

A Reflection  
On the Churches'  
Doctrine of Humanity



A Project of the Christian Unity Committee  
of the North Carolina Council of Churches

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## FOREWORD

It is no secret that there are great contentions, often over moral matters, in the churches of North Carolina today. Therefore, it might make some sense to bracket the moral issues of the day, for a season, and turn attention elsewhere. With the brackets securely in place, this project, “A Reflection on the Churches’ Doctrine of Humanity,” revisits the doctrine that systematic theologians call “anthropology” or “Christian anthropology.” Describing and comparing the official anthropological doctrines of eight communions, the project uncovers convergence and specifies disagreements. Renewal in the churches’ doctrine about humanity, it is hoped, can then assist the various churches in responding to the contentions over moral matters in a way that is most faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, this project might prove to be useful to the North Carolina Council of Churches (NCCC). Much of the ecumenical ministry of the NCCC has to do with the churches’ social-justice witness. This is in accord with the notion that “doctrine divides, service unites.” On the other hand, this project is based on the conviction that doctrine, when it is most deeply understood, can demonstrate unity in Christ and can ground the churches’ service on firm foundations.

It is my prayerful hope that “A Reflection on the Churches’ Doctrine of Humanity” will deepen, and make more faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the theological conversation, teaching, and witness of the Christian community of North Carolina. Furthermore, it is my hopeful prayer that this project will help the churches of North Carolina to show forth their unity in Jesus Christ.

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Third Week after Epiphany 2004

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## INTRODUCTION

This project – entitled “A Reflection on the Churches’ Doctrine of Humanity” – is an experiment in ecumenical theology. It emerges from the work of the Christian Unity Committee of the North Carolina Council of Churches, chaired by Rev. Bill McElveen. The project was first proposed to the Committee by Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth. It was then developed by a subcommittee composed of Dr. Teresa Berger, Mr. Bob Kollar, Pastor Jim Lockley, Rev. Nancy Carol Stahl, and Rev. Stallsworth. The group was chaired initially by Pastor Lockley and then by Rev. Stallsworth. The Council thanks these faithful volunteers, and especially Paul Stallsworth, for their parts in the project.

The project was generously funded by the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church and its Christian and Interfaith Unity Council. We are grateful to them for making this project possible.

The Main Essay was written by Mr. Brian Paul Madison, a graduate student in theology at Duke University. It summarizes the teachings of eight religious bodies, including five which are represented in the NC Council of Churches. Dr. Amy Laura Hall, of Duke Divinity School, edited the Main Essay and wrote the Analysis and Concluding Essay. Insightful critiques of the Main Essay and Analysis were written by Dr. Albert J. D. Aymer of Hood Theological Seminary, Dr. Jill Y. Crainshaw of Wake Forest University’s Divinity School, Dr. Robert T. Osborn (retired) from Duke’s Department of Religion, and Dr. J. Larry Yoder of Lenoir-Rhyne College. The Council is extremely grateful to these scholars for sharing their wisdom and their faith with us.

Each essay in this project contains some material which is more doctrinal in nature and other material which is more practical, suggesting the application of doctrine to contemporary issues. Some using this booklet may be more drawn to the doctrinal parts, while others may find greater resonance with the contemporary issues. It is possible to be drawn into this study through either portal, but it is the fervent hope of those who have produced this work that you consider both the doctrinal and the contemporary. A primary purpose of the study is to help us see the connections between doctrine and application.

But another primary purpose is to promote Christian unity by helping us to see the ways in which we are similar and to better appreciate the ways in which we differ. We approach this with some fear and trembling, knowing especially that some of the current issues mentioned in this study are ones which threaten to divide Christ’s family. So it is also our fervent prayer that those engaging in these discussions will do so in a spirit of Christian harmony, creating safe places to discuss these difficult issues, seeking better understanding of one another, and treating with Christian respect those brothers and sisters whose ideas are different from ours.

The Christian Unity Committee and the North Carolina Council of Churches offer “A Reflection on the Churches’ Doctrine of Humanity” as a gift to be read, studied, discussed, and applied by the Christian community of North Carolina. We hope that it will be employed by pastors and lay teachers in congregational studies and church-school classes. If you need additional copies, you may photocopy this booklet or order copies from the Council office through the contacts listed below. You will also find the project on the Council’s website, [www.nccouncilofchurches.org](http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org).

I commend this study to you, praying that it may help us all to grow more fully into the unity that is ours in Christ.

Peace to you,  
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## The Doctrine of Humanity — Brian Madison

Theological anthropology, or the doctrine of humanity, seeks to explain the nature of human beings in light of their relationship to their source and destiny, the God of revelation, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who by the Spirit raised him from the dead. Such a task sits at the crossroads of many “subfields” of “systematic theology”: the doctrine of Creation, Christology, doctrines of justification and sanctification, ecclesiology, even eschatology. Like the hues of a rainbow, these teachings flow and blend into each other even as we seek clear articulations of each. The contemporary situation in which the Body of Christ finds its manifestation through a plurality of Christian communions adds another level of complexity to any attempt to offer a distinct Christian understanding of what humanity is. This document, therefore, has three goals. First, it seeks to define and limit the purview of theological anthropology in such a way to allow for breadth, nuance and concision. Second, it tries to present the authoritative and/or guiding teachings of various ecclesial bodies about the nature of humanity. Third, based on its survey of different Christian assemblies, it suggests an outline of what may be called a “Christian consensus” concerning who we are and who we are called to be—all in light of Whose we are and by Whom we are called.

In order to fulfill these three tasks this document will proceed as follows. It will survey theological anthropology as encapsulated in the official teachings of seven ecclesial communions: the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, the United Methodist Church, the United Holy Church of America, Inc., the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Southern Baptist Convention. The teachings of an eighth, the Orthodox Church in America, will be discussed via a helpful summary of Eastern Orthodox teaching, as Eastern Orthodox churches do not systematize doctrines in a way comparable to Western Christianity, looking to the whole corpus of Scripture, patristic writings, ecumenical councils and creeds, etc., as authoritative. Each discussion of these institutions’ doctrines of humanity will attempt to convey their particular emphases as well as the general contours of their theological anthropologies. These emphases are due to the historical and theological particularities that surround these bodies, and the general contours reflect their commitments to hand on the faith that all Christians have received. In some way, the notions of humanity’s creation in the image of God, maleness and femaleness, original sin, the justified and sanctified life, social relationships and eschatological destiny will be discussed for each ecclesial body. It will conclude with a final analysis highlighting the areas of significant agreement among these groups, suggesting what our common Christian heritage and teaching are about human beings living before God.

A note is needed concerning references. The documents of each ecclesial body are referenced differently in the text below and as follows:

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994)—by paragraph number;
- *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000)—by page then paragraph numbers
- *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and*

- Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979)—by page number
- *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: United Methodist Publishing House, 2000)—by page number
  - *Standard Manual of the United Holiness Church of America* (Greensboro, North Carolina: United Holiness Church of America, Inc., 1997)—by page number
  - *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, Kentucky: The Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (USA), 2002)—by reference number
  - The Baptist Faith and Message is available at <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/> with links to the introduction, preamble, and body of the text at <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>
  - Thomas Hopko, *Doctrine: An Elementary Handbook of the Orthodox Church* (New York: The Department of Religious Education, 1981)—by page number



### Roman Catholic Church

The teachings of Roman Catholicism are expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which sets out to “faithfully and systematically present the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition in the church and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church, to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for enlivening the faith of the People of God” (4). It contains “both the new and the old . . . because the faith is always the same yet the source of ever new light” (4). With such a comprehensive task, one could expect the theological anthropology taught by the Roman Catholic Church to be extensive and detailed—and so it is.

The *Catechism* begins its discussion of humanity within its explication of the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, situating human beings as creatures of the Almighty Creator. Along with the invisible angels, human beings are the only visible creatures who are able to know and love God (365). But not even the angels have the distinction of being made “in the image of God.” “Being in the image of God the human individual possess the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead” (357). Having this unique distinction, human beings are the beneficiaries of all creation, but are to offer it all back to God in loving service (358). All human beings possess this image and status and, by virtue of common ancestry, are all one race, expressing a “rich variety of persons, cultures, and peoples” (360).

Human persons are also unique within creation as they are “at once corporeal and spiritual” (362). This is in no way a dualistic understanding: “spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature” (365). Human bodily life enjoys dignity “precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit” (364). The immortal spiritual soul of each individual is created without mediation

by God: unlike the body, it neither comes from one's parents nor perishes upon physical death. At the final Resurrection physical body and spiritual soul will be reunited.

Though not unique among creation in possessing maleness and femaleness, humanity's creation as male and female holds special significance. Women and men share equally in the image of God and possess equal dignity, "[b]ut the respective 'perfections' of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband" (369, 370). Women and men are complete in and of themselves, but are made for communion with each other: each is the other's helpmate, complementary and equal (372). Men and women together have sovereignty over the earth, acting as God's stewards, tasked to share in God's providential care for the world God has created and loves (372).

The harmonious relationships of human beings with themselves, with each other, with the rest of creation, and with God marks the condition of "original justice" in which our first parents were created (370). However, in figurative language, the revealed scriptures teach us that this "original justice" was lost through "the fault freely committed by our first parents" (390). Sin cannot be reduced to merely "a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, to the necessary consequence of an inadequate structure, etc." Instead, "[t]o try to understand what sin is, one must first recognize *the profound relationship of man to God*, for only in this relationship is the evil of sin unmasked in its true identity as humanity's rejection of God and opposition to him, even as it continues to weigh heavy on human life and history" [emphasis original] (386). The first sin was an act of rebellion against God, a choice in which man "chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good." Original justice was lost, death enters into human history, and sin proliferates as "universal corruption" (400, 401). "Original sin" refers to the condition in which all human beings find themselves as descendents of common ancestors who introduced sin into the world. Each individual human being is marked by this condition regardless of their individual fault. Original sin "is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin—an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence'" (405).

