

HUMAN BEINGS ARE A SPECIAL CREATION OF GOD

*What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of
your hands;
you have put all things under their feet.
[Ps 8:4-6]*

The crown of God's creation

However we see the process of creation, the Bible makes it clear that human beings are a special creation of God – the climax and crown of God's creative work (Ps 8:4-6). Human beings are unique, different from all the other creatures God created. God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed his breath into that person who became a living being (Gen 2:7). It is important to keep these two aspects together – that human beings are one with the earth (which they share with all creation, and to which they will return) but contain the breath (spirit) of God. This means human beings have a 'vertical' relationship with God, and a 'horizontal' relationship with the rest of creation.

While the Bible uses the terms 'body', 'soul' and 'spirit' to speak about human beings, it is important not to suggest that a human being is made up of three 'parts' (as for example in Greek philosophy). We do not 'have' a body, a soul and a spirit, but we **are** body, we **are** soul and we **are** spirit (1 Thess 5:23 – cf Kolb 53-56). It is also important that we recognise that the body is part of God's 'good' creation (Gen 1:31) and should be treated as such. The body will also rise again at the end of time (Phil 3:20-21, 1 Cor 15:35-57).

Human beings are spiritual beings. One aspect of this, which will be considered further below, is the necessity for human beings to live in relationship and to express their humanity in this way. [Further consideration of human spirituality is taken up in **CW2**.]

The life of every human being is sacred, and God demands that we value every human life as he does. This affects the way we consider all stages of human life, from conception to death.

With unique gifts, abilities and characteristics

Each individual person is unique. While there may be many similarities with other persons, no two human beings are identical. God has given each person distinctive characteristics and abilities (cf Luther's explanation to the first article of the Apostles Creed). These gifts do not establish our

worth, because human worth does not depend on people's abilities, talents or achievements; nor is it diminished by illness, handicap, age, or failure of any kind. Human worth certainly has nothing to do with race, colour, gender or anything else that distinguishes one human being from another. [The use of gifts is further developed in **CL2**.]

With individual worth and dignity

All human beings, whether or not they realise it, are individual creations of God. This gives every individual worth and value in the eyes of God. All people are of equal worth because they are all creatures of God whom he loves equally (Acts 10:34: 'God does not show favouritism', NIV). This value rests not only on the creative work of God, but also on the fact that Jesus has died for each individual and the Holy Spirit offers faith to each person and lives within each Christian.

Despite the effects of sin, each person has value in the eyes of God. Each person therefore can see her/himself as an individual with worth and dignity because that is the way God sees him/her. On this basis, each person can develop realistic self-awareness, self-identity and self-acceptance through interaction with others. This is a relationship of interdependence rather than independence. Individuals also need to learn how to deal with pressures which come from peers, the media, advertising, and other external influences.

Human beings are created 'in the image of God'

What is 'the image of God'?

There is considerable discussion of what it means that people are created 'in the image of God' (Gen 1:27). It does not mean that we look like God, because God is spirit. Nor is it to be seen in reason, speech, intelligence, etc, which sets us apart from the animal world.

'Image' in relation to God

Human beings are created to live in fellowship with God. They are able to know God, believe in God, love God and obey God. To reject this relationship with God is to pervert the image of God and become worshippers of self (idols) rather than God (Ps 106:19-22; 115:4-8; Rom 1:21-25).

Jesus Christ 'is the perfect example of what it means to be truly human precisely because he is also the perfectly loving and obedient Son of the Father' (Silcock 44). However, Jesus is also more than the perfect example: he himself is the image of God (Col 1:15).

'Image' in relation to creation

Part of what we understand by 'image of God' relates to the recognition that human beings were created to function as representative of God on earth and to be accountable to him for their care of creation (cf 'stewardship' in **CL3**). This mandate was given to human beings when God gave them 'dominion' over his creation (Gen 1:28), and when he placed the first human being in the garden 'to work it and take care of it' (Gen 2:15 NIV).

This responsibility as 'vice-regents' for God means that human beings rule creation in the place of God. They are accountable to God for the way they represent God and manage the earth. This requires responsible stewardship of creation, taking care of it, and not subjecting it to exploitation to satisfy human greed. It means careful and peaceful ruling of the animal world, again without exploitation or violence. It means responsibility for the welfare of all human beings, irrespective of race, colour, creed and social circumstances (cf **CL3**). As a recipient of God's blessing, it means to mediate God's blessing to his creation.

Are people still in 'the image of God'?

Has sin destroyed the image of God in human beings? There are very different views about this. The Lutheran confessions tend to see that the image of God was lost after the fall. They were concerned that nothing should weaken the understanding of the depth of original sin and the need for Jesus Christ as our only saviour from sin (cf **CB3**). However, this teaching can also lead to a false devaluing of the worth of human beings as the crown of God's creation.

The Bible indicates that even after the fall, human beings are made 'in the image of God' (Gen 9:6), but that this image is now deeply fractured because of sin. This is clear from the way in which human beings abuse their responsibility as carers of the earth and as representatives of God. However, human beings are still functioning as 'vice-regents' for God.

For Christians, the image of God, which has been so deeply damaged by sin, is gradually being restored by the power of the Holy Spirit as they grow in holiness (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).

