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Formed in Christ

Due in part to the tragic wars among Christians following the Reformation, the Renaissance movement called “Humanism” began to take on a new character. As the name implies, this religion proclaims a new view of the human species, which took root and experienced tremendous growth through the profound advances in the natural sciences. Fundamental to this religion is the autonomy of the human species. Indeed, beginning in 1933, the core beliefs of Humanism have been articulated in three “manifestos” (1933, 1973 and 2003). While offering different articulations by new generations of Humanists, all three statements share the presupposition that man is responsible for his own life and his own environment. Consider the following excerpts:



by Primary Texts

James G. Bushur

“Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement” (*Humanist Manifesto I*).¹

“While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves” (*Humanist Manifesto II*).²

“The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone” (*Humanist Manifesto III*).³

While the number of self-identifying Humanists may be small, it is evident that the sentiments quoted above are woven into the very fabric of our Western world. The radical autonomy of human beings is perhaps the greatest contemporary challenge to the orthodox confession of the Christian faith.

So how does the Seminary form pastors and deaconesses to serve in such a world? It is obvious that the teachings of Humanism are contrary to Scripture. But we may rightly ask, “How effective are our repeated demonstrations that Humanist assertions contradict Scripture?” While perhaps confirming loyal Christians in their convictions, it is doubtful that such appeals to authority will present any threat to the power of Humanist assumptions in our contemporary culture. Thus, beyond its obvious contradiction of Scripture, the Church must challenge the disastrous effects of the Humanist world view that surround us. The radical autonomy of the individual has promoted a fragmentation that not only undermines traditional values and institutions, but even threatens the very foundations of human identity.

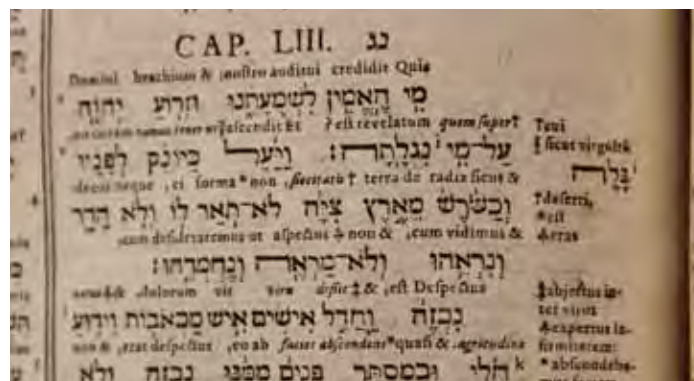
Divorce, adultery, homosexuality, transgenderism, transsexualism, genetic manipulation, abortion, euthanasia, depression, suicide,

etc. are all fruit from a common root. Humanism leaves the autonomous individual to be the source and perfection of his own identity. In the name of freedom, Humanism would render us all orphans, detached and free-floating individuals who are self-generating, self-affirming and self-fulfilling.

To those orphaned by Humanism, Christianity preaches the Gospel of sonship. As St. Paul reminds us, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery... but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15). To be a son is to recognize that my identity is not self-generated, but received from parents, grandparents and a host of ancestors extending back to the creation of Adam.

Indeed, for the baptized the origin of our identity is no longer limited to Adam and the human race, but stems from the body of Christ, who is Himself the Only-begotten of the Father. And so we address God as “our Father” because we, as St. John says, “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).

The study of primary Christian texts forms the heart of the Seminary's curriculum. These primary texts include the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church, the confessional writings in the *Book of Concord* and the writings of orthodox fathers throughout history.






These seminal texts are not passive words that autonomous readers use to generate their own meaning and remake their own lives. Rather, these texts have their origin in Christ who is the eternal Word of the Father and, therefore, actively form the Christian into the image of Christ and Him crucified. “So for the time being,” St. Augustine proclaims to his hearers, “treat the Scripture of God as the face of God.”

However, to be a son is not only to reject the self-generated identity of Humanism, but also its message of self-fulfillment. Baptism not only gives the church an identity generated by God, but also an identity fulfilled in an eternal inheritance with all the saints in communion with the Holy Trinity. “If a son,” Paul concludes, “then an heir through God” (Gal. 4:7b). Instead of orphans oppressed by the necessity of generating and fulfilling their own lives in the present, Christ offers us a share in His own sonship. As sons, we are free to live unfulfilled lives in the present because our true fulfillment, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, resides in “the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”

It is for this reason that the study of primary Christian texts forms the heart of the Seminary’s curriculum. These primary texts include the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church, the confessional writings in the *Book of Concord* and the writings of orthodox fathers throughout history. In the first place, the study of these primary texts is required by the ordination vows taken by every Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor. In these vows the pastor binds himself to certain primary texts: the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions. However, in addition to this external, legal bond required by ordination vows, there is a more visceral, internal and organic bond that makes the engagement with these primary texts a fundamental necessity. These primary texts help form the very mechanism by which Christian identity is communicated from one generation to the next. These texts are a kind of Christian DNA that bears the genes of the Spirit producing sonship. Thus, these texts are not dead words or inert artifacts of a distant past; they are living seeds that penetrate the fleshly soil of our lives and generate abundant fruit.

In other words, these seminal texts are not passive words that autonomous readers use to generate their own meaning and remake their own lives. Rather, these texts have their origin in Christ who is the eternal Word of the Father and, therefore, actively form the Christian into the image of Christ and Him crucified. “So for the time being,” St. Augustine proclaims to his hearers, “treat the Scripture of God as the face of God.” He then exhorts them to “melt in front of it.”⁴ For Augustine and for orthodox Christians throughout history, to read the Scriptures is to come into direct discourse with the living God. It is to hear His voice. And to hear is to be changed. As St. Paul puts it: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18b). The Seminary curriculum, therefore, does not simply call students to the academic study of these texts, but to receive them as formative of their identity; to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them”⁵ as the old collect puts it. These texts are living seeds, taking root in the heart, generating our thoughts, structuring our words, shaping our lives and inspiring the hope for what is yet to come. 

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1. “Humanist Manifesto I.” American Humanist Association. 1973. Accessed April 03, 2018. <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto1/>.
2. “Humanist Manifesto II.” American Humanist Association. 1973. Accessed April 03, 2018. <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto2/>.
3. “Humanism and Its Aspirations: Humanist Manifesto III, a Successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933.” American Humanist Association. 2003. Accessed April 03, 2018. <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/>.
4. Augustine, Sermon 22.7. E. Hill, trans., *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part III: Sermons, vol 2: Sermons 20-50, (New York: New York City Press, 1990), p 46.
5. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p 107.