Human beings are not meant to be lost to sin and death, however. They are meant for beatitude, blessed happiness—the chief of all, "the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts" being God's own beatitude (1719). God moves to bring salvation to humanity, redemption from sin and death to new and eternal life. The Passion of Jesus Christ, God incarnate as a human being, merits for humanity justification, which "is granted through Baptism" and "conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us" (2020). As such, justification "includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man." (2021). It is the grace of God, "the *free and undeserved help* that God gives us" [emphasis original] which enables human beings to respond to God's call "to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life" (1996). Human beings respond to this call through repentance, or conversion, which is "[t]he first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (1989). At Baptism, the Spirit infuses into the human soul sanctifying grace which "is a habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to love with God, to act by his love" (2000). Humanity's freedom is not compromised, however, in its reconciliation to God: "God's free initiative demands *man's free response* for God has created man in his image by conferring on

him, along with freedom, the power to know and love him” [emphasis original] (2002).

Finally, it is inherent to human beings to live together in society. Human social relations in some part reflect the union of divine persons in the Trinity (1878). All human societies and social institutions are meant to uphold the human person as of prime and final importance, regardless of their specific purposes (1881). Existing in a fallen world, societies can invert means and ends, an inversion which “results in giving the value of ultimate end to what is only a means for attaining it, or in viewing persons as mere means to that end, engenders unjust structures . . .” (1887). There can be no true solution to such social injustice apart from the Gospel which calls human beings to inner conversion and sets people on the path of love of God and neighbor (1896, 1888, 1889).



### Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America “accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Constitutions, By-laws and Continuing Resolutions*, 2003, 2.03) along with “the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this church” (2.04). Additionally the ELCA “accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel” (2.05) and “the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church” (2.06) The following discussion of the theological anthropology of the ELCA will draw from these latter sources (i.e. the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and other confessional writings of the *Book of Concord*). With its emphasis on the doctrine of justification, Lutheran theology discusses anthropology most explicitly in terms of the image of God and its loss, the nature of freedom, the nature of justification, and the Christian life.

Lutheran teaching has held that the creation of human beings “in the image of God” is none other than a reference to the “original righteousness” which human beings enjoyed upon their creation. “[O]riginal sin is a complete absence or ‘lack of the original righteousness acquired in Paradise’ . . . or of the image of God, according to which the human being was originally created in truth, holiness, and righteousness” (*Book of Concord*, 533.10). Original sin denotes the universal corruption of human nature: there is no facet of the human body or soul that is not infected by sin. Even though original sin is not to be considered identical with human nature (for not only does God, who authors nothing sinful, create each and every human being, but Jesus Christ has the fullness of human nature and is yet sinless), it describes not merely the lack of original righteousness, but the replacement of “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” (534.11).

In this fallen state, human beings have only a limited freedom. According to the Augsburg Confession, “a human being has some measure of free will, so as to live an externally honorable life and to choose among the things reason comprehends.” Such a freedom is insignificant, however, when one understands that of themselves, human beings can in no way be pleasing to God. The Confession continues, stating that “without the grace, help, and operation of the Holy Spirit a human being cannot become pleasing to God, fear or believe in God with the whole heart, or expel innate evil lusts from the heart. Instead, this happens through the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God” (50.1-3).

Interpreting article IV of the Augsburg Confession, the Formula of Concord’s Solid Declaration states, “Regarding the righteousness of faith before God . . . poor sinful people are justified before God, that is, absolved—pronounced free of all sins and the judgment of the damnation that they deserved and accepted as children and heirs of eternal life—without the least bit of our own ‘merit or worthiness’ . . . , apart from all preceding, present, or subsequent works.” Human beings, devoid of all righteousness lost through original sin, “are justified on the basis of sheer grace, because of the sole merit, the entire obedience, and the bitter suffering, death, and the resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteous” (563.9). The justified human being is still a sinner, however, as his or her righteousness is the imputed “alien righteousness” of Christ (565.22); hence Luther’s famous dictum that the believer is *simul justus et peccator*. “Renewal and sanctification are a blessing of our mediator Christ and a work of the Holy Spirit.” They are not part of justification “but rather result from it since, because of our corrupted flesh, they are never fully pure and perfect in this life . . .” (566.28).

Concerning public order and secular government, Article 16 teaches that “all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God and that Christians may without sin exercise political authority.” The holding of political office, administration of laws, the waging of just wars—all can be rightly done by Christians. This reflects the reality that there are two kingdoms in the world to which the believer belongs: the spiritual kingdom of Christ and the civil kingdom. Article 16 also upholds the right for individuals to marry, with marriage being an institution ordained by God and forced celibacy being contrary to God’s intentions (249.9, 221.14).

Alongside the assertion that the Gospel introduces no new civil laws stands The Small and Large Catechisms’ expositions on the Ten Commandments. In these, Martin Luther displayed the deepest commitment to the reality that God intends for humanity to live in loving, just relationships, with love and justice marking our deeds, attitudes and intentions.



### **Episcopal Church in the United States of America**

The Episcopal Church holds the Holy Scriptures as the ultimate standard of Christian faith, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Articles of Religion (the Thirty-Nine Articles) as expositions of doctrine. *The Book of Common Prayer* also contains a catechism, “An Outline of the Faith” which, though “not meant to be a complete statement of belief and practice,” is still an excellent resource for seeing how Episcopalians approach

theological anthropology (844).

The catechism begins with a section entitled “Human Nature.” Following a question and answer format, it addresses various aspects of being human. It affirms that human beings are, by nature, “part of God’s creation, made in the image of God.” This special quality of being made in the image of God “means that we are free to make choices, to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.” Harmony is lost, however, because human beings from their origins have misused freedom. This misuse has distorted human relationships with God, other humans, and all creation.

The section “Sin and Redemption” further details this distortion and explains God’s response. Sin is defined as “the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God.” Its power over human beings is due to the fact that “when our relationship with God is distorted” our liberty is lost. God acts to redeem us however, to free us “from the power of evil, sin and death”. The prophets of Israel are sent of God “to call us back to himself, to show us our need for redemption, and to announce the coming of the Messiah.” This Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth, God’s only Son, who is “sent by God to free us from the power of sin so that with the help of God we may live in harmony with God, within ourselves, with our neighbors and with all creation.”

The Articles address the doctrine of humanity most explicitly in Articles “IX Of Original Sin or Birth-Sin,” “X Free Will,” “XI Of the Justification of Man,” and “XVI Of Sin after Baptism.” Original Sin is the corruption of human nature such that “man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil”—a corruption deserving of God’s condemnation (869). This corruption remains after baptismal regeneration, though there is no longer any condemnation. Original sin has so weakened human beings that we are unable of our own will to turn toward God; it is only by God’s grace that a human being can turn toward God and have the “power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God” (869). Human beings are justified and “accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith” (870). Those who believe, have been baptized and have received the Holy Spirit are still capable of turning from grace to sin, but by God’s grace one can turn back toward God (870).



### **United Methodist Church**

*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* states, “Devising formal definitions of doctrine has been less pressing for United Methodists than summoning people to faith and nurturing them in the knowledge and love of God. The core of Wesleyan doctrine that informed our past rightly belongs to our common heritage as Christians and remains a prime component within our continuing theological task” (50). Reflecting their Wesleyan heritage, United Methodists understand the Christian life as just that — a holy life of love and justice lived in faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ. Doctrinal formulation, though “less pressing,” has not been neglected, however. The United Methodist Church holds the Methodist Articles of Religion and the Evangelical United Brethren Confession “as doctrinal standards that shall not be revoked, altered, or changed” and understands Wesley’s

*Sermons and Notes* as also “to be included in ... present and established standards of doctrine” (58) (N.B. Of particular interest for theological anthropology among John Wesley’s sermons on the nature of man [Sermon 116], the image of God [Sermon 141], original sin [Sermon 44], and the new birth [Sermon 45]). Finally, although not doctrinally binding, the Social Principles “are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best prophetic spirit” (95). All of these sources speak of what it means to be human beings.

Articles VII, VIII, IX of the Methodist Articles of Religion are substantially similar to articles IX, X, and XI of the Episcopal Articles of Religion and paint the same portrait of original sin, the impaired freedom of the will, and justification of sinful human beings. Article XII addresses “Of Sin after Justification” (an alteration to Article XVII “Of Sin after Baptism” in the Thirty-Nine Articles), noting that human beings are capable of sin even after receiving justification by faith. Article IX of the Evangelical United Brethren Confession, “Justification and Regeneration,” teaches that “regeneration is the renewal of man in righteousness through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature and experience the newness of life” (69).

In addition, the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, Articles XI, XII, XV, and XVI speak, respectively, of sanctification and Christian perfection, eschatological judgment, property, and the nature of civil government. From Article XI, United Methodists “believe sanctification is the work of God’s grace through the Word and Spirit, by which those who have been born again are cleansed from sin in their thoughts, words and acts, and are enabled to live in accordance with God’s will, and to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (69). “Entire sanctification,” or Christian perfection, “is a state of perfect love, righteousness and true holiness” which is available to all believers and is gifted “in this life both gradually and instantaneously.” Christian perfection does not mean, however, that the believer is free from human “infirmities, ignorance and mistakes,” or that she can relax her guard against temptation, as sin is still a possibility (70). Article XII affirms that all “stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day” (70). All shall be resurrected to either eternal life or eternal condemnation.