Human beings are created for relationship

The account of creation (Gen 2:14b-25) shows how highly God values relationships. God created everything to be in a state of perfect harmony. Human beings, created in the image of God, shared in harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships with each other which reflected the relationships within the trinity. Human relationships flowed out of, and were blessed by, a

perfect relationship with the creator. Human beings were also in perfect harmony with the animals and all of the rest of creation. Before the advent of sin to distort and destroy those relationships, nothing disturbed them.

Human beings relate to each other at various levels. Each person is related to every other member of the human family, but God has placed us in a closer relationship with some people than with others. Relationships also change: for example parent/child relationships, friendships, work relationships, etc. The closer the relationship, the greater the mutual benefits, but also the responsibilities.

The effect of sin

Sin has fragmented the relationships which God had established (cf **CB3**). The account of the fall (Gen 3) clearly shows how all relationships were immediately shattered by the advent of sin: between Adam and Eve (vs 7; 12); between God and human beings (vs 8; 10); between human beings and the rest of creation (vs 15; 17; 18). Within one generation, brother kills brother (Gen 4:1-16). The natural self-centredness of sinful human beings leads to disharmony, conflict, and the breakdown of relationships at all levels. Individuals see themselves as the self-sufficient centre of the universe. Human beings see the rest of creation as provided for their benefit and exploitation (cf **CL3**). The Bible itself gives many examples of the tragedy of broken relationships (cf Gal 5:19-21).

Restored relationships

Jesus Christ came to restore broken relationships (cf **CB2**). By restoring the relationship between God and human beings (the 'new creation'), Jesus also provides healing for all broken relationships: between the individual and him/her self; between the individual and other people; between people and the animals, the environment and all of creation. For Christ's sake God offers forgiveness and restoration and makes it possible for us to try to live in harmonious and loving relationships with one another. It also allows us to offer support and care to those who are experiencing difficulties in relationships (eg marriage breakdown, family strife, unacceptable work situations, congregational tensions, abuse and harassment, bullying, etc).

Christians are asked to consider carefully how they live in their relationships following the example of Jesus Christ (eg his acceptance of social outcasts, his care for women and little children, etc) and his teaching (eg in Matt 5-7). In the Small Catechism, Luther gives examples of the New Testament teaching of living in human relationships, based on a restored relationship in Jesus Christ (Kolb, Wengert: 365-367).

The 'orders of creation'

So that people can live in society in the way God planned, God has provided various structures within society to foster relationships. These structures of family, state and church are recognised as 'orders of creation'. They are also seen as the 'stations' or 'places of responsibility' in which Christians live out their vocations (cf **CL2**). God protects these structures through his law ('political use'), creating a safe and supportive environment in which people can live and work, and keeping sin and lawlessness in check. In this way, God's law is seen as part of God's care and protection of his creation (eg commandments 4-10), showing how we are able to live in love in our various relationships, loving our neighbour as ourself (Matt 22:39).

Through the 'family', God provides for the immediate needs of people. For example, marriage is the context in which a man and a woman commit themselves to each other, to love, care for, and trust each other. It is also the context in which God protects human sexuality (6th commandment). Human sexuality is a good gift of God to be used not just as a physical function, but as an expression of the closest human relationship (Gen 2:20b-25). The sexual relationship, and the ability to create new life, are under the blessing of God (Gen 1:28).

The 'family' (including all who may make up a 'household' or an extended family) is created to provide a safe and healthy environment in which children can grow and mature and develop their own identity. It is also the initial context for education.

Through the 'state' God provides care and protection for all of society. This involves agencies for law and order (government, police, law courts, judges, etc) to provide a safe and peaceful society in which people can carry out their various occupations, each of which contributes to the well being of society (eg teachers and students, employers and employees, farmers, doctors, cleaners, etc – cf 'vocation' in **CL2**).

The Bible recognises that there can be great diversity in human relationships. For example, various social, political and economic systems are depicted in the Bible and no one model is given special emphasis. Jesus did not overthrow the political and social systems of his day (Matt 22:21; cf Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17), but taught how people are to live in love within these systems.

The 'church' includes all those who are involved in ministry of the word of God, for example, pastors, teachers and other church workers. However, it

also includes parents who teach their children in the faith and all others involved in service in the church in any way.

Human beings play their part in God's continuing creation

God continues to create every individual person (cf Luther's Small Catechism, First Article). Human beings work in partnership with God to create new life (Ps 139:13-16). They are not creators in the same way that God is creator, but God allows them to become partners with him in the creation of new life (procreation).

The responsibility of human beings as stewards of God's creation (cf **CL3**) also relates to their role in continuing creation. The teaching of vocation (cf **CL2**) which sees human beings as the 'masks' through which God operates in the world to provide and protect, is also relevant here, as individuals carry out their God-given roles in home, occupation, society and the church (the 'orders of creation').

Human beings also contribute to creation through their own creativity in the arts, culture, scholarship, etc. Again here, human creativity is to be seen on a different plane than God's creative acts, but this creativity is also part of God's good gifts to his creation and needs to be fostered and celebrated.

Christian Studies Framework

Christian Living

Key Idea 1: Christians believe that God wants people to live in relationship with him and with each other.

Exploring the mystery

- Are there aspects of God's *creatio continua* that surprise you and make you rethink the creation process?
- In what school contexts have you become especially aware of God creating in and through the mind of the child?