

Statement on Human Sexuality, Personhood, Identity, and the Historic Christian Faith

The rise of transgenderism is not a small topic. It has been on the agenda of our society for the last two decades at least. It requires a response. As a matter of human sexuality, personhood, and identity, it involves all the chief articles of the historic Christian faith. To demonstrate this, in organizing what the Scriptures have to say, we will follow the basic pattern of the Apostles' Creed. We believe in the Creator, who made this world and everything in it. We believe in our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who became fully human to rescue this world and everything in it from corruption, sin, and death. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, who is even now renewing the world and everything in it.

First Article Truths

1. In the beginning God created the human race in his own image by an act of special creation. (Gen 1:26–27).
2. He created us body and soul—a single being, yet with a unique integrity, blessed with both physical and spiritual components. We have both a physical body endowed with sexuality, and a rational soul blessed with reason, will, and emotions (Gen 1:26–27; Gen 2:7; Ps 73:26; Matt 10:28; Eccl 12:7).
3. God's purpose for humanity was expressed in his act of creating us,¹ that is, in his creative design (Matt 19:4–6).²
4. He created us “male and female,” that is, with a sexuality that takes only one of two forms (Gen 1:27; 2:20–23).³
5. He created male and female to unite us in marriage (Gen 2:20–24; Matt 19:6).
6. He makes man and woman one in marriage to ease our loneliness, to provide interdependent and complementary help and companionship, and to produce and raise

¹ This is the underlying assumption of Genesis 1: the division of day from night, “the stars in their courses,” the rising and setting of the sun, the succession of seasons, and the empowering command for living things to be fruitful. These are all mentioned in Genesis 1 as being set in their order by God's creative word and design. The rest of the Scriptures affirm this with one voice (Ps 33:6; Ps 148:1–6; 2 Pet 3:5; Rev 4:11).

² God's gift of marriage does not exhaust Scripture's accounting for the purposes of our creation as male and female. Unmarried men and women also have roles to play in the world. Their maleness or femaleness is integral to those interdependent and complementary roles. Scripture says that we need each other as we serve in love in our unique callings as man or woman. We also have God-given roles to carry out as stewards of God's created world. As parents and teachers, we must redouble our efforts in teaching our young people the full truth of God's design (Gen 1:26, 28; 1 Cor 11:11; Eph 6:4).

³ Our gender identity is formed by a complex interaction of biology, hormones, upbringing, and culture. Thus “gender” and “sex” can certainly be distinguished, but they are not to be separated.

children (Gen 2:20; 1:28; Matt 19:6). God’s intent is to build families and communities (Ps 68:6).

7. God’s creation in all its aspects was and is “very good” (Gen 1:31).
8. Our original righteousness and holiness were lost in the Fall (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; 1 Cor 2:14; Rom 7:18; Rom 8:7) and human beings became thoroughly corrupt and depraved in their natures⁴ (Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; John 3:6; Eph 2:1, 3; Matt 15:19; Rom 7:18; Rom 8:7). We are no longer capable, by nature, of knowing God truly, much less ourselves. A corrupt understanding of God necessarily leads to a faulty understanding of our own nature (Rom 1:25, 28). Nevertheless, the essence of our humanity—our creation as beings fashioned wonderfully and well, with body and soul, and as male and female for marriage—remains God’s handiwork even after the Fall. Jesus himself specifically affirms it (Ps 139:13–16; Matt 19:4–8).
9. Our distinct callings as men and women, our sexuality, marriage, and the family are not simply social constructs. Their essence cannot simply be changed by human will, desire, or feeling. “From the beginning” they have been gracious gifts of God, interwoven into human nature and foundational to human society (Matt 19:6).⁵
10. The Church confesses, “I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.”⁶
11. For our existence, for our identities as male and female, and for marriage and family—gifts from our Creator’s hand—all human beings “ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him”⁷ (Ps 139:14; Ps 150:1, 2, 6; Rom 12:1; Rom 1:21).