Articles XV and XVI deal with economic and political realities modulated to a Christian key. God is acknowledged as the proprietor of all creation. Private, corporate or public forms of property are all to be responsibly stewarded “for human good under the sovereignty of God” and Christians are to use their private property “for the manifestation of Christian love and liberality” and the “support of the Church’s mission in the world” (71). The *just* powers of civil government are derived from God who is sovereign. “Governments should be based on, and responsible for, the recognition of human rights under God” (71). War and the shedding of blood are in opposition to the good news and Christ’s spirit (71).

The Social Principles and the Social Creed of the United Methodist Church contain extensive statements on a myriad of economic, social and political issues. As mentioned above, they are a prophetic witness to the call of Christians to fully live out their discipleship in all aspects of human life, individual, ecclesial and social.



### United Holy Church of America

The United Holy Church of America stands within the Pentecostal/Holiness tradition. *The Standard Manual and Constitution and By-Laws of the United Holy Church of America, Inc.* contains the UHC's exposition of doctrine, the Apostles' Creed, an Affirmation of Faith and the Articles of Faith.

According to the UHC statement of doctrine, "God the Creator has made all persons in His image and likeness to know, love, serve, and enjoy Him, both in this world and in the world to come" (24). To be created in the image of God is to be "endowed with intelligence, the powers of reason, freedom, volition, emotions, which include the capacity to love and to hate, and the ability to express himself so that he can be understood by others" (24). "The highest expression of human nature," according to the UHC, "is that of perfect obedience to God and conformity to His will" (24). Human nature has fallen however, as the result of disobedience. In this fallen state, "human beings turn against God and each other" and "destroy one another and the world God has given" (24). In fact, "[t]he entire universe is plunged into a cursed and fallen state as the result of man's sin" (24).

God does not leave creation in this condition, however: "Through the life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and intercession of Jesus Christ, God has provided for the redemption and reconciliation of mankind and his world" (25). Salvation is a "comprehensive work of restoration" that "includes justification, forgiveness of sin, adoption, regeneration, sanctification, and transformation of the world order" (25).

According to Article 9 of the Articles of Faith, "sanctification may be viewed in three aspects: instantaneous, progressive, and entire" (32). Instantaneous sanctification is the act of being set aside unto God upon one's regeneration through the Holy Spirit. Progressive sanctification is described as "the process wherein the believer continues to grow in grace" (32). Finally, entire sanctification is the condition of complete holiness in "body, soul, mind, and spirit" (32). The Holy Spirit fills the believer "in an initial act and in recurring acts of refilling" to bring the believer into complete submission to God (32).

The Church awaits "the imminent return of the Lord Jesus" who will righteously judge the world (26). All of humanity will be resurrected from the dead in order to be judged. Eternal life or eternal punishment awaits all human beings (26). "The ultimate hope" of all creation "is for a New Heaven and a New Earth wherein Jesus Christ shall reign and where the earth shall be filled with the glory of God" (26).



### The Presbyterian Church (USA)

"The *Book of Order* is clear that 'confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him . . . . While all creeds and confessions . . . are subordinate standards, they are *standards* for the church and its ordered ministries" (*The Book of Confessions*, xxxii). Presby-

terians are to be instructed by them even as they are always open to reform in order to be ever more faithful to Jesus Christ. Included in the current *Book of Confessions* are the Nicene Creed, Apostles Creed, Scots Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Second Helvetic Confession, Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Shorter Catechism, Westminster Larger Catechism, Theological Declaration of Barmen, Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith (1983). For the purposes of this document, the Westminster Confession and the Confession of 1967 are used as representative of the larger Presbyterian confessional and creedal corpus to discuss theological anthropology within the PC(USA).

According to the Westminster Confession, human beings are created by God “male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change” (6.023). That possibility became actuality and human beings “fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin,” leaving no aspect of human existence undefiled (6.032). All human beings, by common ancestry are subject both to the guilt and the corruption following upon our primal parents’ transgression. Humanity, bound by sin, is bound to commit sins and incapable of willing “any spiritual good accompanying salvation” (6.061).

This corruption remains in those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and is why the believer’s will remains corrupted (6.035, 6.062). As the Confession of 1967 states, new life in Christ does not release one “from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, fear” (9.22). However, this “new life finds its direction in the life of Jesus, his deeds and words, his struggles against temptation, his compassion, his anger, and willingness to suffer death.” Guided by “the teaching of the apostles and prophets” and nurtured and equipped by the Christian community in which this new life takes shape,” new life in Christ “takes shape in a community in which men know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are” (9.24, 9.22). This new life is eternal life and the “resurrection of Jesus is God’s sign that he will consummate his work of creation and reconciliation beyond death . . .” (9.26). Created for freedom and communion with God, those reconciled to God become able to love God fully and freely in eschatological glory (6.063, 9.26).

The ground of salvation for humanity is “God’s reconciling act in Jesus Christ” (9.09). Faith is the instrument by which reconciling justification is received, a faith which “is ever accompanied with all other saving graces” and is thus manifested by love (6.068). New life in Christ is a process of sanctification, a growing into maturity which, as mentioned above, though never complete in this life, comes into fullness in glory (6.075-6.077).

Prior to the eschaton, God’s call is to a life of faithful, loving witness to God’s reconciling act in Jesus Christ. “God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary” (9.44). Politically, this reconciliation is “the ground of peace, justice and freedom among nations which all powers of government are called to serve and defend” and economically it “makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God’s good creation” (9.45, 9.46). Stating that “[t]he relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God’s ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind,” the Confession of 1967 declares, “Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and re-

spect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in life-long concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality” (9.47). God’s reconciling act in Jesus Christ is to be worked out in all aspects of human life.



### **Southern Baptist Convention**

Baptists have historically upheld the ultimate authority of Holy Scripture, the “priesthood of all believers” and Christian liberty in such a way as to oppose the imposition of confessions by religious institutions upon individuals, holding those confessions which are made as tentative and subject to interpretation by individual congregations and congregants. Nonetheless, the Baptist Faith and Message, a summary of Southern Baptist Convention teaching, was revised in 2000. It offers a gateway into the general beliefs of this large and influential denomination of the Baptist tradition. All quotations are from <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>, October 1, 2003.

The Baptist Faith and Message (BFM) has a specific statement on anthropology titled “Man.” Human beings are special creatures of God, “the crowning work of His creation,” marked so as bearers of the divine image. Humanity is made male and female; “[t]he gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation.” Human beings were created by God as innocent and free creatures. Through temptation, the first human beings freely chose to rebel against God, losing their original innocence and causing their descendants to “inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin.” For this reason, “as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation.” It is only by God’s grace that human beings are able to re-enter into God’s holy fellowship and “fulfill the creative purpose of God.” The Baptist Faith and Message explicitly connects both humanity’s creation in the image of God and Christ’s death on its behalf as securing the sacredness of each and all human beings, making individuals of every race and ethnicity worthy of respect and Christian love.

Section “IV Salvation” of the BFM treats the redemption of human beings. It states, “Salvation involves the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Christ.” Grace enacts all aspects of human salvation. Regeneration is the new birth, “a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin” leading to repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. “Justification is God’s gracious and full acquittal” from the guilt of sin and it brings one into right relationship with God. Sanctification is the believer’s ongoing growth in grace “toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.” Glorification is the completion of salvation “and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.” Finally, as is stated in section “V God’s Purpose of Grace,” the sovereign gracious action of God is consistent with free human agency “and comprehends all the means in connection with its end.” As it is pure gift, salvation should evoke an attitude of humil-

ity in all who receive it.

The BFM recognizes that human beings are meant to be social creatures. In section “XV Christianity and the Social Order,” it delineates numerous stances Christians should take in order “to seek and make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society.” Racism and all forms of avarice and sexual immorality ought to be opposed. All are to work to provide for “the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick.” Also, “every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love.” A separate section, “XVI Peace and War” specifically enjoins Christians to “do all in their power to put an end to war” which has its “true remedy” in “the gospel of our Lord.”

Section “XVIII The Family” states that “God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society.” Marriage is a lifetime covenant commitment between a man and a woman and reveals “the union between Christ and His church.” It is also “the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.” As a model of God’s relationship to God’s people, marriage entails different roles for husbands and wives who are of equal worth and dignity, equally made in the image of God. A husband’s loving servant leadership and a wife’s gracious submission reflect the relationship of Christ and the church. The children brought forth from the bond between man and woman are “from the moment of conception ... a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”



### Orthodox Church in America

Eastern Orthodox Christianity exists as a variety of autonomous and autocephalous national churches. Founded in 1971, the Orthodox Church in America is one of the Christian communions which represent Eastern Orthodoxy in the North America. According to its constitution, the OCA “is an autocephalous Church with territorial Jurisdiction in the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Canada. Its doctrine, discipline, and worship are those of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church as taught by the Holy Scriptures, Holy Tradition, the Ecumenical and Provincial Councils, and the Holy Fathers” (Article I of the *Statutes of the Orthodox Church in America* as found in <http://www.oca.org/pages/oacadmin/documents/Statute/or-The-Orthodox-Church-in-America.html>, October 1, 2003) Although the OCA has no authoritative systematic form of its teachings, it does publish a series of guides to Orthodox teaching and practice. *Doctrine*, the first volume of the series *The Orthodox Faith* by Father Thomas Hopko, “is intended to provide basic, comprehensive information on the faith and the life of the Orthodox Church for the average reader” (OCA, [http://www.oca.org/pages/orth\\_chri/Orthodox-Faith/index.htm](http://www.oca.org/pages/orth_chri/Orthodox-Faith/index.htm), October 1, 2003). The synopsis below of Orthodox theological anthropology comes from this work.

