

IdentityBook.

Lutheran Identity Vol. 1

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Let's find our way, together.

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LUTHERAN IDENTITY



Welcome to Concordia!

We are grateful that you have decided to join our faith-based higher education community.

We've been in Austin since 1926 but our history actually stretches back much further than that—to the early 16th century and a priest named Martin Luther. Luther served as professor of religion and campus pastor at Wittenberg University in Germany, and he's best known as the person who set the Protestant Reformation in motion. Luther didn't aim to change the course of the Western world... but he unintentionally did. His conviction that church leaders could better serve their faith communities spurred Luther to begin a dialog that took the form of [95 Theses](#), talking points that Luther believed should be discussed among professors and theologians. Check them out online by searching Luther's 95 Theses.

One of the things that makes us—and our program of study—unique in higher education is the Concordia Distinctive, our faith-based mission of empowering students of all backgrounds to lead lives of critical thought, compassionate action, and courageous leadership. Our goal is to develop every student's mind, heart, soul, and body, thereby preparing them to lead lives of service.

Students need many things on the road to becoming a person of service in our complex world, and, as a Concordia employee, you serve an important role in helping them realize that goal through your vocation. In fact, one of the reasons you are a part of this community is because Concordia values how you embody ethics and faith in your work. You model who we want our students to become: people who serve with critical thought, compassionate action, and courageous leadership.

In the following pages, we'll examine more in-depth what all this means, and how a Lutheran liberal arts education enlightens and guides all of our journeys regardless of your role at the university. Whether you are a life-long Lutheran or come from a different Christian tradition, you are welcome here. Our hope is your time serving here will be meaningful, different, special, and distinct.

Models of Faith Based Higher Education

One way to divide higher education in the United States is between secular and faith-based educations. Typically, secular universities and colleges (i.e. state universities and community colleges) have their origins in the government land grants, which set aside space and money to educate young men and women in their political jurisdictions for public service and the professions. Faith-based universities, however, were characteristically founded by a religious tradition or denomination to train young adults for service in the church and society.

Among faith-based universities, researchers have suggested there are three types:

Non-sectarian. Non-sectarian faith-based universities had their origins in a specific church denomination or faith tradition. Over time, however, non-sectarian universities either disengaged or rejected their church identities, to become private schools that imitated the secular university in their attempt to provide a quality education for public service. In order to become more pluralistic and less religious, the non-sectarian university expects that its university and faculty's religious commitments be either absent, or general and non-offensive. Should students, staff, or faculty come from a faith tradition, they are expected to keep their faith private. Non-sectarian universities also expect all of their students to be exposed to a broad diversity of ideas and truths, and to encourage students to be accepting of all viewpoints.

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Sectarian. Like non-sectarian faith based universities, sectarian universities also had their origins in a specific faith tradition or church body. However, in contrast to the non-sectarian schools, sectarian faith-based universities value religious uniformity over diversity, and seek mainly to serve students who either belong to the founding denomination or who have very similar religious identities. Sectarian faith-based universities also try to hire faculty and staff who share that same religious identity maintaining deep roots in the Christian tradition of their denomination. Sectarian universities tolerate other religious traditions and beliefs, but don't view them as full expressions of the truth.

Concordia University Texas was originally this type of denominational university. Leaders of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) founded this university in 1926 to serve the church body by training and providing pastors and teachers for the LCMS. All of the faculty, staff, and students were expected to be LCMS because the church established Concordia for Lutherans in the LCMS.

Concordia sees itself in a third way.

Faith Based – the Third Path. Distinct from the non-sectarian model, Concordia takes its religious tradition and faith seriously and seeks to build its identity on it, exploring the riches of that Lutheran tradition as part of its contribution to the whole. At the same time, distinct from the sectarian model, Concordia seeks also to welcome and affirm people of all backgrounds, and to serve not just the Christian community, but also all people, regardless of their background and identity.

While Concordia believes it has theological and moral truth to impart, we do not believe that we have all truth. We encourage a deep humility in order to listen and learn from others, to move beyond toleration to the full affirmation of all people, regardless of their background, to learn from every perspective through dialogue and engagement, and to work with people of all or no religious traditions. Concordia deliberately takes our human differences seriously as a gift of God, so that we can genuinely seek to engage and struggle with those realities rather than minimizing or sidestepping them.

Lutheran Learning Framework

Concordia University Texas is not Lutheran or Christian by accident, but on purpose. It is for this reason that we intentionally recruit and hire talented Christian faculty and staff, who share a common faith in Jesus Christ. We want our campus to radiate a healthy, Christian atmosphere, modeling the various ways to embody Christ to our students and to each other. We seek to live, teach, and proclaim the Good News that through Jesus Christ all can have forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

Whether you are a life-long Lutheran or come from another faith tradition, you may be wondering what the Lutheran tradition believes, and what difference it makes in the classroom. This section describes how the Lutheran tradition and its beliefs inform the act of working, teaching and learning. Over time, we have called it by various names (e.g. Lutheran distinctive, Lutheran ethos, Lutheran learning model, and Lutheran learning framework), but it consists of six core elements, which overlap with one another: Theology of the Cross; God's Sovereignty and Human Finitude; Two Kingdoms; Paradox and Dialogue; Vocation; and Freedom.