⁴ “Nature” here is used as the Scriptures and Luther use it, to refer to “the negative or positive characteristics of a thing.” It does not refer to the “essence, body and soul of the human being.” Formula of Concord, SD I, 51, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 540. The sinful inborn characteristics of humanity after the Fall have to be distinguished from humanity’s essence as God’s creatures fashioned with a body and a soul: “Otherwise, God would be a creator of sin.... It is true this creature ... of God is tragically corrupted by sin.... God makes and fashions human nature, as it now is, so tragically corrupted by sin, so that he might cleanse, sanctify, and save it through his dear Son.... Original sin does not come from God, nor is it a creature or handiwork of God.... In order to distinguish God’s creation and work ... from the devil’s work, we say that it is God’s creation that the human being has a body and soul and can think, speak, act, and accomplish anything, ‘for in him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). That this nature is corrupted and that our thoughts, words, and deeds are evil is in its origin a handiwork of Satan.... Sin cannot be the human being itself for God receives human beings for Christ’s sake into grace but remains hostile to sin for eternity” (FC SD I, 38–42, 45, in Kolb and Wengert, 538–539).

⁵ Here we stand together in conscious agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and their “Position Statement on Sex and Gender Identity,” available at https://els.org/wp-content/download/doctrine/Sex_and_Gender_Identity.pdf. They write, “God created the human race with unique gender distinctions as male and female.” We also agree with the statement adopted by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations, which states, “From the standpoint of our bodies—which is the only objective means of determining who is male or female—we have a God-given identity that is either masculine or feminine.” CTCR “Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria in Christian Perspective,”⁵ <http://www.lcms.org/docs/3012>.

⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*, edited by Stephen Geiger, Joel Otto, John Braun, and Ray Schumacher (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 130. The CTCR “Gender” document points out, “The term *Glied*, however, is used to refer to all body parts. Moreover, the Latin version of the Small Catechism reads ‘*omnia membra*’ 6, fn18—this includes our sexual members.”

⁷ *Luther’s Catechism*, edited by Geiger et al., 130.

Because of these scriptural truths, ...

12. We cannot accept a worldview that assumes humanity, rather than being a special creation of God, is more or less a random assemblage of atoms coalescing by happenstance (evolutionism).
13. We cannot accept an ideology that assumes that our world is constantly being refashioned by our subjective perceptions and the words we use to describe them. We understand that culture shapes norms and behaviors, often in positive ways. But we reject the idea that there are no universals, and that all definitions and descriptions of the universe are solely expressions of personal or tribal opinion without any basis in objective reality, and that all truths are merely interpretations based upon culture. It is simply not true to say that people are radically free to re-shape their world in any way they please, based upon their thoughts, feelings, and desires (postmodernism). Such an ideology is contrary to both common sense and natural law,⁸ and it flatly contradicts the truth of the goodness of God's creation. There can be no compromise with a philosophy that rejects the objectivity of God's purpose and design for the world he has made. Our words do not make the world; God's Word does (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26; Ps 33:6–9; Heb 11:3).
14. We cannot accept the ancient Greek notion that the body is a tomb for the soul, or similar, modern notions that the body is a mere “meat-skeleton” and that what you feel defines your essence.⁹ We cannot accept that the true and authentic person is the “autonomous choosing self” which can be separated from the physical body in such a way that people are free to discard, reshape, and transform it in any way that best pleases their minds. “This is ancient Gnosticism in new garb.”¹⁰ To believe these untruths is to reject the goodness of our Creator and to despise the gifts of body and soul he has given us (Rom 1:21; 9:20). God created us as humans with a body and soul whose physical being is just as intrinsic to our essential nature as our soul (Gen 1:27; 2:7; Matt 10:28). Matter matters.¹¹
15. We cannot accept that changing one's birth sex through hormone therapies or surgeries is right or even possible.¹² While we reject the false ideology of transgender theory as

⁸ By this we are merely signaling that this statement is not a uniquely “Christian” insight. Consider the testimony of a former Christian, who found no strong antidote in the Anglicanism he grew up in to the “social justice” campus movements in Britain that were advocating an ideology he couldn't accept: “All of these [movements] ... seemed to have the same vision of man: a *deracinated, protean aggregate of desires* [emphasis ours].” Jacob Williams, “Why I Became Muslim,” *First Things*, May 2019. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2019/05/why-i-became-muslim>.

⁹ As described by a young woman on a BBC program and as quoted in Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019, 197.

¹⁰ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 195.