In the Orthodox tradition, that human beings are created in the image of God can only be fully understood in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ: “to bear the image of God is to be like Christ, the uncreated Image of God, and to share in all of the spiritual attributes

of divinity” (54). Human beings, made male and female, are meant to participate in and manifest in themselves the freedom, dominion over and nurture of creation, loving-kindness, mercy, compassion and eternal life of God. “As the Divine Archetype has no limits to His divinity, so the human image has no limits to its humanity, to what it can become by the grace of its Creator” (55). Human beings are intended to develop and grow without end, as they are intended to participate in the infinite, inexhaustible being and life of God. Hopko writes, “The fact that human nature progresses eternally in perfection within the nature of God constitutes the meaning of life for man, and remains forever the source of his joy and gladness for all eternity” (55).

That humanity is made male and female means that “[t]he differences between men and women are real and irreducible. They are not limited to biological or physical differences. They are rather different ‘modes of existence’ within one and the same humanity; just as, we might say, the Son and the Holy Spirit are different ‘modes of existence’ within one and the same divinity, together with God the Father” (57). Just as there is equality of nature but differentiation within the Trinity, so too is there in humanity. Men lead in society without oppression and tyranny, as women are to be “helpmeets” without usurpation (57). In the final analysis, “[i]t is the Trinitarian Life of God which is the Divine Archetype and Pattern for the being and acting of male and female within the order of creation” (57).

Sin is “a missing of the mark” a failing to be what one should (58). The account in Genesis 3, however one interprets it, clearly conveys the reality that human beings from the beginning have broken their fellowship with God (58). Hopko notes. “In the Bible and in Orthodox theology these elements always go together: sin, evil, the devil, suffering, and death” (58). Genesis continues to portray a catastrophic cascade: “Sin begets still more sin and even greater evil. It brings cosmic disharmony, the ultimate corruption and death of everyone and everything” (58-59). Humanity “still remains the created image of God – this cannot be changed – ” but that image is marred and the divine likeness is lost (59). “The world also remains good, indeed ‘very good,’ but it shares the sorry consequences of its created master’s sin and suffers with him in mortal agony and corruption” (59). Bound by common ancestry, all human beings along with the world they are called to steward are also bound to corruption and death (59).

Through Abraham and the people and history of Israel, God acts to save creation from sin and death, “culminating in the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and glorification of God’s only Son Jesus the Messiah” (59-60). Jesus Christ alone “is the one who comes from the Father to save the people from their sins, to open their tombs and to grant eternal life to all creation” (60). The Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ comes as a perfect human being. In a sense, he “recapitulates” the life of Adam; and as the “new Adam,” Jesus “did all things that man fails to do, being in everything the most perfect human response to the divine initiative of God toward creation” (72-73).

Salvation in Christ has three aspects. The first is the illumination by the Holy Spirit that enables one “to see, to know, to believe and to love the truth of God in Christ” (93). The second is the redemption from and atonement for sins made by Christ on behalf of humanity, thus allowing for the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God (93). Finally, the work of salvation “is the destruction of death by Christ’s own death” (99). Death itself dies in and through the death of Jesus Christ, making it possible for humanity to live in eternal communion with God.

Thus, all who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, turn to God through Jesus Christ, are united to him and drawn back into fellowship with the Triune God. As Hopko writes, “Only by the Holy Spirit can man and the world fulfill that for which they were created by God. All of God's actions toward man and the world—in creation, salvation and final glorification—are from the Father through the Son (Word) in the Holy Spirit; and all of man's capabilities of response to God are in the same Spirit, through the same Son to the same Father” (120-121). Human beings and all of creation are destined for renewal by God. All shall be resurrected into a resurrected creation which will be “glorified by Him, filled with His own divine presence” (133). Those who receive the forgiveness and love of God will find this existence in the presence of God to be unspeakable beatitude; those who refuse to receive such and refuse to repent will find this existence in the presence of God to be intolerable damnation (134).

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*The contemporary situation in which the Body of Christ finds its manifestation through a plurality of Christian communions adds another level of complexity to any attempt to offer a distinct Christian understanding of what humanity is.*

### **Analysis — Dr. Amy Laura Hall**

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

There are reasons not to apply *directly* Paul's words to the church in Corinth to this ecumenical project, but the text does work *analogically*. We are many members of the Body of Christ, with different emphases on the question of anthropology. The United Holy Church of America sheds light on the doctrine of humanity through an emphasis on sanctification as the "comprehensive work of restoration"; the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterians shows up in their conviction that salvation "takes shape in a community"; and the arm of the church catholic that is Lutheran will predictably, whatever the particular doctrine, answer with reference to justification by faith through Christ. One gift of ecumenical, doctrinal conversations may be our renewed capacity to appreciate the different emphases – newly to note our own church's distinct heritage and hopefully also to appreciate the doctrinal history of the other members of Christ's Body.

Allow me to shift towards a linguistic analogy. An attempt to forge some sort of theological Esperanto is potentially to miss out on one blessing of ecumenical conversation. Like the artificially universal language created by Dr. Ludovik Lazarus Zamenhof, a least-common-denominator answer to any theological question is spoken in the elusive land of everywhere, and nowhere. While we may agree on fundamentals, the liturgical and theological shape of those fundamentals will be different in different traditions, the various agreed-upon-basics will receive different accent in the United Methodist and the Roman Catholic Churches. We will do well humbly to note that even an agreement on what we are saying will not eliminate our distinct ways of stating our agreement.

This is perhaps as it should be for members who share a sacred text that is not univocal. To force James and Galatians to say the exact same thing about the task of humanity is to do violence to both texts. Christians are left with the blessed and holy task of answering how such books do not contradict one another, without taking the easy route out of the task by suggesting that they say the same thing. Indeed, one way fruitfully to read the creeds of the church is as the church's divinely inspired attempt to keep the faithful from eclipsing one scriptural emphasis in favor of another, potentially discordant, emphasis. Jesus was fully God *and* fully human. We are created in the image of God *and* are utterly reliant on the grace bestowed through Jesus Christ. Ecumenical conversation engendered by documents like this one may enable us to appreciate the complexity and excitement of ecumenical, scriptural interpretation.

Allow me, nonetheless, to suggest one basic assumption that works its way through all of the documents discussed above. In paragraph 389 from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Vatican writers helpfully suggest:

[t]he doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the "reverse side" of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all men, that all need salvation, and that salvation is offered to all through Christ. The Church, which has the mind of Christ, knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ.

While emphasized differently in the different documents, and while the Lutheran tradition more drastically estimates the damage to the *imago dei* due to the fall, all of the traditions share the conviction that Genesis 3 holds inescapable import for anthropology. No person, however auspiciously born and pristinely placed, is beyond the need and scope of God's powerful movement toward beatitude. Or, to speak what is perhaps the same conviction with a different accent, it does not matter whether we are born in the most chaotic city or

the tawniest, most well-planned suburb, we are all standing in the need of prayer.

As we proceed with the working assumption that doctrine does indeed matter, perhaps this common need, and, as its “reverse side,” our common hope that, through the one Spirit in which we are all baptized, we will eventually be again the unified body of Christ, are the most apt fundamentals to keep in view as we perceive together theological anthropology.

When these ecumenical conversations hit the ground, so to speak, the different members of the body will arguably have to deal with the import of doctrine for various pressing questions. Among those that we (Brian Madison and Amy Laura Hall) deem to be more than worth attention include:

1. How are Christians to perceive race within the project of anthropology? Does our commitment to racial equality arise out of notions of common ancestry? Out of an understanding of being made in God’s image? Out of God’s universal concern for humanity? Or does our commitment arise primarily out of our common baptismal heritage as those saved by Jesus Christ?
2. How are Christians to construe the humanity of nonbelievers? If soteriology plays a crucial role in Christian anthropology, where does this leave our understanding of those who are not explicitly saved through the instituted means of grace?
3. Can Christians who believe in gender complementarity and those who are suspicious of such language as undermining the equality of women and men before God be in constructive doctrinal conversation with one another?
4. If Christians are meant to be stewards of all creation, does that stewardship include our own bodies? If so, does this have import for questions in reproductive technologies and techniques of genetic manipulation?

The church's theological reflection on these and other issues can and must draw upon our rich and diverse tradition as we all faithfully seek to receive, interpret, and hand on the good news of God's faithful loving-kindness revealed in Jesus Christ.

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*We are many members of the Body of Christ, with different emphases on the question of anthropology.*

## Response — Dr. Albert J. D. Aymer

As I understand it, Mr. Madison's paper presents a synopsis of the theological anthropology of eight different Christian communions: Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Episcopalian, United Methodist, United Holy Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Southern Baptist, and Orthodox. In his presentation, the writer promises to highlight six things about these anthropologies:

1. Their notions of humanity's creation in the image of God
2. Their understandings of maleness and femaleness
3. Their presentations of original sin
4. Their understandings of the justified and sanctified life
5. Their statements about social relationships; and
6. Their positions about eschatological destiny.

From my conversations with Mr. Madison and the Rev. Paul Stallsworth, I understand that the purpose for this paper is to determine if in the doctrinal positions of these eight Christian communions there is a common teaching on anthropology that may serve as a general guide to Christian faith and witness today. The short answer to this question, in my opinion, is Yes and No.