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Theology of the Cross

¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written:

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”*

²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

-1 Corinthians 1.18-25

From this passage, Martin Luther coined the term “theology of the cross” to contrast it from what he called the “theology of glory.” A theology of the cross humbly trusts in Christ while a theology of glory could be called “self-righteousness,” “triumphalism,” or “audacity.” The theology of the cross starts at the foot of the cross where Christ has died for the sin of the whole world and paid for it all for us. We can do nothing or think nothing to earn our salvation or add to our righteousness before God. The gift of forgiveness comes by God’s grace through faith.

A theology of glory, on the other hand, starts with natural reason and human perceptions. It emphasizes what we can do and how we cooperate with God to win God’s favor. A theology of glory wants to quickly move beyond the cross to emphasize other aspects of Christian living. Luther said a theologian of the cross looks at all things in life through suffering and the cross.

In the end, no comprehensive system that accounts for all reality (material or spiritual) has yet been found, nor, given human finitude, will there ever be one. The antidote to religious, academic, political, social, or economic triumphalism is humility and faith.

Strikingly, the mark of divinity for Luther was less God's sovereign omnipotence than the astonishing self-sacrificial love and compassion of God for humanity in all its messed-up-ness. Luther expressed it famously in this Christmas sermon:

Look at the Child, knowing nothing. Yet all that is belongs to him that your conscience should not fear but take comfort in him. Doubt nothing. To me there is no greater consolation given to humanity than this, that Christ became man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother. Who is there that this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to this gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save.

God's Otherness is not found in distance, but in tangible, compassionate proximity in Jesus Christ, especially in his suffering, weakness, and death—those places where God seems to be absent.

God's Sovereignty and Human Finitude

I believe. Help my unbelief! -Mark 9.24

Higher education has a reputation that it has all the answers. The Lutheran tradition says we can be comfortable with our finitude and our ignorance. You don't have to have all the answers after you graduate. We consider ourselves fortunate that we have the ability to ask the right questions - a mark of leadership.

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Since God is infinite and we are finite, we called to a life of learning. We can't possibly confess knowledge of all of reality, and so we have to admit that no matter how hard we have labored in any field, including theology, that our knowledge is fragmentary. The Lutheran bias is not to jump on bandwagons that promise all the answers, whether political, academic, or religious. At best, this keeps us from fanaticism. At worst, it keeps us from fighting hard and standing up when it is time to stand up.

This is true in the faith realm, too. Faith lives in paradox, in dialog with doubt. Miguel de Unamuno said, "A faith that does not doubt is a dead faith." I believe; help my unbelief. Doubt and doubters are welcome in this community. That is how faith is built.

Two Kingdoms

Then Jesus said to them, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." -Matthew 22.21

Martin Luther taught that all Christians live as citizens in two kingdoms, or realms, simultaneously. One is the Kingdom of God and the other is the kingdom of this world, both created by God and ruled by Christ. We become members of one by physical birth and the other by spiritual birth by grace through faith. In the kingdom of God, we are ruled by the gospel. Here on earth we are ruled by civil laws and human reason. This does not imply a false distinction between things secular and sacred, but that God has ordained human society just as he has established the Church. Each has an important function but in different realms, an idea which contributed to the modern principle of the separation of church and state.

How does this work? Let us imagine a student who made a poor choice: she did not quite understand a research assignment, started her paper the night before it was due, and waited too long to ask for help. She plagiarized large sections of the assignment, and the professor called her in for a discussion about academic dishonesty. "We're both Christians," the student argued, "so you should forgive me." "I do forgive you," the professor responded "and you still earn a failing grade for this assignment."

Whether we are referring to the earning of grades, completing an assigned task for our jobs, or the paying of tuition bills, offering forgiveness and levying punishments at the same time seems to be contradictory behavior (a paradox) but, in fact, it reveals a greater truth about how Christians live in this world, including Concordia.

