

HUMANITY

We believe in our importance to God.

God cares deeply for human beings and communities. His concern for humanity is grounded in his determined love for persons (Romans 5:8). This love is comprehensive, calling for a response not only in terms of individual salvation but also in the transformation of society. In the words of the prophet Amos, "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:24 RSV). Christianity speaks for the wholeness and sacredness of human existence.

We believe in our created nature.

God created human kind. The Bible makes this clear when it says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27 KJV). This means human beings, like everything else in creation, are utterly dependent on God. Nothing in creation has life in itself. "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7 RSV). The human race, and the world itself, continue to exist only because God continues to give life to his creation (John 1:1-9; Hebrews 1:1-3).

We are made in the image of God. This makes us different from all other living beings. We believe that the "image of God" (Genesis 1:27) allows us to commune with God and causes us to "hunger and thirst" when we are cut off from God. It should be noted that the "image of God" is given equally to men and women. It is neither "male" nor "female" but simply human.

Humanity was created as a "good" creature in a "good" creation. God gave human beings dominion over the world (Genesis 1:26 -30), need for fellowship with other human persons (Genesis 2:18), sexuality (Genesis 1:27 -28, 2:21-25), and freedom to make their own decisions (Genesis 2:15 -17). God was pleased with the human creatures he had created and pronounced the world "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Thus, the Bible has a high view of the human race as it was created by God (Psalm 8).

We believe we have a sinful nature.

The original goodness of creation was shattered by humanity's free choice to seek life apart from God. The story of this decision, often called "the Fall," is found in Genesis 3. The first sin was not simply disobeying a divine rule, but the effort to

become independent of the Creator. The heart of the first sin is revealed in the words of the tempter to Eve: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it [the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5 RSV).

This desire to seek life apart from God is the essence of sin. We desire to become our own creator, to become God. From this flows all human violence, degradation, and darkness. Paul says that the source of every human corruption is that humankind "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25 RSV).

We believe that the search for life apart from God leads not to life, but to death. For Adam and Eve, decision against God resulted in alienation from God, from each other, and from the earth they ruled (Genesis 3:8-24). We believe every person shares in that decision. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6 KJV). All human beings are sinners, alienated from their Creator, cut off from the One who gives life. The sinful nature of human beings has broken and corrupted their created nature.

We believe in the potential of our new nature in Christ.

God does not leave us torn between a created nature and a sinful nature. We believe God has acted decisively in Jesus Christ to reconcile human beings to himself and to deliver them from death to life.

We believe Jesus Christ was both fully divine and fully human. In becoming fully human, Jesus showed what it means to be human. "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17 NIV; also Hebrews 2:5-18). Cheapened and degraded by sin, exploited by Satan, broken by despair and doomed to death, the human race has become ugly and hopeless. Yet beneath the horror and sin, God's image remains. In becoming human, Jesus made humanness beautiful again. In defiance of the darkness, Jesus made humanness shine. In his perfect humanity, Jesus has given us a new way to see ourselves and to see humankind (2 Corinthians 5:16 -17).

Jesus Christ not only became the example for redeemed humanity, but the sacrifice that made redemption possible. When he died on the cross, he atoned for all the sin of humanity. In the words of Paul, "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass

was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18 NIV).

Faith in Jesus Christ leads to new birth in which the believer is made a new creation and restored to the love and fellowship of God and God's people. The Christian is thus a new person, part of a new humanity. The new person in Christ is set apart to bear witness to the Kingdom of God and the promise of re-creation.

We believe that the ideal new person in Christ will be fully realized with the return of Jesus Christ. Until Jesus comes, believers are called to be part of a pilgrimage which daily leads from the brokenness of the old life more deeply into Christ's new life. The new person in Christ is thus the potential of every human being, a potential released in the new birth, and fulfilled in the triumph of Jesus Christ at the end of history. This potential is clearly stated in the Gospel of John: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12 RSV).