In the "Analysis" attached to the main paper, Mr. Madison and Prof. Amy Laura Hall explain clearly what I refer to as the Yes and No answer. There are profound similarities in the denominational positions described in the paper and there are nuances or subtle differences of expressions. These nuances and differences, it seems to me, are due mainly to two factors. One is that we indeed "share a sacred text that is not univocal" (p 20). For that reason, the biblical texts on which these positions are posited themselves provide the opportunity for diversity of interpretations and positions. The other factor is the differences in the historical, social, theological, and political situations in which these positions were originally articulated. For example, we know that the Church of England drew up the *Thirty-nine Articles* in response to considerable controversies it faced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that these *Articles* were not originally intended to be a statement of Christian doctrine. To overlook either of these factors about ancient texts (be they in the Bible or be they articulations of Christian communions in periods of history far removed from and so different from our own) in any easy attempt to find in them justification or guidance for our actions today is to do disservice to the texts and to read in them the answers we want.

Another concern I have is that consideration ought to be given to these denominations' articulation of their theologies of anthropology subsequent to the formulation of their creeds, articles of religion, catechisms, etc. Theology can only be static if God ceases to disclose Gods-self to humanity, and if believers discontinue the quest to learn more about God and God's purpose for humankind. Some questions this paper raises for me are these: What are the theologies of anthropology of these denominations in a world and time when nations possess the means to obliterate human civilization? Why is human life treated as dispensable in the interest of personal and national gain of big and powerful nations? Why are sprawling affluence and abject poverty allowed to exist side by side in and among many na-

tions, with little redress from those nations and peoples that can do something about it? Why is HIV-AIDS being allowed to decimate generations of the populations of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in other parts of the Third World, and among the poor and marginalized in some developed countries when there are medicines that can arrest the spread of the disease? This is the real world in which we live, and it is in this world that ecumenical action and theological articulations of anthropology ought to take place.

For me, part of the richness of ecumenical conversations and sharing is not simply our commonality but a willingness to embrace the uniqueness that each communion brings to the table. When we come to such conversations looking for a way to reduce the diversity of our theological emphases to a common denominator, we end up usually by frustrating our conversation partners and ourselves. Such frustration comes from the fact that like ourselves, our conversation partners are also convinced firmly about the correctness of their positions. On the other hand, when we come to such conversations with an openness to learn from our conversation partners and a genuine willingness to affirm them in their understandings and perspectives, allowing those understandings and perspectives to inform our own, then we receive mutual blessings.

Lastly, while the questions raised in the Analysis are critically important to contemporary believers, it does not seem reasonable to expect definitive answers to these questions from the ancient theological articulations expressed in this paper. Questions of racial discrimination, the humanity of nonbelievers, gender equality, and stewardship of our bodies ought to be discussed in light of our increasing understanding about God—God’s being, character, and purpose for humanity—using these articulations of ancient texts as a guide but not as the final arbiter.

Finally, it seems to me that the place to begin any ecumenical dialogue or conversation is with an acknowledgement or affirmation of our oneness in Christ Jesus. The Analysis began with one of my favorite quotations from Paul found in I Cor. 12:12-13. That quotation is an echo of a critical statement the apostle made earlier in his Letter to the Galatians:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of us are one in Christ Jesus (3:27-28).

The basis of Paul’s bold appeal in this passage is what he refers to as being “**in Christ.**” This phrase is not a reference to some mystical experience or some esoteric rite. Rather, it refers to all who by faith are included into the community of believers in Christ. For Paul, this “in Christ” phrase refers to what is uniquely and truly transformative about the life in Christ (see II Cor. 5:17). In its broadest interpretation, the “in Christ” phrase is what Paul meant by being a Christian. In other words, for Paul, to be a Christian means to live a life in community with all who have faith in Christ. In this appeal to baptismal equality, Paul is not saying that the differences between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female do not exist (to use a double negative for emphasis). It would be ridiculous for any rational human being to make any such claim, because such differences in nationality, status, and gender do exist. They are common factors of our human situation. What Paul is saying, rather, is that such differences ought not to be regarded as reasons for division among those who are “in Christ.” Such differences are irrelevant! Taking this lead from Paul, therefore,

to be a Christian means that I am in communion and community with all Christians regardless of their denominational affiliation. The recognition and affirmation of this community “in Christ” is for me the beginning of any meaningful ecumenical conversation.

Albert J. D. Aymer  
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*Questions of racial discrimination, the humanity of nonbelievers, gender equality, and stewardship of our bodies ought to be discussed in light of our increasing understanding about God—God’s being, character, and purpose for humanity—using these articulations of ancient texts as a guide but not as the final arbiter.*

## Response — Dr. Jill Y. Crainshaw

“No person . . . is beyond the need and scope of God’s powerful movement toward beatitude” (Hall, 21). Recognition of the human need for beatitude is shared, suggests Amy Laura Hall, by the Christian traditions cited in the main essay. Linking the language and rhythms of “beatitude” or blessing with discussions of the doctrine of humanity establishes the context of liturgy and liturgical theology as important theological and pastoral resources for ecumenical exploration of theological anthropology. Christian liturgy, as sacred space of doxology and beatitude, is also an important window into the anthropological questions Hall and Madison pose at the conclusion of the essay.

One of the promises of Christian faith is that through liturgical gathering, people daily immersed in the celebrations and laments of human living are drawn toward a transforming encounter with God. Human actions of singing, washing, and eating, woven together with God’s Word in worship, reveal truths about God and humanity. In worship, as diverse human stories converge with God’s story around the eucharistic table, it is possible for people to move ever more deeply into what it means to be human “in light of their relationship to their source and destiny” (Madison, 7); in other words, into questions of theological anthropology.

While the liturgical shape of beliefs about humanity varies from one tradition to another, in most traditions, at least two elements of liturgical gathering are important to the expression and formation of theological anthropology. One element is worship’s focus on the praise of God. The other is the way liturgy reminds worshippers of humanity’s need for God’s grace. The creative intermingling of these two elements in worship—connection with the Divine and human need—provides communities with sacred space to wrestle with questions of theological anthropology in a way that both honors the nuances of diverse traditions and stretches beyond the parameters of those traditions to consider truths about God manifested in contrasting belief systems. Creating space for diversity to be celebrated within Christian unity is one of the foremost goals of ecumenical dialogue.

The core patterns of worship have already been explored as rich ecumenical soil by persons from diverse churches throughout the world. These ecumenical liturgical discoveries have been articulated in several widely respected documents, most notably the Lima Document of the World Council of Churches.<sup>1</sup> The impulse to ecumenical relations through shared liturgical practices suggests that liturgy’s window into theological anthropology is important to consider in relation to the plurality of official teachings cited in the main essay and in relation to the complexities challenging Christian unity today. In fact, what has sometimes been missed in discussions of doctrine is the kind of ecumenical doctrinal dialogue that might emerge as a result of our expanding common liturgical knowledge.

Ecclesial documents reflect and grow out of historical particularities and often state theological knowledge in language that is aimed at providing systematization of beliefs and conciseness of thought. In the PC(USA), for example, The Confession of 1967 clearly acknowledges the temporal and provisional authority of official teachings:

Confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subordinate to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to

him. . . Obedience to Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its tradition. This obedience is the ground of the church's duty and freedom to reform itself in life and doctrine as new occasions, in God's providence, may demand.<sup>2</sup>

Statements of doctrine in ecclesial teachings and confessions are valuable in that they are rooted in each tradition's distinct historical and ongoing struggles to claim identity, to interpret complex theological ideas, and to create guidelines for life and work together as communities of faith. Doctrine does indeed matter. What is important to remember is that one of the main functions of confession in the ancient church was liturgical. As official teachings over the centuries have taken on more doctrinal purposes and language, however, their connectedness to liturgical dimensions has, to some degree, been lost.

Liturgical knowledge, or what Susan Wood calls "participatory knowledge," has a unique role in shaping beliefs, world views, and moral or ethical practices, all of which have a direct bearing on anthropological questions.<sup>3</sup> Accessing the knowledge of God revealed in worship, along with restoring the liturgical context of confessional documents, is vital if our conversations about theological anthropology are to be conversations that move toward Christian unity.

"Whatever else the Sunday assembly of Christians is intended to do," Lutheran scholar Gordon Lathrop argues, "there can be wide ecumenical agreement on this: the Sunday assembly means to say the truth about God."<sup>4</sup> Worship also means to say the truth about humanity:

By entering into praise and thanksgiving, we know who we are in relationship to God and to God's sovereignty. Within the liturgy we come to know ourselves and God because the liturgy orders our relationships: my relationship to others within the body of Christ sacramentally. . . my relationship to God as recipient of God's graciousness, my relationship to the world. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Worship speaks truth about what it means to be human and patterns our relationships to one another and to God less through the kind of doctrinal language found in official ecclesial teachings and more through the metaphorical language of sacrament and symbol and through the liturgical experience of entering into a synergistic relationship with biblical texts, with ritual actions and objects, with each other, and with God. We know God and ourselves *in relation* to the creative and transformative patterns and rhythms of liturgy.

The relational dynamic central to how worshippers *know* themselves and God in liturgy suggests one way that liturgy and liturgical theology might provide creative space for diverse traditions to enter into theological dialogue not only about the practices and meanings of baptism and eucharist but also about pressing contemporary issues such as racial equality, religious pluralism, human sexuality, and ecological and biological responsibility. For example, liturgy invites us to *dwell in* its rhythms and patterns before explicating them doctrinally. This means that liturgy invites us to immerse ourselves physically, affectively, and cognitively in sights, smells, sounds and actions that together create a world of theological meaning within the pathos of lived human experience. To participate in rhythms of beatitude and doxology *before* talking about or critically interpreting human need and action through doctrinal particulars is to open ourselves to encounter God and to catch sight of

meanings beyond the temporal limits of official church teachings about humanity. The possible result is a deeper understanding of self and others gained not by contemplating our identity in the mirror of ecclesial documents but by beholding the face of Christ that appears in our gatherings around the table.