Paradox and Dialogue

[In biblical studies] one must accustom oneself to the Holy Spirit's way of expression. With the other sciences, too, no one is successful unless he has first duly learned their technical language. Thus, lawyers have their terminology, which is unfamiliar to physicians and philosophers. On the other hand, these also have their own sort of language, which is unfamiliar to the other professions. No science should stand in the way of another science, but each should continue to have its own mode of procedure in its own terms. Every science should make use of its own terminology, and one should not, for this reason, condemn the other or ridicule it; but one should rather be of use to the other, and they should put their achievements at one another's disposal. -Martin Luther (LW 1:47-48)

Martin Luther pondered seeming contradictions, or paradoxes, quite a bit. Rather than view them as a source of confusion, however, Luther believed paradox can often help us make sense of the human condition. His favorite paradox was that believers of Christ are simultaneously sinners and saints. How can that be? It means that God's law shows us our flaws, our sin, (and honestly, who makes it through the day without messing something up?), and the Gospel—the belief that through Christ, we are forgiven—wipes away those flaws.

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God's love in Christ has made us whole, and yet we still lead broken lives. We are usually safe drivers but the one day we're late for work, we get pulled over and receive a ticket. We are an awesome biker but one miscalculation that defies the laws of gravity, and we spend the summer in a cast. We have finally found a friend for life but after a stupid argument, she stops speaking to us for a week. Being forgiven doesn't mean that we escape the consequences of our actions. Lutherans believe this is true because we live in a fallen world, which leads us into the concept of "two kingdoms" also known as the "two realms."

Another area where paradox and dialogue show up is in the nature of scholarship. The duty of the scholar is to study the world as it is, and then bring that world into a dialectic with the Christian vision of redemption and grace.

The vocation of scholars is to live in both realms, keep them separate, and yet keep the dialog between them alive. In the words of Blaise Pascal, "If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have no mysterious and supernatural element. If we offend the principle of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous." The Lutheran tradition welcomes diversity of thought, and cultural pluralism with a seriousness that can escape people who want to fit the world into their version of Christianity. In the words of Concordia alumnus, Richard John Neuhaus, "If the truth of Christianity does not support, illumine and elevate every quest for truth, it is questionable whether Christianity is true."

Vocation

Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. -Ephesians 4.1-2

The word vocation is derived from the Latin word for calling, the same root as the English word “voice”. Lutherans believe that God calls all Christians, not just church workers. In fact, all believers have multiple callings. We are called to be children of God. We are called to be responsible citizens here on earth. If we are married we are called to be a good spouse and if we have children to be a good parent. We are also called by God to serve the world through our careers by faithfully carrying out our responsibilities in that role. The Bible provides guidance for we how should live out each of these callings. Any occupation that is not opposed to God’s Word can be an act of service to him.

Whether you are a Christian or profess a different faith, the concept of vocation means that each of us is uniquely called to different spheres of influence, oftentimes simultaneously, in life.

A vocation may be:

- **A certain profession, job, or project, like working in admissions, or finance, or HR.**
- **It may mean being a mom or dad, a daughter or son.**
- **It may mean be that you involve yourself and others in important civic or political causes.**
- **It means you also have a calling to your faith community, and to work for its success and nourishment.**
- **It may be that you are called to help with various events on campus that technically are not in your job description.**
- **And if you are using a tuition discount to further your education, you are even called to be a Concordia University Texas student.**

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One of your callings for the next several years is to be an employee at Concordia. And, whether you realize it or not, you have not only been called to work, but you have also been called in vocation to form relationships and to be involved in this community. Serving your neighbor is part of discovering and living out your vocation.

Freedom

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. -John 8:36

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. -Galatians 5:1

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. -Galatians 5:13

Another foundation part of Lutheran ethos is the understanding that Christian freedom means both “freedom from” and “freedom for.” God acted in Christ to free humans from their own sin and death. Christ has done the full work of salvation. By the grace of God through faith, Christ redeems humans and brings them back into a relationship with God. This freedom from sin, however, does not eliminate human moral responsibility. Rather, freedom empowers people to act out of moral responsibility and love for others.

Christians are completely free to act and to be fully human; they are spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and physically free for service. They do not have to keep looking over their shoulders to ask whether what they are doing is good enough to please God, since all has become pleasing in Christ through forgiveness. Ethically, freedom means humans are free to serve—to take risks in service of neighbor. Humans often live in ambiguous situations and have to make difficult choices in their family life, economic life, congregational life, educational life, etc. In Christ, they are free to risk, to challenge, to experiment, to serve the neighbor boldly without fear of whether they are pure enough or good enough or right enough.

In responsibility, humans are free to doubt, to question, to challenge, to ask the embarrassing question. All members of the Concordia community are free to explore human nature and the created world. All questions, even theological questions, are on the table for testing, for exploration, and for potential modification in accordance with truth. A Lutheran ethos rejects authoritarianism that forbids questioning. Indeed, as creatures of God, we are free to explore all questions, even traditional ethical or doctrinal questions. This freedom is not intended to indulge the sinful nature, or to promote uninformed discussion for the sake of word-play, but to responsibly explore all dimensions of the complexity and infinity of God's Word and God's creation.



Concordia University Texas

