



# CHRISTIAN LIVING

## THEOLOGICAL NOTES

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### KEY IDEA 1: CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT GOD CREATES PEOPLE TO LIVE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND WITH EACH OTHER

*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 honour.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet.*

[Ps 8:4–6]

### HUMAN BEINGS ARE A SPECIAL CREATION OF GOD

#### 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, distinctive characteristics and abilities, 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, parents, schools, churches, 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 representatives 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 on behalf 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 responsible care 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 story 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 (vv 7, 12); between God and human beings (vv 8, 10); between human beings and the rest of creation (vv 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 (sixth 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 wellbeing 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.

### Some issues and questions for discussion and reflection:

- With the strong emphasis on individualism in our current context, how do we help students focus on the importance of the community?
- How can we emphasise the uniqueness of individuals without degenerating into individualism? How can we emphasise interdependence rather than independence?
- How can we address current environmental concerns theologically?
- Does a biblical understanding of the individual differ from views currently reflected in educational theory and practice?
- How can we help students develop realistic self-awareness, self-identity and self-acceptance based on the value God places on them as individuals? How can we support students learning to cope with external pressures from peers, the media, advertising?
- How does this key idea provide a Christian perspective on other aspects of the school curriculum (eg health, study of society) and policies relating to bullying, harassment, etc?
- How does the biblical understanding of the human being as one with the earth (created from and returning to dust) but made alive by the breath of God, influence our understanding of human beings?
- Since God regards all life as sacred, how does this affect our attitude to all stages of human life from conception to death?
- How might the teaching about relationships in Christian Studies relate to teaching about relationships in other curriculum areas (eg health, study of society, etc)?
- Should Christians try to change social, political and economic structures?
- What are the implications of the 'orders of creation' (particularly 'the family') for an approach to gay marriages?

### References and further reading:

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## KEY IDEA 2: CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO LOVE AND SERVE ALL PEOPLE

*If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away: see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.*

2 Cor 5:17–18

### THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP — LIVING THE ‘SANCTIFIED LIFE’

Christians are called to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. Because they have been made right with God (justified) by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God declares them to be righteous and holy. He also makes them holy (sanctifies them) in Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this way they share in God’s holiness (the ‘fruit of the Spirit’). Sanctification is the lifelong process whereby Christ through the Holy Spirit makes Christians more and more into the people God created them to be; Christ makes them in reality what they already are through faith.

It is important to recognise that both justification and sanctification are the work of God in the life of Christians. Some people regard justification as the work of God, but sanctification as the work of the Christian. However, sanctification is the work of God the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. The weaknesses and failures of Jesus’ disciples (their desertion, Peter’s denial, etc) remind us that disciples live only by God’s grace and forgiveness. The more closely disciples follow their Lord, and the more they draw their life from him (as branches in the vine, John 15:1–5), the more they will be like their Father in heaven and show love, mercy and forgiveness to others (Matt 5:48; cf Eph 4:32, Col 3:12–17).

It is also important not to separate sanctification from justification. Although Christians are justified alone by grace through faith and not by works (Rom 5:21–25), yet faith is always accompanied by the works which God commands in the Bible (Jas 2:17). As the Christian strives to live the life of love (*agape*) by the power of the Holy Spirit, the commands of God can act as a guide (‘third use of the law’). Even though the Christian is justified in the eyes of God, the life of the Christian continues to be one of tension and struggle and daily repentance against the sin which still lives in him/her (the tension of ‘saint and sinner’).

#### The disciple as ‘learner’

The word ‘disciple’ means ‘learner’. Disciples of Jesus learn from him who God is and what God does, and they learn who they are and how they are to live their lives as God’s people. Jesus as ‘rabbi’ (teacher) reveals to his learners the ‘secrets of the kingdom of heaven’, often by means of parables (Matt 13:11; 11:25–27) but also by direct teaching (eg Matt 5–7).

#### The disciple as ‘follower’

Disciples are also ‘followers’. They identify with their Lord and master and go where he goes. They trust him to lead them. They obey his directions.

It was a common practice in Jesus’ day for men who wanted to learn the law of Israel to apply for admission into a rabbi’s school. Jesus’ disciples, however, did not choose him as their rabbi; Jesus took the initiative and did all the choosing (John 15:16). His choice was not based on their merit, past performance, or future potential. He selected most unlikely people: nobodies from the backblocks of Palestine, uneducated fishermen, political agitators, and hated tax collectors (Matt 4:18–22; 9:9; cf 1 Cor 1:26–31). In addition to the ‘inner circle’ there were many other disciples (Luke 6:17). In contrast with other Jewish rabbis at this time, Jesus also had female disciples, for example, Martha and Mary, who ‘sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said’ (Luke 10:38–42; cf Luke 8:1–3).