Liturgy also invites us to dwell in the life stories of those who gather with us, stories that are not always given voice in the language of ecclesial documents. Drawn into face-to-face encounters around the table with others created in God's image, we are given opportunity to name something about the lived experience of humanity in relation to God's Word *prior to* and *along with* articulating a doctrine of humanity. To immerse ourselves, within liturgy's narrative dimensions, in human stories of lament and celebration and in the Gospel story of the paschal mystery, before focusing these stories through the lenses of doctrinal particulars opens the way to explore how God is present in the humanity of every person. Exploring doctrinal statements or official teachings through the dynamic relational lenses of liturgy's *ordo* provides a context of beatitude for ecumenical conversations about theological anthropology and accompanying moral and ethical decision-making.

The contemporary church struggles as the church has struggled throughout history to understand its identity in relation to the world and to offer a voice of wisdom in the midst of human pain and brokenness. Our communal actions around liturgy's table can serve as a model for theological conversations about human identity in relation to God. As Calvin insists in his writings about the Eucharist and as we see reflected in official teachings within much of the Reformed tradition, "communion with Christ" cannot be reduced to "beliefs about Christ." Nor can shared table conversation reduce "the living body of the church to an association of likeminded individuals."<sup>6</sup> Movement toward Christian unity demands of us something different. The Confession of 1967 of the PC(USA) puts it this way:

The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the reconciliation of [people] with God and with one another, in which they joyfully eat and drink together at the table of their Savior. Jesus Christ gave his church this remembrance of his dying for sinful [persons] so that by participation in it they have communion with him and with all who shall be gathered to him.<sup>7</sup>

If Eucharistic table talk is to respect differences and lead to reconciliation and unity, it demands of us a clear sense of self-identity as individuals and within traditions. One way that self-identity and communal identity are formed and clarified in worship is through a dynamic relationship with those whose identity in God's image is different than ours and with the One who is both wholly Other and wholly connected to us through Christ. This suggests that the eschatological vision of "the unified body of Christ" depends not on the establishment of a universal Christian doctrine of humanity but rather on working together to create mutual dialogues through which our separate but connected identities are continually named, clarified, and transformed.

Liturgy models this kind of mutual dialogue by creating an ethos of story sharing wherein we learn around the communion table how to tell the stories of human experience in relation to the Gospel story, growing into an ever-expanding eschatological vision of hos-

pitality and grace:

Yet even while the assembly tells stories, it also undercuts the inevitability of narratives, the legalisms, they reinforce. . . The practice of the assembly can be a pedagogical force for the recovery of healthy stories. . . Yet it can also be one force for resistance to the wounding power of cultural narratives . . . .<sup>8</sup>

This liturgical pattern of story sharing wherein the Word and voice of God is discovered in biblical texts, in prayers, in preaching, *and* in the voices of one another honors diversity but insists on unity of celebration and praise.

Such a liturgical pattern also demands a covenantal willingness on the part of worshippers to risk face-to-face encounters with those stories hard to hear and hard to tell. These difficult and painful stories stand at the intersection of official teachings about humanity and complex contemporary issues, giving these issues human faces and thereby confronting us with the ambiguities and mysteries of God's image as it appears in human lives and experiences.

The importance of ecumenical conversation about theological anthropology cannot be overestimated. Many of the crises the contemporary church faces grow out anthropological questions and concerns. Because of the intensity of these issues and their potential divisiveness within and between Christian communions, the face-to-face narrative patterns modeled in liturgy cannot be set aside as people from diverse traditions move from liturgical celebration to doctrinal conversation about race or gender or human sexuality or ecological responsibility.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Prosper of Aquitaine wrote what has become a central phrase in ecumenical liturgical renewal: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The rule for praying establishes the rule for believing. The *practice* of prayer, of interceding to God for the world and for humanity in worship, is the foundation, the soil, of theological doctrine. How the practice of prayer takes shapes may look different in different traditions, but the *fact* of the "rule of prayer" is ecumenically shared.

Even the most doctrinally divergent communities share the common call to prayer around Christ's table of thanksgiving and blessing. To ground our conversations about human identity, value and even salvation in this shared "rule of prayer," invites us to look one another in the eye and share bread around God's table of grace before drawing rigid theological or doctrinal lines of demarcation. The "rule of prayer" invites us to share a space of beatitude before explicating our divergent "rules of belief." This might be a good place to start as we seek the gift of ecumenical conversation because, as Hall reminds us, "we are all standing in the need of prayer."

Jill Crainshaw  
Wake Forest University Divinity School  
November 2003

*Even the most doctrinally  
divergent communities share the common call to prayer around  
Christ's table of thanksgiving and blessing.*

<sup>1</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> "The Confession of 1967," *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I: Book of Confessions: Study Edition* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 321.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Wood, "Participatory Knowledge of God in the Liturgy," an unpublished paper presented at the meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy, January 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Lathrop, "At Least Two Words: The Liturgy as Proclamation," in *Liturgy: We Proclaim* 11 (1: 1993), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Wood, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 190.

<sup>7</sup> "The Confession of 1967," *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Part I: Book of Confessions: Study Edition* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 330.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

## Response — Dr. Robert Osborn

First, a word, indeed a few words, in appreciation to Brian, Amy and others who have done this remarkable job of selecting and summarizing the doctrines of humanity as found in the confessional and doctrinal standards of a number of Christian traditions. Whatever else might come of this work, it provides at least a fine resource for those who would pursue an investigation of the doctrine of humanity in the contemporary church. A first reading is notable, in my judgment, for its display of what the traditions have in common: the creation of humans in the image of God; their fall, from the beginning, into sin; the saving grace of God manifest in Jesus Christ that restores them to their created image, etc. One can recognize anticipated differences: the Roman Catholic conflation of justification and sanctification, for example; the Baptist limiting of the saving work of Christ to “all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior”; Methodist and Holiness emphasis on sanctification, even “entire sanctification.” However, a significant and most important common denominator is the primary authority of Holy Scripture, above or with the creeds and tradition of the church.

The document raises one basic question for me regarding its stated purpose. The stated purpose is to find what might be called “a ‘Christian consensus’ concerning who we are and who we are called to be—all in light of Whose we are and by Whom we are called,” and to do this by surveying the creeds or guiding principles of the denominations, with due consideration of their evident diversity. My question is simply, Why? Why study creeds, confessions and the like, and why particularly the doctrine of humankind? Is the search for a Christian consensus to enable the Council to address more effectively the ecumenical church that it represents? Is its focus on creeds and denominational guidelines in order that it might have more authority? Is its focus on the doctrine of humanity in the realization that there are common problems of humanity and perhaps more doctrinal consensus here than at other loci?

It also raises the basic question of the function of authoritative doctrine, creeds and confessions within the various churches. What is the relevance of one tradition’s creed or doctrine for another tradition that has its own confessional stance? What is the importance of the Westminster Confession, for instance, for the Catholic Church, or the Orthodox Church in America, or the UCC? Is it that by calling attention to the different doctrinal emphases, as well as the *loci communes*, they enable the churches better to understand one another and perhaps achieve a greater unity? But would they have any doctrinal authority? A related question arises from the noteworthy fact that in every instance, primacy is given to Holy Scripture as the “source and norm of...proclamation, faith and life” (ELCA). Roman Catholicism stresses at the same time the essential role of Tradition and the Magisterium as well as the living tradition in the church, and Orthodoxy the binding authority of early creeds and councils, but for all the communions, the first and final authority is Holy Scripture. My question then has to do with the relationship of these doctrinal statements to Scripture.

Now I want to suggest that these two questions are fundamentally the same: to ask about the function of creeds, etc. is to ask about their relationship to Scripture. Given the

primacy of Scripture, the answer would seem to be that the function of doctrinal norms or dogma is to facilitate a faithful reading and hearing of the Scripture to which they are subordinate. As the Presbyterian Confession of 1967 states, Confessional statements are “subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, as Scriptures bear witness to him....” I would cite in addition the first thesis of the Barmen Declaration (also a confession of the Presbyterian Church as well as of Reformed churches worldwide): “Jesus Christ as attested in Scripture is the one word that we have to hear in life and in death.” So, we may conclude from these that the function of the confessions, creeds, etc. is to lead to the Bible and with the Bible to Jesus Christ, the Word of God that is in the beginning with God and is God. This is to say that the creeds and confessions function hermeneutically; they help the church hear and say what Scripture has to say; they facilitate the church's witness to Jesus Christ, and, as regards our topic, to the humanity that is restored and revealed in him. It has been suggested that we think of these confessions and creeds (symbols) as buoys that direct the church faithfully into scripture: they set the boundaries of the course, marking the shoals, rocks and currents that would hinder a faithful, obedient hearing of the Word. What these statements seek, therefore, should not be a doctrinal or dogmatic orthodoxy, and certainly no sanctified pluralism, but the unity of faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ as attested in scripture, and to a putting on of the new humanity that we have in him. All the buoys are meant to bring us all, by differing courses, into the same harbor, rather than to the conformation of the church's thinking and understanding to common creedal texts and dogmas, as if the buoy itself were the goal, the harbor sought. Therefore, our final goal is not doctrinal correctness or agreement or even doctrinal fidelity, but the hearing of the word of God as addressed us in Scripture. This situation—many buoys, one harbor—suggests the possibility of two unacceptable solutions: 1) Many buoys, many diverse opinions—theological pluralism. Wrong. We don't pursue the buoys, but leave them behind to seek the harbor to which they point; 2) One harbor, one destiny, one doctrine, one dogma—theological orthodoxy. Wrong. There are many pointers, not just one, though only one true harbor. Returning to the document before us, I have to say that I am not clear as to where it wants to take the churches. Is it toward a new, informed respect for the diversity of buoys, or is it hoping to define one absolute ecumenical orthodox buoy, or is it to put all buoys in place as pointers to the harbor—Jesus Christ as attested in scripture?

