

ARTICLE 3

Creation and Humanity¹

Creation

We believe that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and they were very good.² 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.³ Creation declares God's wisdom and power, calling all to worship Him.⁴

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.⁵ The Creator gave them the mandate to rule and care for creation as a sacred trust, and the freedom to obey or disobey Him.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸ 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.⁹

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.

Preamble

The NFLT is working on an on-going project to update the existing resources (viz. Commentary and Pastoral Application) connected to our 1999 MB Confession of Faith. We are excited about this new project which will provide “Explanatory Notes” for almost every sentence of the actual Confession. In addition, we are replacing the Pastoral Application with what will be called “Living the Confession (FAQs).” While these resources do not carry the same authority as that of our Confession, we hope that these resources can provide significant help for our pastors/leaders, others within our congregations, folks interested in our MB theological convictions, and finally for prospective credentialing candidates as they move toward credentialing and leadership in our MB family.

We have already approved and printed a number of revised resources (viz., Article 8: Explanatory Notes and Living the Confession (FAQs); Article 1: Explanatory Notes; Article 2: Explanatory Notes). The NFLT has given approval in principle to Article 6: Explanatory Notes and Living the Confession (FAQs) and is seeking input from all of our Provincial Faith and Life Teams and other interested individuals so that this resource can be the most helpful to our wider family.

We are asking for input related to several larger questions: Is the particular note helpful in clarifying the statement made in the Confession—or is there something that needs to be added? (Note: Our Confession has 18 articles so there are other articles that might address what is missing but we are happy to hear what you think is missing.) Does the response to an FAQ reflect well our convictions?

The best way to provide feedback is to explain how your comments relate to a specific note or FAQ. Please send feedback to keith.reed@mbchurches.ca. We hope to move forward with final approval of these resources in Fall of 2024, so feedback is welcome at any point over the next months.

Thank you for your help (and for your prayers) as we undertake this project. While we are glad to have you share this DRAFT with others who might be able to provide helpful feedback, please do not post this online or distribute it widely at this point.

Ken Esau (National Faith & Life Director)

¹ **The Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 is not firstly a collection of doctrines nor a step-by-step guide to achieve personal salvation, but rather the recording of God’s big story encompassing the totality of the cosmos.** It is this story that tells us the true story of the whole world (See M. Goheen and C. Bartholomew, *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama* [Rev.], Brazos, 2020). It is this story that best explains our world and provides the only trustworthy explanation for who we are, why we are here, why things are not as they should be, and what the future holds. It is this story that provides both meaning and hope in a world desperately lacking both.

God’s gospel story stretches from the original creation (Gen 1) to the new creation (2 Cor 5:17), from the first Eden (Gen 2) to the restored Eden (Rev 22:1-3), from the first heaven and first earth (Rev 21:1) to the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1; cf. 2 Pet 3:13). The big story is not simply about God reconciling humans to himself but about God re-establishing his Kingdom by bringing “unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph 1:10; cf. Col 1:20). The story moves from a “good” creation to corruption, sin, and death, and then finally to renewal, restoration, and flourishing in the new creation.

The story begins in a garden and ends in a city—the “Holy City, the New Jerusalem” (Rev 21; cf. Heb 13:14). In the new creation, God returns to dwell with humans (Rev 21:3). Humans are restored to their divine calling as royal image bearers worshipping God and reigning in God’s name over his new creation (2 Tim 2:12). This new community will come from east and west (Matt 8:11-12) and be “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). God will “wipe away every tear” (Rev 7:17) and they will be given once again “the right to eat from the tree of life” (Rev 2:7; cf. 22:14). As a result, there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev 21:4). **This is the eternal Kingdom that fulfills the gospel that we believe Jesus proclaimed (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:15; Luke 8:1), embodied, and victoriously initiated during his time on earth.**

God’s big story from creation to new creation provides clarity about the nature of our physical world; about humans and their nature and purpose in the story; about where salvation and healing are found; and finally about the future plans that God has for the world. Article 3 contains a very brief but important sketch of this story that will be examined more completely in Article 4: Sin and Evil; and Article 5: Salvation.

