

ARTICLE 3

Creation and Humanity

Creation

We believe that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and they were very good. All of creation expresses God's sovereign will and design, but remains distinct from the Creator. The universe belongs to God, who takes care and delight in sustaining it. Creation declares God's wisdom and power, calling all to worship Him.

Humanity

Humans, the crowning act of creation, were designed to live in fellowship with God and in mutually helpful relationships with each other. God created them male and female in the image of God. The Creator gave them the mandate to rule and care for creation as a sacred trust, and the freedom to obey or disobey Him. Through the willful disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin entered the world. As a result, human nature is distorted and people are alienated from God and creation. Creation is under the bondage of decay. Humans and all creation long to be set free.

The New Creation

Sin, guilt, and death will not prevail. God will create a new heaven and a new earth in which there will be no evil, suffering, and death. The first signs of this new creation are already present in those who accept God's forgiveness through Christ. In Christ, all things are being reconciled and created anew.

Genesis 1-3; Psalm 8:6; 19:1-6; 24:1-2; 89:11; 95:5; 104; Proverbs 8:22-31; Isaiah 40:12-31; 44:24; John 1:1-4, 10; 17:5; Romans 1:19-20; 5:17, 21; 6:4; 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 15:20-27; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6; 5:16-19; Galatians 3:28; 6:15; Ephesians 1:4, 9-10; 2:11-22; 4:24; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 11:3; Revelation 4:8-11; 21:1-5; 22:13.

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COMMENTARY

The purpose of this article of faith is twofold. First, it is designed to affirm what the Scriptures teach about the relationship between God and the created universe. Second, it is intended to make a statement about humanity in regards to its origins, its role in creation, its present condition, and its ultimate destiny.

Creation

The purpose of the first paragraph is to respond to some widely-held beliefs in our society about the relationship between God and the universe. On one hand, the notion that the universe is the result of chance and that life on earth is the outcome of blind fate is generally accepted as true. The existence of the universe is no longer consciously associated with the intentional and benevolent action of a personal, loving, all-powerful Being. Darwinism, usually called the theory of evolution, has throughout the 20th century been the most powerful cause behind this development. In its most popular formulation, the theory teaches that the existence of the universe and the presence of humanity on the earth are the result of a powerful process which was set into motion by chance. According to Darwinian theory, randomness is the basic principle behind the formation of the universe rather than the intention of a personal and loving God.

On the other hand, it has become fashionable, particularly under the influence of the New Age movement, to believe that there is some universal force in which all living things participate. According to this worldview, human life has no special value and human individuality has no other destiny and purpose than to be dissolved in this impersonal life force. This concept, popularized by the New Age movement and by such movies as *Star Wars*, is known as pantheism.

Because we live in a society in which there is increasing confusion about God and nature, it becomes correspondingly vital for the Church to proclaim that there is a fundamental difference between Christianity and pantheism. Pantheism teaches that God is the sum total of the vital forces which animate the universe. The implication is that if the physical universe were to cease to exist, God, or whatever is understood as the primal force in the universe, would cease to exist as well. The Christian faith teaches that the universe is temporal and contingent. In other words, the universe has a temporal beginning and

an end, and it depends on a historical intervention of God and His continual sustenance for its existence.

Pantheism and evolutionism not only affect how we view the universe and God, they also profoundly influence the way we perceive human beings and define what it means to be human. If the universe is indeed the result of an accident, and humankind the end-product of a blind evolutionary process, then human life has no ultimate meaning and significance. The purpose of each person's life can then be focused on the need to transmit one's genes and to contribute to the evolution of the human race. Once this purpose has been fulfilled, there is then no need for the person's continued existence and no further purpose beyond that person's contribution to the genetic survival of the race.