#### The ‘cost’ of discipleship

To be a disciple of Jesus is not easy; it requires total commitment. When Jesus commanded ‘Follow me’, people had to leave everything: their professions, possessions and families (Matt 19:27–29). Disciples have to count the cost of following Jesus (Luke 14:25–33). Often the commitment Jesus demands of his followers seems harsh (Luke 9:57–62; Matt 10:37–39; John 15:18–25), but because there is no real life apart from Jesus, nothing dare come between the disciple and Jesus. Following Jesus means saying no to one’s self, giving up all earthly security and being ready even to suffer for the sake of the Lord (Matt 16:24–26).

### THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS — THE MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE

#### The motivation for service

A key question relating to service is the question of motivation. Selfless acts of service can be performed for many different reasons by Christians and non-Christians alike. Simply seeing **what** is being done does not indicate **why** it is being done.

Service may be motivated by a sense of care and responsibility for fellow human beings. While this may be based on a number of different motivations, theologically this can be seen as operating from an understanding of God as creator and all human beings as brothers and sisters of God as Father. Within the orders of creation (cf **CL1**), human beings serve each other in their various areas of responsibility in society.

Service can also be the result of legalistic or moralistic motivation. Individuals can engage in acts of 'service' because they feel that it is their 'Christian duty', or because they feel that in this way they are somehow 'earning God's approval'.

However, for the Christian, the motivation for service arises from theology of the cross as a response to the love and forgiveness of God in Christ.

### **Theology of the cross**

Theology of the cross is a way of understanding God's revelation and the way in which God works in the church and in the Christian life. It recognises that God can only be fully known in the crucified Christ and that any theology which tries to understand God apart from the cross is a false theology, a theology of glory.

Theology of the cross puts the cross of Christ in the centre of all that Christians preach and teach (cf 1 Cor 1:18 – 2:5). It is a way of speaking about the paradox that God reveals himself through 'concealed revelation', hidden under the opposite of what one would expect. God reveals himself by hiding! The key example of this is the victory of God in Christ on the cross, where victory over sin, death and the devil is hidden under the apparent defeat of Christ as he suffers and dies.

Theology of the cross means that Christians do not constantly look for God in demonstrations of power and majesty and glory, but by faith they see God in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Christians do not look for God situated in the heights of heaven, but on earth amongst the weak, the suffering. As St Paul experienced in his own life, God's 'power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor 12:9).

This view is very different from that presented by some Christian groups which see outward signs of success (eg material wealth, health and lack of suffering) as indicators of 'living faith'. Dramatic growth in numbers and the 'victorious life of the believer' are viewed as necessary signs of the blessing of God. Such theology of glory does not recognise God in the suffering of God, or that of God's people.

### **Theology of the cross and service**

Jesus Christ, the suffering servant of God (Phil 2:6–11), came 'not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Matt 20:28). Christians are called to identify with Jesus Christ in serving others (cf Luther's explanation to the third article in the Small Catechism). This is the cross which disciples of Christ 'take up' as they follow Christ (Matt 16:24).

Service, motivated by theology of the cross, is the appropriate response of the disciple of Jesus Christ. Christians recognise the face of Christ in those who are suffering (Matt 25:40) and they serve Christ by serving those who are in need (cf parable of the 'Good Samaritan' [Luke 10:25–37]).

## **VOCATION**

Christians are called (*voco* = 'to call' in Latin) to faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 4:1–5). They are also called to live a life of service to their neighbours (Eph 2:8–10), serving God by serving others. This service leads ultimately to praise of God as Christians function as salt and light in the world (Matt 5:16). The call to faith (vocation as believers) and the call to serve the neighbour (vocation to serve in the world) are inseparably connected for Christians. Faith is directed towards God; good works are directed to the neighbour.