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² **Article 3 states without reservation the biblical conviction that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth** (Gen 1-2; Ps 8:3-8; 24:1-2; 89:11; 95:5; 104; Prov 8:22-31; Isa 40:12-31; John 1:1-10; 17:5; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15-17; Heb 11:3; Rev 4:8-11). In Genesis 1 and 2, the language of “heavens and the earth” was understood to include the totality of the physical universe including the earth (with its living plant, animal, and human inhabitants), the sky (with the birds inhabiting it), and all the visible bodies situated there (these are later called the sun, moon, and stars).

Article 3 simply reiterates the biblical language of Genesis 1 that God created the heavens and the earth. This means fundamentally that the physical universe and humans themselves are not a result of chance or blind fate but are the products of the intentional and benevolent action of a personal, loving, all powerful Being (Gen 1:1-2:3; Ps 33:6; Jer 32:17; Rev 4:11). This conviction recentres everything toward the Being who is the Creator. This also means that physical matter itself did not exist eternally but had a beginning when the physical world was “created” (cf. Heb 11:3; Rev 4:11).

This also means that the physical creation was created by a good God who made a good world and called it “very good” (Gen 1:31). This means that the physical creation and our physical bodies are fundamentally good. While sin and death have tainted everything, the “physical” nature of both creation and our bodies is part of what God called “good” and “very good” and therefore not something that needs to be fixed or escaped from. This has implications for our theological/ethical convictions about faithful discipleship life as well as about the Christian hope for the resurrection of the body (John 5:28-29; Rom 8:21-23) founded in the reality of Jesus’s physical resurrection from the grave (Matt 28:9; Luke 24:39; Acts 10:41; Phil 3:20-21).

While these are profound claims in light of popular worldviews today, rejecting the conviction about the Triune God creating the heavens and the earth would cause a ripple effect and the undermining of much Scriptural teaching as summarized in the MB Confession of Faith. **The conviction that God created the heavens and the earth and declared them very good is fundamental to all Christian theology.**

Article 3 does not wade into the debate regarding the exact process used by God to create the heavens and the earth but assumes that the method is secondary to the key theological truths that the Triune God is the world’s Creator and that the world and the humans within it exist for a profound and significant purpose. [\[Return to article\]](#)

³These two sentences make the following assertions which are fundamental to Christian theology:

- a) **God is distinct from creation** (cf. Ps 24:1-2; 89:11; Isa 44:24) which means that creation itself does not contain or exist as a spiritual force independently worthy of worship (as in pantheism or panentheism; see Rom 1:20-25). Instead, all creation rightfully points worship back to the Creator (Psalm 66:4; 148:1-14; Neh 9:6; cf. Rom 1:25).
- b) **Creation is under God's sovereign will** (John 4:24; Col 1:16-17) which means that creation has no power to control human destiny independent from God's active involvement.
- c) While God is distinct from creation, **something of God's character, power, purpose, and glory is visible when humans observe the physical creation** (Rom 1:20; Psalm 8:1).
- d) **The physical creation "belongs to God"** (cf. Ps 24:1-2) which means that it owes its existence and life to God.

God "takes care and delight in sustaining" creation (cf. Job 34:14-15; Ps 104; Isa 42:5). God cares for all creation and God alone is the ongoing sustainer of the created world (Isa 45:7-9; Matt 10:29-31, Heb 1:3) providing what is needed for its ongoing well-being. Because of God's care for and delight in sustaining creation, his human image bearers should participate well by stewarding the physical creation in a way that honours the Creator (see Article 15: Stewardship). [\[Return to article\]](#)

⁴**The physical creation reveals the "wisdom and power" of God, "calling all to worship Him"** (Ps 19; 95; 104; Prov 8:22-31; Isa 40:12-31; Rom 1:18-20; Col 2:2-3; Rev 4:11). The orderliness and structure of the physical creation is at the root of scientific inquiry which means that science done well (and within the parameters of knowledge possible for this inquiry) can be a path to better understand something of God's wisdom and power.