The end-result of such evolutionism, as well as of New Age ideology, is virtual elimination of the notion of a personal, moral, benevolent God. At this point, it is important to realize the grave implications of such a choice. We cannot pretend to eliminate the notion of a personal God, as portrayed in Scripture, without also eliminating a certain understanding of what it means to be human. It is ultimately impossible to understand the fundamental character of human nature and existence without an absolute point of reference. In the absence of such a context, subjectivity becomes the only operative principle in defining the relationship between humankind and the world. Humanity then becomes its own point of reference; it literally becomes the centre of the universe. Such a philosophical stance has formidable implications for the whole spectrum of ethics and human endeavours. The way we view human life and how we deal with ethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, palliative care, law enforcement, the nature of the state, and so on, depend entirely on our frame of reference. Without God, we are condemned to forgetting what truly defines human nature and thus the rationale for compassion.

The Scriptures teach that the universe is not the result of some random, anonymous, or blind primal force. According to the creation account found in Genesis, the universe was created by a personal, moral, and compassionate being who wishes to be in a loving and reciprocal relationship with humanity (Genesis 1:1-2:1; Psalm 8:3-8; 24:1-2; 89:11; 95:5; 104:1-35; Proverbs 8:22-31; Isaiah 40:12-31; John 1:1-4, 10; 17:5; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 11:3; Revelation 4:8-11).

Humanity

The biblical record emphasizes the uniqueness and the sacredness of human life. According to the Scriptures, human life has special value and dignity because men and women are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6). This most basic trait indicates that human beings are called to represent

God in creation. In biblical times, the ideal king or his representative was characterized by a profound love for his subjects and by an overriding concern for the welfare of his entire kingdom. The ideal king did not abuse his power by exploiting and impoverishing his subjects; he was to give his total attention to promoting peace, prosperity, and justice in his realm (Psalm 72). As representatives of God, human beings are responsible to care for God's creation and to manage it for the benefit of all its present and future inhabitants. The mandate to rule the earth in no way legitimizes the selfish and shortsighted exploitation made possible in recent history by technology. On the contrary, as God's representatives, humans are accountable to God for wise use of the earth's resources.

This special relationship between God and humanity that declares humankind as created in the image of God, however, does not tell the whole story. It is universally recognized that there is something wrong in human nature. While human beings are capable of noble accomplishments, human history and our own self-awareness force us to recognize that there is something warped in the deepest recesses of the human heart (Romans 3:9,23; 5:12; 7:7-25; Ephesians 2:1-3). According to the biblical record, the genesis of this deep distortion of human nature can be found in humanity's ability to exercise free will (Genesis 3:1-24; 4:1-13).

At this point, it is important to note that as tragic as the story of the fall might seem, it is also a powerful affirmation of the value God attributes to human free will. Genesis 3 reminds us that human beings have the capability to make significant choices, and that these choices shape their future. This flies squarely in the face of all the reductionist and deterministic philosophical systems which have shaped human history over the centuries. The stars do not predetermine the character and destiny of human beings, as the ancient Mesopotamians believed and as many of our contemporaries accept. Men and women are not solely the result of genetic, family, sociological, or psychological factors. Even demons cannot exert absolute control over the human spirit (Mark 5:1-20). The story of the fall forcefully affirms that human beings have the capability to exercise their free will in respect to good and evil, and can thus influence or even radically change their destiny (Genesis 2:16-17; Joshua 22:5; 24:14-15; Proverbs 2:1-5; Romans 12:1-2). But as the biblical text records, human beings decided to disobey God, resulting in alienation from God, from themselves, and from nature. The consequences of this disobedience have been catastrophic for the human race. Death and suffering in all of its manifestations have resulted directly from this unwillingness to trust God (Romans 5:12).

The New Creation

In spite of the precarious character of humanity's condition, the biblical record forcefully asserts that disobedience and its devastating effects on humanity and creation are not final. God loves humanity and is unconditionally committed to bringing about His original project to create a people composed of men and women who will freely love and serve Him for all eternity. God has provided a way to recreate what was destroyed through human disobedience. We do not fully understand why, but it was necessary for God to do something of cosmic proportion to provide redemption for humanity. God sent His own Son to die on a cross so that we may, in the most profound sense of the word, be reconciled with Him, with ourselves, and with creation. The Bible states that the outworkings of this reconciliation are not exclusively reserved for some future time. Scriptures repeatedly state that the results of God's redemptive work are already visible and effectual in the present time. The first signs of this new creation are visible in those who accept God's invitation to be reconciled to Himself through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17, 21; 6:4; 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6; 5:16-19; Galatians 3:28; 6:15; Ephesians 1:4, 9-10; 2:11-22; 4:24; Colossians 1:15-17; Revelation 21:1-5).