¹¹ This is not the first time the Lutheran Church has had to contend with what the confessions call “Manichaeism error” (FC SD 1, 26). Against Flacius, who claimed that original sin was essential to fallen humanity, the confessors had to reaffirm the goodness of God's creation.

¹² The essential biology of a man or woman remains male or female respectively, no matter what interventions take place (Gen 1:27). We are not talking about the rare congenital anomalies known as “intersex” here. See the end of the document for a clarifying section, “Regarding the Intersex Conditions.”

contrary to natural law and Scripture, we retain every sympathy for individuals whose sinful natures are adversely influenced by the powerful voices of their peers and their culture. We pledge to express our love to them in every way possible that remains consistent with our biblical confession.

Second Article Truths

1. The object of God's love and pity is, by his amazing grace, that same humanity that fell away from him in revolt: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The world which John describes earlier as being "in darkness," unwilling and unable to recognize its Maker (John 1:5, 10) is the same world into which God sends his Son. The Word became flesh (John 1:14). Jesus is the human incarnation¹³ of the one eternal God (Phil 2:6).
2. In other words, there is no greater evidence than the incarnation of Jesus Christ that our essential humanity is still God's good creation—body and soul. As our Lutheran confessions say, "God's Son assumed our human nature without sin, [and] ... he 'became one of us, in every respect like us' apart from sin (Heb 2:17)... Christ ... is of one essence with us, his siblings. For he took upon himself his human nature which is in every way identical with our human nature in its essence and in all its essential characteristics (with the exception of sin)."¹⁴
3. Therefore a distinction must be made between the essence of humanity itself and the sin that inheres in all of us, body and soul. This is not to minimize sin. It remains a terrible corruption that affects and pollutes our whole being: our thinking, feeling, and willing (Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; John 3:6; Rom 3:10–18; Rom 8:7).
4. But Scripture teaches that, though we are by nature¹⁵ "objects of God's [just] wrath" (Eph 2:3), "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). After becoming one of us, Jesus willingly offered himself as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Though "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," nevertheless "all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23–24).

¹³ One of the controversies plaguing the early church was the problem of whether or not Jesus truly *had* a human body or only *seemed* to have a human body. The Greek worldview privileged the spirit over the body, and it seemed irrational to them to affirm that any divine being, much less the Son of God, could have had a real, natural body. Against this notion, again and again the Scriptures and the early church affirmed the reality and integrity of Christ's person as body and soul and the reality and permanence of God the Son's assuming the human nature into full unity with the divine nature.

¹⁴ FC SD I, 43, 45, in Kolb and Wengert, 539.

¹⁵ Once again, though it may sometimes be confusing for the reader, we are retaining the two meanings for "nature" employed by the Lutheran confessions. The first refers to the "nature" or essence of a creature of God; the second to its "inborn characteristics." We employ the second meaning here. See footnote 4 for more clarification.

5. As our Lutheran confessions put it, “God makes and fashions human nature as it now is, so tragically corrupted by sin, so that he might cleanse, sanctify, and save it through his dear Son.”¹⁶
6. Because of our Savior’s love we joyfully embrace him with our whole heart and confess, “He has redeemed me,¹⁷ a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, ... that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness.”¹⁸

Because of these scriptural truths, ...

7. Though it may accurately reflect one’s feelings, we cannot accept as objectively true the despairing cry that declares, “God made me this way [i.e. a transgender person].” The implication is that one has no choice but to be what God made him. This contradicts not only the goodness of God’s creation, but also the truths of the incarnation, that Jesus assumed our essential humanity into the Godhead, and that our essential humanity is still God’s good work. To say anything else turns God into the author of sin. What’s more, it could no longer be said that Jesus is our brother and kinsman-Redeemer, since Scripture declares that he became like us, yet without sin. It is true that sin has corrupted us in body and soul. But if sin is part of our human essence, Jesus is no kin of ours. On the contrary, those who penitently accept the truth of Jesus’ incarnation trust that the whole reason why our Lord came was to set us free from sin by his redeeming love. Jesus gives me a new identity in himself, set free to be what God made me to be and to confess him in the world, body and soul.

