [ὁπαρχων] the image and glory of God,” suggests that man still possesses the image of God in

Polemica, 2:3; Johann Wilhelm Baier and C. F. W. Walther, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae Adjectis Notis Amplioribus ... Confirmatur* (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia Verlag, 1879), 2:147–49; Hollaz, *Examen Theologicvm Acroamaticvm*, 478; Christian Löber, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Fr. Dette, 1872), 346; Chr. Ernst Luthardt, *Kompendium der Dogmatik*, 10th ed. (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1900), 161; W. Linsenmann, *Die Dogmatik der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche* (Saginaw: Saginaw Publishing House, 1901–2), 1:251–54; W. Rohnert, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Braunschweig: Hellmuth Wollermann, 1902), 197; Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A Summary of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publishing House, 1905) 96, 99; Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:320, 322, 328–29; C. E. Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1928), 156–57; W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 1:150–52; August Pieper, “The Law Is Not Made for a Righteous Man,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997–2022), 2:79n1; Steven P. Mueller, ed., *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 132; Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015), 197, 199. See also Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 23–29; Kolb, *The Christian Faith*, 55–57; Jerrold A. Eickmann, “Anthropology,” 1:272–81.

⁹² FC SD II, 19–23.

⁹³ FC SD II, 61–62. See also FC SD, I, 10.

⁹⁴ FC SD II, 23, 60, 71; LW 33:67. See also Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Theological Anthropology and Sin*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics (Ft. Wayne: Luther Academy, 2023), 70, 74.

some sense (1 Cor 11:7).⁹⁵ They also recognized that the perfect participle in “the human beings who have been made [γεγονότας] in the likeness of God” (Jam 3:9), suggests humans still possess the image of God in some sense as well.⁹⁶ It should also be noted that the unregenerate carry out some measure of some of the purposes or effects of the image of God (e.g., vocation, procreation, and dominion). Thus, there is warrant for the teaching of the divine image in the wide sense.

The image of God in the wide sense seems to refer to a passive compacity for God, which makes unregenerate human use of memory, intellect, and will possible. Unlike the image in the strict sense, this image survives the fall, albeit totally corrupted, void of grace, unable to orient itself to God (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 51:7; 143:2; Isa 6:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12–21; 14:23; Heb 11:6). The divine image in the wide sense then would be essential and substantial to man. The divine image in the wide sense also provides human beings with God-given dignity. When one of God’s human representatives are dishonored, God is ultimately dishonored (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jam 3:9). Mankind also continues to be loved by God (John 3:16) and remains essentially his good creation (Ps 8:5–9; 24:1; 50:12; 139:13–16; 1 Cor 10:26). What maintains and fuels this image in the unregenerate is natural law (Gen 4:7; Rom 2:14–15) and providence (Gen 8:22; Neh 9:6; Matt 6:26; Acts 14:17; 17:25; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3).

Nathan Jastram has argued for a new Lutheran way of thinking about the wide and narrow sense of the image of God. He proposes that divine image in the wide sense be defined as “to be like God.” He then proposes two different kinds of narrow senses. His narrow sense 1. (i.e., former strict sense) refers to “godlike spiritual attributes lost in the fall, regained in Christ.” His narrow sense 2. (i.e., former wide sense) refers to godlike natural attributes retained after the fall.” Jastram himself admits this definition too would lead to confusion and does not adequately account for the comparative difference (e.g., between “Christ’s complete, essential likeness to our partial likeness”).⁹⁷ Ultimately, Jastram’s aim to be as comprehensive as possible still cannot account for every nuance of the image and muddies the distinctiveness of the narrow sense.

Purpose of the Image of God in the Wide Sense

The divine image bearer in the wide sense is also a type meant to reflect an archetype. In other words, its purpose is to foster a recognition that human beings have a responsibility to God (i.e., archetype [Rom 1:18–25]) and other human beings (i.e., fellow types [Rom 1:26–32]). Fallen man’s passive compacity for God, the demands of the law, and providence make civil righteousness (Rom 2:14–15) and some measure of some of the purposes or effects of the image in the strict sense possible (e.g., vocation, procreation, and dominion). But when unbelievers do these things, they are on some level always trying to justify themselves before the demands of

⁹⁵ Curtis Giese, *James*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2021), 312.

⁹⁶ Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, trans. Andrew R. Fausset (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1863), 5:27; H. A. W. Meyer, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 10:118; R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistles to James* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 611; Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The New Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 2:507–8; Giese, *James*, 312. See also C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1:287 on Gen 9:6.

⁹⁷ Nathan Jastram, “Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, no.1 (January 2004): 56–58.

the law, themselves, God, and their neighbors (Luke 10:29; 16:15). Nevertheless, God still perpetuates his providence through the vocations and works of unbelievers.

Recreation of the Image of God in the Narrow Sense

To accomplish a divine act of recreation for those who bear the image of the fallen first Adam, Christ assumed a perfect human nature. He did this so that man could receive the image of the new Adam via his theanthropic salvific work (Luke 1:74–75; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Martin Chemnitz captures Christ’s recreative work this way:

... [God] poured into [man’s] soul divine light, wisdom, and righteousness, etc., in order that man might be the image and likeness of God. Christ also, as He undertook to restore in man the image of God, used the process of breathing in or upon, as when he breathed upon the apostles and gave them the Holy Spirit, John 20:22. And there is no doubt that he intended to lead us to thoughts of that first inbreathing.⁹⁸

In justification, the image of God is recreated already (Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 5:17) but not yet in all its fullness (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:2). The regenerate remains at the same time saint and sinner until the last day (Gen 8:21; Rom 7:15–25; Gal 5:16–17). Here Luther expresses the “already” and the “saint” aspects of justification

But now the Gospel has brought about the restoration of that image [*Hoc autem nunc per Euangelium agitur, ut imago illa reparetur*]. Intellect and will indeed have remained, but both very much impaired. And so the Gospel brings it about that we are formed once more according to the familiar and indeed better image, because we are born again into eternal life, or rather into the hope of eternal life by faith, that we may live in God and with God and be one with Him as Christ says (John 17:21).⁹⁹

Luther conversely captures the “but not yet” and “at the same time sinner” aspects here.

In this manner this image of the new creature begins to be restored by the Gospel in this life, but it will not be finished in this life. But when it is finished in the kingdom of the Father, then the will will be truly free and good, the mind truly enlightened, and the memory persistent. Then it will also happen that all the other creatures will be under our rule to a greater degree than they were in Adam’s Paradise.¹⁰⁰

There are few better ways to close a reflection on the image of God than Martin Franzmann’s poetic summary of its restoration in his hymn “Thy Strong Word.”

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous;
Bright with Thine own holiness.
Glorious now, we press towards glory,
And our lives our hopes confess.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia without end!¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:282.

⁹⁹ WA 42:48; LW 1:64.

¹⁰⁰ LW 1:65. See also FC SD, XI, 49.

¹⁰¹ Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 1996), hymn 72:3.