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PASTORAL APPLICATION

A basic need in life is to know where we are from, why we are here, and where we are going. These essential issues are addressed in Article 3 of the confession. Questions regarding the origin of life, our relationship to the environment, and God's unfolding plan for His creation are all part of this discussion. Article 3 gives us a biblical framework for understanding our part in the universe.

Scripture and Science

To state that God is the Creator of the universe tells us where we come from. While many study the planets, stars, and furthest reaches of space to try to discover the origins of the physical universe and life, Scripture tells us, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Our universe did not evolve by chance. We are not part of a random and chaotic accident. Rather, we are part of God's design. God is the one to whom we owe our existence.

Robert Jastrow, an internationally known astronomer and authority on life in the cosmos, makes the following comment:

It is not a matter of another year, another decade of work, another measurement, or another theory; at this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For scientists who have lived by their faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. They have scaled the mountains of ignorance; they are about to conquer the highest peak; as they pull themselves over the final rock, they are greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries (115-116).

This raises the question of how theology relates to science. The church has been wrestling with this issue since the time of Galileo. Today we are aware of the debate between creation and evolution. One view, known as "biblical creationism," seeks to counter scientific theories of evolution. It mines the Genesis account for scientific data, more than recognizing its theological intent. Scripture does teach that God created the heavens and the earth and that human beings are unique among God's creation. Exactly how God accomplished this is not altogether clear. Some in our churches understand

Scripture to teach that God created the universe in six 24-hour days no more than 10,000 years ago. Others leave room for God to have used longer periods of time, including an evolving process of creation that incorporates some of the findings of modern science. We should allow for differences in our views of creation and exercise mutual respect for one another. To pit an interpretation of Genesis against the findings of science or to label people as either biblical creationists or evolutionary atheists does not serve us well.

A more helpful approach is to allow biblical teaching and scientific inquiry to inform each other. John C. Polkinghorne is a Cambridge physicist who is both a renowned scientist and an Anglican clergyman. In his book *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, Polkinghorne articulates a faith which is strengthened rather than threatened by scientific inquiry. He is able to affirm God as Creator and embrace a scientific view of the universe which is fluid, flexible, and open to divine providence. Polkinghorne leaves the process God used in creating the universe open to scientific investigation. In his mind, creation remains a mystery worth exploring. We must be careful in our preaching and teaching about creation to affirm only what the Bible says. Scripture and science need not be antagonistic.

God and Creation

The trend in our postmodern culture is to move from a mechanistic to a more “spiritual” view of the universe. Movies such as *Star Wars* and *The Lion King* obscure the distinction between God and nature. God is reduced to an “impersonal life force” or nature is deified as a “circle of life.” This relates to the issue of worship. God is replaced by nature as the ultimate reality. The result is that creation is worshipped instead of the Creator—an act Paul attributes to human disobedience (Romans 1:25).

Excessive concern for the environment can also lead to nature worship. In addressing past neglect of the environment, the temptation in our culture is to “spiritualize” nature, granting it divine status. Such feelings can take on an aura of worship. Divine reality is said to be found in nature itself. Any distinction between God and creation is lost.

Such a position is problematic for at least two reasons. First, its attempt to rescue nature without reference to God rings hollow. No one cares more for creation than God its Creator. Any concern for the environment must remain grounded in God’s love and care for His universe. To worship creation at the expense of the Creator undermines the very foundation of environmental concern. Second, creation itself recognizes its dependent relationship to God and gives Him glory as Creator and Sustainer of the universe (Psalm 19:1-6; 24:1-2; 104). As God’s creatures, we are to follow creation’s lead in worshipping God instead of nature.