Third Article Truths

1. God justifies us personally through the gospel message of the forgiveness of sins, won by our Savior Jesus (Rom 4:25). We receive this forgiveness by grace, through faith alone, and not because of our own good works or acts of love. Faith itself is not our own doing, but a gift of the Spirit working through the gospel (Rom 10:17; 3:28; 8:2; 8:16; Eph 1:13; 2:8). The gospel is a complete pardon of the entire life of the whole person, body and soul. As Paul says, “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
2. In the teaching of justification, the role of faith is simply to trust that what God has done in Jesus, he has done “for me” (John 3:16). But the receiving hand in justification becomes an active hand in sanctification. The Holy Spirit takes up his dwelling in us and

¹⁶ FC SD I, 39, in Kolb and Wengert, 538.

¹⁷ We take careful note of the individual’s embrace of the gospel truth reflected in Luther’s words. Jesus found me and gave me *his* identity, *his* righteousness, *his* purity. No matter what I have been. No matter what I have done. No matter how much I still struggle against sinful thoughts, feelings, and desires, I am still his own and completely covered with his pardoning grace. “I am baptized” is the triumphant call of the Christian.

¹⁸ *Luther’s Catechism*, edited by Geiger et al., 130.

makes our bodies his temple (1 Cor 6:19). The new birth of faith flows into the new life of faith. This means we are not only freed from sin's guilt, we are also freed from its absolute power to control and determine our conduct (Rom 8:9; 6:14, 18, 23). The Spirit works in us the new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Through God's grace, he liberates us to live a new and holy life (Rom 6:1–7, 12–13). With the power of the Spirit, we call out to God as our Father in all needs and distresses (Rom 8:15). With the power of the Spirit we “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Rom 8:13) and are able to live lives dedicated to God (Rom 6:22).

3. We live by faith, however, and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). The world as we see it still “displays the results of sin and death.”¹⁹ God's good creation groans under the “bondage to decay,” the result of the curse God pronounced on human sin (Rom 8:20–23). Everything man sees, everything he feels, everything he thinks, everything he wants, everything he does, everything he experiences is corrupted by death and serves as a reminder of his fallen state (Gen 3:16–19). This remains true even for Christians. While the new life of faith has already begun in us in this earthly existence, it has not yet been perfected and will not be until we see our Savior's face in glory (Phil 1:6; 2 Cor 4:16–18; 1 John 3:2–3). Only then will creation itself be fully liberated and brought into “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).
4. That is why when Paul describes the sweet rule of grace (freeing us from sin and making us masters over sin's uncanny power), he does not speak as if we were incapable of being affected by the evil within. He does not depict our present lives as if we had left sin's powers completely behind, as if sin were not still a clear and present danger, or as if sin could not assume rule over us again (Rom 6:7, 12–14; 8:12–14; Gal 5:17–26). In short, “Sin in the flesh is not completely gone or dead.”²⁰
5. Paul deepens our understanding of the power of this indwelling sin by depicting the Christian's life as a hard inner struggle: “What I do is not the good I want to do; no the evil that I do not want to do, this I keep on doing” (Rom 7:19). It is a struggle that defies our understanding (Rom 7:15) and leads to that heart-wrenching cry, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). The struggle certainly includes feelings of being born in the wrong body. The only solution is not to rely upon our own powers, but to find solace in God's pardoning grace alone, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24; see also 8:1).

Because of these scriptural truths, ...

6. We cannot accept that a Christian with the gift of the Holy Spirit can at the same time purposefully live under the mastery of sin. Feelings are one thing; acting upon them is another. Sinful thoughts may come, but we don't have to cherish them in our hearts. Evil yearnings may rise within us, but we don't have to carry them out. “Christian theology

¹⁹ CTCR “Gender Identity Disorder,” 7.