### **Vocation at the time of the Reformation**

At the time of the Reformation, the term 'vocation' was normally used to refer only to the 'calling' of priest and monks and nuns. This was because these people were regarded as serving God directly in a special and holy calling. The reformers, however, rejected that narrow view and recognised that all God-pleasing work is service to God through service to the neighbour and is therefore to be regarded as 'vocation'. In his commentary on Genesis 20:2, Luther wrote (Luther's Works 3:321):

when a maid milks the cows or a hired man hoes the field — provided that they are believers, namely, that they conclude that this kind of work is pleasing to God and was instituted by God — they serve God more than all the monks and nuns, who cannot be sure about their kind of life.

### **Vocation and 'orders of creation'**

God uses all people for his purposes as part of his 'continuing creation' (cf **CL1**) as they work within the 'orders of creation' (cf **CL1**). Luther spoke about people as God's 'masks', because it is really God who is hidden ('theology of the

cross') behind the people, both Christian and non-Christian, who are carrying out God's purposes in the world (in both the left- and right-hand kingdoms). Christians see that they are doing God's work in the world because God is working through them.

In carrying out their vocation within their areas of responsibility ('stations'), Christians bear fruit in serving others by the power of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Christians use the gifts and abilities which they have been given by God for this purpose.

Every person finds him/herself in a variety of 'stations' (areas of responsibility) in life related to the 'orders of creation'. Thus a person can be a child, a parent, a sibling, a grandparent, etc, all at the same time. The person may have a paid occupation, serve on various community groups, have various roles within the congregation, work in the canteen at a school, be a volunteer caregiver, etc. All of these 'stations' become vocations when they are used to serve others, and when that service is done in response to the love of God in Jesus Christ. A person may also find considerable changes in their places of vocation through life. The birth of a child, a new place of employment, the death of a family member, retirement, a change in place of residence, etc, all lead to significant changes in vocation.

### **Vocation and occupation**

The term 'vocation' is often used, also in Lutheran schools, to refer to 'occupation' or 'profession' as a means by which people make money and build up status in society. Often the idea of serving others by using one's gifts and talents for the welfare of others is missing. However, the theology of vocation sees Christians serving in whatever places of responsibility God has placed them. This does not always include a place of paid employment. Unemployed people are still 'in vocation' as members of families, contributors to society, members of the congregation, etc. It is also important that students see 'being a student' as their vocation, and not simply as 'preparing them for vocation'.

The theology of vocation counters the individualistic approach to life which sees striving for one's own advantage as the goal, rather than serving the common good. Seeing vocation as serving our neighbours to the glory of God gives meaning and purpose to life, even in times of difficulty and when one has lost paid employment.

### **Vocation and 'bearing the cross'**

Living in vocation also includes dealing with pain, frustration and failure. This may be due to problems within our relationships, in our work, in our congregation. Satan can attempt to destroy our sense of vocation. We may also be tempted by the power, success and status of our vocation so that we no longer see serving others as the purpose of vocation. We may also feel failure and worthlessness because we fall into the trap of measuring ourselves against the performance of others.

'Carrying our cross' in vocation (Matt 16:24; 1 Pet 2:21) helps us to deal with failure, frustration, conflict and even tragedy in our work. While Christians do not glorify in suffering nor in any way justify suffering or abuse, seeing suffering in the context of vocation helps them to turn to God in prayer and to grow in hope and the certainty of faith.

### **Vocation and witness**

Vocation is also the arena in which Christians witness to those around them through their words and actions. In the daily interactions in their places of responsibility, Christians are able to proclaim the gospel and witness to their faith in relationships which they have established and in which they are accepted and respected. Although the primary purpose of vocation is as part of the order of creation, it also provides the context for witness and showing the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5:22-26).

## **THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

Christian service (*diakonia*) is one of the functions of the church. It grows out of the worship life of the people of God (*leitourgia*), where God speaks and acts in love and mercy to his people and God's people respond in praise. Service is part of the witness (*martyria*) of God's people to the love of God and is a way of showing faith in action. The 'diaconic' work of the church is tangible evidence of its servant role in the world.

[**Note** the appointment of 'deacons' in Acts 6:1-6. The matter of the 'diaconate' as an 'order of ministry' is also under discussion in the LCA. This relates to the so-called 'three-fold order' of bishop, priest and deacon, which is the structure of ordained ministry in the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.]

### **Some issues and questions for discussion and reflection:**

- What kinds of service awards and other awards are appropriate in Lutheran schools? How should the recipients be identified?
- In the middle of great human tragedy and suffering, where is God?
- Is 'striving for excellence' in Lutheran schools consistent with theology of the cross?