I would speak finally and briefly to the question of how these buoys work, and point beyond themselves to the true end of our course. I continue with my metaphor. Of course we study the charts, get to know the buoys well—what they say, where they are located, what courses they would steer us from and what course they would put us on. The doctrine of sin, for example, warns us away from reading a vain optimism into Jesus' vision for our humanity, whereas the doctrine of our creation in the *Imago Dei* discourages a faithless pessimism in our effort to hear the word of God in our situation. So we study our normative documents and should have no more option about this than does a sailor the obligation to know her charts. But all this is to help her sail faithfully and true. So she does not sail with her undivided attention on the charts, lest she miss sight of the ship passing across her bow, or the storm signaled by the rising wind. In the language of Michael Polanyi, she is not always attending to her charts, but more often from her charts, which are tacitly at work through her mind and body, to the explicit task of steering and sailing the boat. Moving from the metaphor: we do not preach or practice dogma; we do not seek to be orthodox, nor

do we advocate it; rather, we seek with well-trained minds and spirits to walk with the church in faithfulness to Christ, so that as we confront the many obstacles and challenges we meet—like such specific issues as homosexuality or abortion or war or poverty—we will have the charts handy to guide us to Him who is the way, the truth and the life, and who alone can show us the way and the truth in the context of these pressing issues. I want to suggest, in conclusion, that in the cases of abortion and homosexuality for instance, the church should be driven neither by a political correctness (in the name of “pluralism” perhaps), or by a simplistic orthodoxy (as “the church has always taught”), but by the scripturally attested Jesus as his will and way are sought with all the doctrinal tools to guide us that are available. But neither the political nor the doctrinal are determinative, not even the text of Scripture, but only Jesus Christ, albeit the scripturally attested Jesus Christ, as the church seeks His will and way.

As a Methodist—that is, as a member of a non-confessional church with a tradition that has celebrated the plurality and diversity of theological positions—I am aware of the value and need of common and accepted doctrinal standards. Methodists do have the Wesleyan tradition, especially as set forth in the Articles of Religion, the Sermons of John Wesley and his New Testament Notes, but these have never served to provide Methodism with a doctrinal norm. The best it has been able to come up with recently is the so-called “Methodist Quadrilateral,” according to which Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience are the sources and norms of theology—all-in-all, it would appear, a prescription for pluralism and theological diversity. In the Methodist Church, and perhaps in the mainstream church generally, this kind of “diversity” seems to prevail, and is generating two responses, both unacceptable, in my judgment: a steadfast commitment to diversity and pluralism on the one hand, and an aspiration for a new theological orthodoxy on the other. These are the easy answers, but, to say it again, there is just one word the church has to hear—the Word of God who is Jesus Christ. How do we do this? By trust that He lives and is not dead, that He speaks for himself in the Church, as the Church, led by the buoys He has enabled the Church to place along its course, gathers together to hear and to listen. We must of course do our homework: get to know the buoys, where they are placed and why, and occasionally supplement or refurbish them, but always to put them behind or beneath so as to attend to that one Word we have to hear.

Obviously more can and needs to be said, but this must suffice for the moment.

With a prayer for grace and guidance,  
Robert (Bob) Osborn  
Professor Emeritus of Religion  
Duke University

*All the buoys are meant to bring us all, by differing courses, into the same harbor, rather than to the conformation of the church's thinking and understanding to common creedal texts and dogmas, as if the buoy itself were the goal, the harbor sought.*

## Response — Dr. Larry Yoder

### The Damage to the *Imago Dei* in the Fall

1. The Lutheran understanding of fallen humanity is a distinctly *theological* understanding in Christian anthropology. *Ethically*, even with the remaining limited freedom of will, human beings can “live an externally honorable life and ... choose among the things that reason comprehends.” That goes for Islamic “Turks” as well as baptized Christians. (Luther once observed that he would rather live under the rule of a righteous Turk than a wicked Christian!) The fallen state of humanity has *precisely* to do with one’s relationship with God, and how it is that sin is forgiven. The review is correct when it observes of Lutherans that they understand “that of themselves, human beings can in no way be pleasing to God.”
2. As the paper notes at a couple of points, Lutherans share Luther’s understanding of *simul*. One is at the same time a saint and a sinner, always penitent. One is at the same time a free person, subject to no one; but also a servant to all. One is a citizen of the kingdom of Christ and the civil kingdom. The fallen nature of humanity pervades all our actions, so that even well-intended ethical motives have about them the smell of sin – self-interest disguised as good works, pride in being “better” than others, and the like. Lutherans understand that no human undertaking, and no human institution, is free from that fallenness. One lives provisionally as a redeemed child of God, himself or herself also yet a sinner. It is a psychological as well as a theological understanding – but it has corporate and institutional implications.

Further Reflection – John 8:31-32 – “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

1. The text above is the Gospel lesson always appointed (in the Lutheran tradition) for the Sunday of the Reformation (i.e., the Sunday in October nearest October 31). Among those in the mainline of Protestantism, including some who carry the name of Luther, there are now those unwilling to accept the Word of God as norming norm for faith and life. Thus emerges the question of the status of the Word of God as “norming norm” to faith or life. At the first level is “theocentric christology,” which challenges the claim of the Savior that “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one cometh to the Father but by me.” Jesus the Christ becomes one among several, if not many, possible avenues to God. In the name of tolerance-amid-diversity, the claim to continue in His Word is eroded if not evaporated. Respect for the integrity of other religions of the world is a necessity, over against prejudice and controversy, to say nothing of violence. Dialogue is desired, even mandatory. But who sacrifices on the altar of tolerance the centrality of the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Resurrection as the Way to the Father, does not continue in the Word and is at best a specious disciple, if not an apostate, however well-

meaning.

A second, and equally challenging phenomenon, is the move to elevate “experience” to a status of importance so as to supercede (or trump) the teaching of Scripture. Particularly is this true in the debate over the legitimation of homosexual actions and relationships.

2. "You will know the truth and the truth shall make you free." – There have been two significant "sunderings" of this quotation. The first was the disengagement of the conditional clause from the main clause: that is, the separation of "if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples" from "you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Modern education follows the Enlightenment premise that indeed knowing the truth is a necessary precondition for freedom, but that both knowing the truth and being made free are enterprises that can be carried on quite apart from any discipleship to the Lord. Indeed, from the secular point of view, can *only* be carried on quite apart from any prior commitments to transcendent authority, other than to the ascendancy of reason and an often unspoken adherence to material causality only.

That's the first sundering: of the conditional clause from the main clause. But there is another divorce, more recent and more virulent. That is the sundering of "truth" from "freedom," not only in the culture but especially in the church. One must properly acknowledge the work of John Paul II in this regard. His *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993, stands as a monument at the end of the 20th century, a brilliant attempt to correct errors in moral theology *in the church*. The bishop references "uncommanded man" as accurately illustrative of men and women inside and outside the church who will not be commanded by God, but who have usurped with their freedom the prerogative of defining the content of the good. Adam and Eve began the enterprise and humanity has continued it across time. In the present day, there are those who claim that "the Bible is culturally conditioned. All truth is culturally conditioned. Truth is radically subjective. Everything is hermeneutic." The currency of deconstruction is the yield of the intellectual separation of truth from freedom. Here and there, among pastors and bishops even, behavior and relationships condemned by the scripture are declared intrinsic to God's good creation.

Writes the Bishop of Rome: "A new situation has come about *within the Christian community itself*, which has experienced the spread of numerous doubts and objections of a human and psychological, social and cultural, religious and even properly theological nature, with regard to the Church's moral teachings. It is no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of anthropological and ethical presuppositions. At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth. Thus the traditional doctrine regarding the natural law, and the universality and the permanent validity of its precepts, is rejected; certain of the Church's moral teachings are found simply unacceptable; and the Magisterium itself is considered capable of intervening in matters of morality only in order to 'exhort consciences' and to 'propose values,' in light of which *each individual will independently make his or her decisions*

and life choices. (VS, # 4, emphasis added) This in the church of Rome. Absent a Magisterium since the sixteenth century, now awash in dissent from the authority of the scriptures, Protestants are often reduced to trying to make lemonade.

### Import of Christian Anthropology for Various Pressing Questions.

1. As to race, Lutheran “conservatism” is properly one of caution rather than ideology. Caution against utopianism on the left and intransigent prejudice on the right. Remember, for Lutherans, no human institution can embody the kingdom of God. On the other hand, of the southern churches, it was a Lutheran body, the confessionally oriented Tennessee Synod (1820-1918), which had congregations in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina – and one in Tennessee, that first declared its unequivocal condemnation of the plague of slavery, in its *first* meeting as a synod, 1820. For pastors like the Henkel brothers, the humanity of Africans was not in question; it was an equal and co-humanity with people of European ancestry. As churches, the Lutheran bodies (ELCA, LCMS, and Wisconsin Synod) have an “ethnic heritage” of Northern Europeans. For the last 30 years and most prominently for the last 15, Lutherans have been actively seeking diversity in membership, writing liturgy in other idioms, actively placing mission congregations in areas where the membership can reflect the demographics of the nation.
2. The humanity of nonbelievers: Since “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” the humanity of nonbelievers is precisely the same as the humanity of believers. As mentioned above, Lutheran understanding of the “two kingdoms” to which Christians have allegiance, for all the flaws of that view, does allow them to work side by side – in business, commerce, arenas of work for public good and all other human affairs – with non-believers and practitioners of other beliefs.