There are also implications for congregational worship. We should encourage outdoor worship settings in God's creation. Church camps, summer worship services in the park, and outdoor baptisms can all enhance our praise to God. However, when some propose that experiencing God in the beauty of nature is an acceptable alternative to gathering regularly with God's people for worship, we should raise the question of where our worship is focused. While we appreciate God's creation and marvel at God's handiwork, our worship is to be directed not to creation but to God the Creator.

Humanity and Creation

How do we as human beings relate to creation? There are two extremes to avoid. One is to consider human beings as merely one life form among others with no more significance than the grass, the trees, or the animals. Compare, for instance, the degree of public interest in saving threatened animal species to the plight of starving children. There is a bumper sticker that says, "Save a whale; Harpoon a human." For many, animal rights have become more important than human rights.

Scripture teaches that human beings are unique among God's creation. Only people are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). This sets us apart from all of creation. Psalm 8 speaks about our significance in relation to the vast expanse of the universe and the animals, birds, and fish which inhabit our planet. We are made just a little less than God (Psalm 8:5). God has crowned us with glory and honour beyond that of other life. Although all life is valued, no life is more valuable than human life. People who are more committed to the health of their pets than the well-being of their fellow human beings distort the value of human life. What we believe about human life has implications for ethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and genetic research. (See article 14, "Sanctity of Life.")

There is a second extreme to avoid. It advocates that our superior position over the rest of creation gives us the right to use or abuse it at will. Exercising dominion over the earth becomes a licence to dominate, deface, and destroy. A commercial for an oil company stated, "Nature is tough, but we are tougher." This attitude treats the earth as a commodity which can be bought and sold, exploited and abused, consumed and discarded.

Concern for the environment in recent decades has corrected much of this attitude, but many churches tend to lag behind in this area. A survey taken to determine attitudes toward the animal world, for instance, revealed that the more frequently a person attended religious services, the greater the person's tendency was to hold domineering or oppressive attitudes toward nature (Granberg-Michaelson, 2-3). What could account for this?

One reason may be a reluctance to be identified with extreme

environmentalist agendas. Another reason may be an inadequate view of the future. If God is going to create a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:11-13; Revelation 21:1-5), why preserve the present environment? A gospel song puts it this way, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through.”

Such a cavalier attitude toward creation fails to recognize two things. One is God’s ultimate intention in reconciling all things in Christ, which includes God’s creation and God’s creatures (Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:19-20). A second is God’s continual mandate to care for His creation in light of His restorative goal for the universe (Genesis 1:28; 2:15; Psalm 8:6).

Scripture teaches that environmental responsibility is a Christian mandate. Of all people, Christians should be the most responsible when it comes to the environment. Why? Partly because of our call to care for others by addressing, for example, the threat of pollution, the need for sustainable development, the concern for global survival, and so on. But the ultimate reason for environmental responsibility is that Christians understand what it means to have a personal relationship with the Creator—the one who made us, who made the world, and who cares for all His creatures and His creation. If we love and respect our Creator, we will care for His creation. This includes a conscious effort to reduce consumption, respect natural resources, and recycle materials in our homes, workplaces, and churches.

Humanity and Creativity

God created us in His image. He placed within us a desire to build, to plant, to imagine, and to create. Our expressions of morality, sexuality, and creativity all reflect God’s image. Although marred by the fall, human life is still full of God-given possibility and potential.

The church has an opportunity and an obligation to encourage a full expression of God’s creative gifts among its people. Our congregations are noted for excellent preachers, teachers, and musicians. What about artists, poets, carpenters, and chefs? There are many more creative gifts we can celebrate in the church. Arts and craft festivals, drama and dance presentations, fashion shows, food fairs, and flower displays are all ways to reflect God’s creativity.

God also created us as male and female to display His likeness. This includes the active participation of both men’s and women’s gifts in various areas of service. God grants gifts irrespective of gender. God’s image is distorted when men and women are discouraged from developing and using their creative gifts.

God has given us the freedom to express our human creativity in ways which bring Him glory. We reflect God’s image when we work together in creative harmony as responsible creatures in God’s world.

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