- What rationale does the Lutheran school use to support programs of community service by students in the general community?
- ‘Service is not a means to an end, but a way of life.’
- Comment on the statement: ‘Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven’.
- Does the use of ‘vocation’ and ‘vocational’ in Lutheran schools adequately reflect the theology of vocation?
- Do Lutheran schools prepare students for ‘vocation’ or ‘occupation’, or both?
- How can teachers in Lutheran schools incorporate the theology of ‘vocation’ into industrial processes such as enterprise bargaining?
- Are ‘gifted and talented’ programs in Lutheran schools consistent with theology of the cross and theology of vocation?
- Does it help teachers to see their ministry of teaching as an arena in which they are called to ‘bear the cross’?
- Does the doctrine of vocation help us to address the role conflict in which we operate?

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## KEY IDEA 3: CHRISTIANS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY IN AND FOR THE WORLD

*Since the God to whom the Christian belongs is the same God to whom all the earth, all domestic, political, and economic life belongs, the Christian has no reason to withdraw from the world of the world – either out of timidity or out of aloofness – but every reason to make the world’s work his own, as a worker together with God. Thus as the Christian awaits the new age he is already busy with its kind of life, here and now.*

(Schnabel: Lutheran Education 98 (1963), 448)

### HUMAN BEINGS AS GOD’S STEWARDS IN THE WORLD

Human beings are created ‘in the image of God’ (Gen 1:27). Part of what is understood by this is that human beings function as God’s representatives in the world and are accountable to God for the care and protection of all of God’s creation, human beings, the animals and the natural and humanly constructed environments (cf **CL1**).

#### Care and protection of the world

Although human beings as God’s stewards were given responsibility to ‘rule over’, ‘subdue’, and ‘have dominion over’ God’s creation (Gen 1:28), they were also commanded to ‘work and take care of’ and ‘till and keep’ it (Gen 2:15). This means that they cannot simply use or abuse God’s creation for their own benefit, but are to care for and protect what God has entrusted to them (cf **CL1**).

Human beings are also invited by God to share in the joy of creation (eg Ps 104). Not only are they urged to enjoy creation, but also to join in praising God with and on behalf of creation (eg Pss 19:1–6; 148).

#### The impact of human sinfulness

Sin has destroyed the original harmony and perfection of God’s world (cf **CL1**). This has impacted on all relationships within creation (Gen 3:14–19). Creation now waits to ‘be set free from its bondage’ under which it ‘has been groaning’ (Rom 8:18–23). Human beings continue to add to the suffering of creation through their sinful actions, leading to pollution of the environment, land degradation, the loss of endangered species, and the increasing ecological crisis.

People also add to the suffering of others through their actions. The Bible speaks out against those who exploit others, mistreat others, use others for their own purposes, and show lack of care and concern for others in their suffering and difficulties (eg Isa 3:14–15; Jer 5:26–28; Amos 8:1–7). Jesus’ teaching about the last judgment shows how important he regarded the care and compassion shown to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner: ‘just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’ (Matt 25:40). ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’ (Luke 6:36).

People may also cause suffering for themselves through their own actions (eg substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, unwillingness to forgive, etc). While Jesus was quick to point out the dangerous fallacy of trying to link specific cases of suffering to particular causes (John 9:1–3), people do contribute to their own suffering through actions which ignore the boundaries God has provided for human protection in his law. The ten commandments, for example, indicate situations which people may need to address in their own lives to deal with circumstances of their own suffering.

The Old Testament teaching on ‘wisdom’ and ‘foolishness’ is also helpful here (cf Proverbs). God, who created order out of chaos to bring the world into being, still preserves and sustains that creation. It is God who has provided the framework in which creation operates, and God’s design directs and controls that creation. Wisdom grows from recognising the patterns God has incorporated into his creation and from living in harmony with God’s will for creation. Knowledge of God, and the knowledge which God gives also through the gift of reason, provide the context in which wisdom develops: ‘the Lord gives wisdom; and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding’ (Prov 2:6). Only the ‘fool’ does not recognise God and the boundaries which he has set (Ps 14:1; 53:1).

### THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

Theology of the cross provides the motivation for a Christian response to situations and circumstances in the world (cf **CL2**). In becoming a human being, Jesus Christ identified with people in their weakness and suffering. He still does so. While the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the world was ‘once for all’ (Heb 10:10,14), nevertheless Jesus continues to suffer with his suffering people. Hymn 761 (Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement) expresses this in verse 4:

In every insult, rift, and war,  
where colour, scorn, or wealth divide,  
he [Christ] suffers still, yet loves the more,  
and lives, though ever crucified.