As to missions, ELCA Lutheran leadership at the beginning of its existence (1988-91) were influenced by the notion that “missionary activity” is a violation of the integrity of a people’s native religion. This led Carl Braaten, a son of Lutheran missionaries, to thunder from the pulpit at St. Olaf’s Boe Chapel: “The missionaries are coming home and they are not going back. How long until God takes the Gospel from our faithless hands and gives it to those who will proclaim it?!” (from First Call to Faithfulness Conference, June, 1991) Lutherans pray for all those who do not know Jesus Christ, and leave to God’s mercy both those who have not heard or responded, and those (including ourselves) whose fulfillment of the Great Commission has fallen far short!

3. Gender complementarity – “Constructive conversation” can always occur among persons of good will. However, the “gender debates” have included those (on the right) who insist on the Bible’s mandate of female subservience, and others (including “gender feminists”) whose view of the scriptures is that they are rooted in patriarchy and thus not trustworthy for being normative in faith and life. It is encouraging to see emerge, in

a younger generation of theologians, women who are not captive to the “hopelessly patriarchal” view of scriptures, so that conversation can indeed occur. Women and men are indeed equal before God ... and women and men are indeed in a relationship of complementarity with each other. It is time to get beyond questions of power and grievance. With Lutheran seminaries now more than 55% populated by women, that issue is beginning, I think, to see its resolution.

4. Reproductive technologies and genetic manipulation – Here is where the Lutheran understanding of original sin needs thoroughly to be heeded. Lutherans should speak a resounding “no” to embryonic stem cell research, and encourage stem cell research, more difficult as it is, from those already born! Techniques of genetic manipulation should also be considered with great caution, recognizing on the one hand that such work will always have in its constituency those whose ambition outweighs their constraint, to say nothing of their wisdom. One should recall Icarus, Faust, and the Sorcerer’s Apprentice ... legends and stories they are, but they declare a primal caution to constraint in human effort. We have reached beyond the threshold of life to its “creation” (reproductive technology) and its manipulation (genetic alteration). The old maxim “do no harm” does well apply. This is a new and significant set of “powers” that must be monitored carefully and with much greater “wise restraint” than with “unbridled enthusiasm.”
5. Two other “pressing-question” issues seem to this observer intrinsic to the question of Christian anthropology and deserve attention in this discussion – the homosexual debate and abortion. However, even though I regard them as crucial, they are controversial and have been set aside for the purposes of this study.

Larry Yoder  
 Professor of Religion  
 Lenoir-Rhyne College

*Respect for the integrity of other religions of the world is a necessity, over against prejudice and controversy, to say nothing of violence. Dialogue is desired, even mandatory. But who sacrifices on the altar of tolerance the centrality of the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Resurrection as the Way to the Father, does not continue in the Word and is at best a specious disciple, if not an apostate, however well-meaning.*

## Concluding Essay-Amy Laura Hall

The work of ecumenical, doctrinal conversation is arduous. I commend those who have struggled through. In what follows, I will speak to the different respondents briefly, building toward a constructive proposal inspired by Dr. Crainshaw's vision.

The question of hermeneutics (or textual interpretation) looms large in this project. Dr. Aymer writes in his response: "To overlook [the historical, social, theological and political contexts of traditional creedal/confessional statements and the fact that biblical writings themselves are not univocal] in an easy attempt to find in them justification or guidance for our actions today is to do disservice to the texts and to read in them the answers we want." This brings up a significant intra-denominational problem. How are we to read Scripture and other formative texts as Holy? In what sense is Scripture authoritative? Why should my students read Saint Augustine? Any answer to such a question is likely to seem arbitrary to those on the "other side" of any thorny moral question. For this reason, I believe that the task of reading together these texts must be a baseline practice prior to any particular discernment about war, patriotism, abortion, homosexuality, gun control, or any other focused question facing Christians. I think here of the *Disciple Bible Study* series, but there are other examples.

Fruitful textual study will involve charity on at least two levels. First, fruitful study will require a charitable reading of the text – a sense that the text holds wisdom to which we are not otherwise privy. True, attentive, charitable reading does not necessitate subservience, but it does require an open curiosity, a kind of trust that the text wishes you good rather than ill. This is a significant task, particularly for people against whom Holy texts have been used as a battering ram. Charitable reading involves a refusal to allow those who have wielded texts as weapons to have the definitive word. Christian history is replete with examples of resilient, tenaciously hopeful interpretations of "the Master's" text. Second, and perhaps more difficult, fruitful reading will involve charity between readers. Fruitful study involves a commitment to listen, to pray, and to be with one another through time. I myself suspect that this is at least as much the problem facing denominations as is difference in interpretations. To read Scripture charitably together requires a covenant of conversation and embodied care of one another's soul.

Might it be possible for those affiliated with the North Carolina Council of Churches to covenant with one another for a long-term Scriptural study on the *Disciple* model?

Dr. Osborn gives an impassioned plea for clarity: What do the various members of the Council hope will come of these conversations? It may be possible to pull out the responses to that question and then dig deeper to consider the anthropological assumptions underneath the various hopes for the document itself. Those who hope it will bring clarity to a muddled, heterodox context likely view human creatures as prone to stray, prone to wander and leave the Lord. Those who hope to bring justice to the impoverished perhaps view human creatures primarily as agents of the Lord's work in the world. And so might the discussion proceed. This follow-up might prove a fruitful conversation in itself. Perhaps Dr. Osborn might come more fully to consider that his "just one Word" is itself a particular rendition of the doctrine of anthropology. As a United Methodist, I fear that his answer is

problematic for true ecumenical discourse. United Methodists often quote John Wesley's "give me your hand" comment regarding unity in Christ. Yet Wesley had deep, abiding, and therefore contentious conversations with Calvinist, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic colleagues over the genuine differences involved in our particular traditions. He did not have the "live and let live in Christ" attitude that we adopt for him now in our attempts to be amiable ecumenical partners. To live in unity in Christ with one another will involve often frustrating conversations with one another about genuinely different interpretations of particular doctrines.

This brings us to Dr. Yoder's response. I would challenge the Council seriously to consider his detailed articulation of Lutheran convictions and to try to understand the nuances of Lutheran heritage before dissecting and dissenting from his response. I would recommend that the Council consider Dr. Yoder the "other" requiring hospitality, rather than deeming him the excluding party. In the days of "live and let live" ecumenical conversation, perhaps he is the stranger whose voice is the hardest to hear.

Finally, Dr. Crainshaw suggests that the North Carolina Council of Churches consider ecumenical documents on baptism, agreements already painstakingly forged concerning the nature of human beings as baptized into Christ's body. I recommend that the Council take its lead and consider various World Council documents on baptism, with particular attention to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* from 1982. The website for the Faith and Order initiative of the World Council of Churches ([www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/texts-e.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/texts-e.html)) has many of the relevant documents. There is reason for the NCCC to seek to craft its own documents of agreement, but it seems at the very least imprudent not to heed and make use of the work of ecumenical foremothers and fathers.

Dr. Crainshaw further suggests that the Council "explore doctrinal statements or official teachings through the dynamic relational lenses of liturgy's ordo." I would encourage indeed the Council to worship together. However, in order to take her suggestion seriously, Council members would need to worship within the different respective communities, and more than a one time, drop-in visit. This would require time and effort, but seems a very apt and creative way to proceed. Otherwise, I fear that Dr. Crainshaw is correct to suspect that any consensus regarding doctrine will be disembodied and fruitless. The Council would do well to invite Teresa Berger and Geoffrey Wainwright to come and discuss liturgy and ecumenical efforts. Both are local but world-renowned scholars of liturgy and ecumenism. Professors Berger and Wainwright could help members of the Council discern the level of liturgical participation appropriate when two traditions are in genuine disagreement.

If the responses are some indication, there are those within the Council who see *doctrinal* conversation as incomplete. All but one of the respondents brought up the need for attention to practices – whether political, liturgical, or both. If indeed there are those within the Council who do not consider their own denominational *texts* to be authoritative in a way that can contribute to ecumenical conversation, I would assume that they continue to attend worship. Presumably this worship is meaningful in a serious way for them, and a conversation could emerge around the words of the various denominational liturgies. If we cannot agree about the authority of particular texts, perhaps representatives to the Council could agree seriously to consider the words they currently employ each week in worship. Considering my own tradition, what does it mean for our doctrine of humanity that a United Methodist service includes a Prayer of Confession? How do we understand humanity in the light of the mystery of faith we declare at weekly Eucharist? "Christ has died; Christ is

risen; Christ will come again.” What difference does that declaration make for the faith of a United Methodist? For those affiliated with the Council to worship alongside one another and then to ask questions of each tradition might prove a very helpful second-phase of this project.

May the Holy Spirit use the seeds of this small project to bear fruit in unexpected ways.

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*Fruitful study involves a commitment to listen, to pray, and to be with one another through time. I myself suspect that this is at least as much the problem facing denominations as is difference in interpretations. To read Scripture charitably together requires a covenant of conversation and embodied care of one another's soul.*