²⁰ SA III XIII, 1, in Kolb and Wengert, 325.

has consistently sought to distinguish desires and feelings from behavior.”²¹ At the same time we understand that Christian people often struggle, and feel confused and alienated from their own being (Rom 7:23–24). This genuinely Christian combat is intensely painful because a person doing battle against his sinful nature is at war with himself. “Even though the killing of the old creature and the renewal of their minds in the Spirit has begun—nonetheless, the old creature still continues to hang on in their nature and in all of its inward and outward powers.”²² This is a battle to the death and there can be no quarter given. To state it differently, “There is no true, saving faith in those who have . . . no sorrow, and who have the evil intention to remain and continue in sins.”²³ In this battle we have the gospel comfort of knowing that we are still accepted as God’s sons and daughters for the sake of our Savior. There truly is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). “*Baptizatus sum*—I am baptized (into Christ)”—is the victory cry of every believer. In addition, we have the consolation of knowing that even though they may have glaring faults and seem small in our own eyes, “believers’ good works are pleasing and acceptable to God even though they are impure and imperfect in this flesh.”²⁴

Conclusion

There are many false claims that sin makes, leading us to adopt identities that shape us into the mold of this fallen world rather than to let the love of Christ define our identity. The impenitent claim to be transgender is a clear departure from God’s will. It is contrary to the truth of what he has created us to be, contrary to his will for us in redemption, and contrary to his promise of the new creation.

What we seek above all is to help all people enjoy the firm, sure, and secure identity that a believer in Christ knows. Every human being is a special creature of God, blessed by his Creator with body and soul. Though he is a fallen creature like all humankind from birth, nevertheless he has been fearfully and wonderfully made. He is a redeemed child of God, purchased and won not with gold or silver, but with Jesus’ holy, precious blood. He is a new creation, freed to live from the forgiveness of sins to lead a new and holy life. He can say “no” to sin and its uncanny power within, and “yes” to God in his grace. And though sin still will easily entangle, his victory in Christ is assured. Christ is risen and the believer is his, a baptized member of his body.

²¹ CTCR, “Gender Identity Disorder,” 5.

²² FC SD VI, 7, in Kolb and Wengert, 588.

²³ FC SD III, 26, in Kolb and Wengert, 566.

²⁴ FC SD IV, 8, in Kolb and Wengert, 575.

Regarding the Intersex Condition

This statement concerns itself primarily with the modern phenomenon of transgenderism, that is, the ideology which urges acceptance and affirmation of biologically normal human beings (females with XX chromosomes or males with XY chromosomes) who nevertheless identify in gender with the opposite sex. This condition is called gender dysphoria by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5). We recognize the pain of those who experience such gender dysphoria, but we do not believe that affirming this condition is the correct path theologically, morally, or psychologically.

At the same time, we recognize that there are rare congenital conditions called "intersex." Intersex is a term used for various chromosomal and endocrinological abnormalities with which some are born. It is indeed true that some people are born biologically indeterminate. In other words, biologically, it is difficult to tell whether they are male or female. We can well understand that feelings of sadness may develop in these rare cases. We also understand that special medical remedies may be called for to address these congenital conditions, including hormone treatments and surgery. These cases deserve special pastoral care and concern. But just as hard cases make bad law, so do atypical conditions: they dare not be used to sweep away the natural distinction, founded in our creation by God, between male and female. Nor can they be used as a bridging argument to validate transgenderism.

Addendum for Churches and Schools

Our congregations will reflect the totality of these truths in their ministries as they seek to serve all in love. It is the height of lovelessness to let sin go unnamed and unrebuked. We must take a firm stand against the devil's lies. Yet we dare not act as if the church were a citadel for saints rather than a hospital for the sick. We cannot act as if sexual sins are the worst of all possible sins, nor imagine that people do not struggle with these and many other harmful desires. A loving listening ear helps us distinguish when and how to declare rebuking law or consoling gospel.

Lutheran schools will make policies consistent with this confession. However, it must also be recognized that Lutheran schools participate in both kingdoms²⁵ and need to have policies that safeguard the external integrity of the community, as well as curbs that can serve to forestall certain behaviors becoming more widespread (e.g. no tolerance policies for hazing, smoking, alcohol, etc.) The ministry of the Word is essential, and in proclaiming both law and gospel, schools carry out the mission and ministry of the church, but they are not simply to be equated with congregations. For example, discontinuing a student's enrollment is by no means the same as excommunication. Sometimes a student may simply not be a right fit for every school.

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²⁵ We are referring to the teaching of the two kingdoms: that there is the rule of God in his Church through the means of grace, and the rule of God in the world through power (government, law, policy, etc.). A Lutheran school wants to work with law and gospel, but it must always have policies that ensure its ability to carry out its mission of teaching students. A tension is often felt as administrators wrestle with these two aspects of its ministry.