Christ asks Christians to join with him in identifying with those who are suffering and defenceless. He also empowers them through the Holy Spirit. Christians who have experienced forgiveness and reconciliation through the cross of Christ will also seek to take that forgiveness and reconciliation into the world also in the day-to-day circumstances of life, exploring the relationship of justification and justice.

## THE TWO HANDS OF GOD – JUSTICE AND MERCY

Lutheran theology speaks about God operating in the world using ‘two hands’ in order to deal with the problem of sin and evil. One ‘hand’ (the ‘left hand’) sees God working with the law in the realm of the state in order to maintain peace and good order and keep sin and evil in check. This is the realm of justice, through which God shows his love and care for the world. The other ‘hand’ (the ‘right hand’) sees God operating through the church in the world with the gospel of forgiveness. This is the realm of mercy. God’s ‘left hand work’ is sometimes seen as his ‘alien work’, because God’s nature is to forgive, his ‘proper work’ (his ‘right hand work’).

Although Christians are concerned with the work of God’s ‘right hand’ in spreading the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, Christians are also involved in God’s ‘left hand’ work. They are involved in the ‘left hand kingdom’ as a catalyst for social justice, demonstrating the desire to help create ‘shalom’, peace, and wholeness, and using the law (‘political use’) to protect and preserve God’s creation and help it to function in the way God wants it to. This is part of their ‘vocation’ as Christians (cf **CL2**).

### Peace and justice

Establishing and maintaining peace and justice in the world is the concern of all people, not only Christians. However, Christians have a particular responsibility and motivation for this which flows from the gospel, which proclaims Jesus Christ as the one who has brought peace into the broken world. He is the ‘Prince of Peace’ (Isa 9:6) through whom we are reconciled to God and to one another. Through his Holy Spirit, Christians are empowered to work for peace and reconciliation with all people. The gospel is the power that can change human nature, so that peace, reconciliation and justice become realities.

Peace (‘shalom’) does not simply mean the absence of war (although it includes that). It relates to the total wellbeing and ‘wholeness’ of every person. Justice includes upholding the rights of every individual person. It recognises the fundamental dignity of all human beings as those who have been created and redeemed by God.

### Christian social welfare

The work of Christians in social welfare, for example, grows out of the ‘right hand’ work of God in the church, but is developed in partnership with governments and other charitable organisations. In this way God operates in the world through both Christians and non-Christians as they function as ‘God’s hands’, acting justly and compassionately for the good of all.

Through the ministry of caring, Christians can make incarnate God’s message of love in Christ. Care is offered graciously and unconditionally because the neighbour is in need of care and support, in the same way that the gospel is proclaimed ‘without strings attached’.

### A prophetic role

Christians need to exercise a prophetic role in society, pointing out specific sins of a society and nation, opposing social trends or proposed legislation, and calling society to repentance.

Speak out for those who cannot speak,  
for the rights of all the destitute.  
Speak out, judge righteously,  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

(Prov 31:8–9)

Christians need to become aware of sin as a social and systemic evil as well as a personal reality. Injustice becomes entrenched in structures and systems which oppress people and violate creation rather than serve them. While Christians are to respect and obey proper authority, there may be cases where those in power enact laws which support or practise obvious injustice. In such cases, Christians are called on to ‘obey God rather than human beings’ (Acts 4:19).

### Some issues and questions for discussion and reflection:

- In what ways does the Lutheran school promote education for social consciousness?
- How do Lutheran schools develop an awareness of and sensitivity to suffering in the world and help students to identify with the weak, the vulnerable, and the suffering?
- Should any student be excluded from a Lutheran school because they cannot afford the fees?
- How can a school administrator help to deal with a teacher who is struggling to reach an acceptable level of competence? How can a teacher deal with a struggling student?
- How can students be helped to deal with suffering which relates to circumstances under their own control (eg substance abuse)?
- In what way is the concept of God's 'two hands' useful in helping members of the school community, whether they are Christians or not, understand their responsibility for promoting and working for social justice in the world?
- How do we see the relationship between 'justification' and 'justice'?
- What role does the Lutheran school have in the social welfare ministry of the church?
- In what ways can Lutheran schools exercise a prophetic role in the field of education generally?

### References and further reading:

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