Observing God's creation should lead all humans to lifelong awe and worship of the Creator. "In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker..." (Ps 95:4-6). **Worship involves a posture of gratitude, submission, surrender, sacrifice to God, and a commitment to live a life of faithfulness to God's calling.** [\[Return to article\]](#)

⁵**Although Genesis 1 describes God's creative results as "good" six times (vv.4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), it is only after the sixth day with the creation of humans that the expression "very good" appears (v.31).**

While humans and animals are created by God's direct command in Genesis 1, and both are given the "breath of life" (Gen 1:30), Genesis 2:7 describes the first human receiving the breath of life through God's direct and personal action—breathing this breath of life into his nostrils. While all creatures are valued by means of God's actions of creation and evaluation as being "good," humans are the only created beings declared to be in God's image (Latin *imago dei*) (Gen 1:26-27). Because of their special designation as image bearers, humans are described in Article 3 as "the crowning act of creation." However, this should not be understood in ways that bolster human arrogance or privilege since humans bear the significant responsibility and calling to sacrificially care for and ensure the well-being of that creation.

In ancient cultures, the concept of being in the image of someone is reflective of a family or kinship relationship. A child is born in the image of the parents (cf. Gen 5:3). The child receives a **special dignity/value** consistent with the status of the parents. The child receives a **special relationship** with the parents which carries with it mutual obligations. In addition, the reality of being born from these particular parents bestows on the child a **special capacity/calling** with both resources and responsibilities to live in a way consistent with the character and purposes of the parents. Physical idols in ancient pagan cultures would also have been bestowed with this status of image bearing (or representing) a deity.

What is remarkable and revolutionary in Scripture is that the Creator God does not give image bearing status to a physical idol (presumably because physical idols are entirely incapable of representing the nature, character, and purposes of the Creator God) but to human beings alone. This means that while every human being has an image bearing relationship with their biological parents, an even deeper and preeminent image bearing relationship exists to the Triune God who created humans and gave them breath.

What is also remarkable and revolutionary is that unlike the ancient world where only a sub-category of humans would have been considered in the image of a deity (viz., royalty, the wealthy, males, etc.), the Bible declares that **each and every human being—female and male, royal and commoner, poor and wealthy, the one with a special disability and the one without—is in the image of the Creator God and thus all humans are recipients of the special dignity/value, special relationship, and special capacity/calling that this involves.**

Article 3 highlights Genesis 1:27 that says: "in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." While this text addresses the universal nature of the image of God on all human beings, it also

speaks to the nature of male and female sexual identities as bestowed upon individuals by the Creator God. Genesis 1:27 and the rest of Scripture imply that one's birth sex is no accident but a divine gift to be embraced and stewarded well on the path toward loving God, loving one's neighbour, and even loving one's own self. For more on this topic, see Article 3: Living the Confession (FAQs).

Being a divine image bearer means that God has bestowed the following on each human being, both male and female:

- a) **Special dignity/value bestowed by the Creator that cannot be taken away.** This dignity/value is not based on the social or economic standing of one's parents, one's ability to contribute to society, or any other external measure. This dignity/value is simply there because one is created in the image of the Creator (cf. Gen 9:6). Ultimately it is God who has formed each human being (Ps 139:13-16) and has given each human being breath (Gen 2:7).
- b) **Special relationship with God.** God invites every human image bearer into a loving relationship with God (cf. Gen 3:8-9; Ps 139:7-16; 145:18; Acts 17:27; 1 John 4:7-21; Rev 4:8-11). Humans owe their very lives to the Creator and should want to embrace this relationship with God joyfully and sacrificially. All humans should give back to God what belongs to God (cf. Mark 12:17), which necessarily involves their very lives. The bad news is that humans have universally rejected this invitation to relationship with God and are, therefore, in desperate need of redemption, forgiveness, and salvation in order to live into what every human image bearer is designed to be (see Article 5: Salvation). Without this relationship, humans are lost, misguided, and unable to live in the way they were created to live.
- c) **A special capacity/calling to reflect the character and purposes of God in the world.** Every human being, unlike anything else in the physical creation, has a special capacity/calling to represent God's character (Col 3:12-15; 1 Pet 1:15; 1 John 4:16) and Kingdom purposes in the world (cf. Gen 33:10; Lev 11:44-45; John 13:35; Acts 1:8). Only humans can "rule" over creation in a way consistent with God's loving purposes. Every human being should give their life to the goal of seeking first God's Kingdom and his righteousness (Matt 6:33). But again, humans have universally rejected this part of image bearing and used their God-given capacities toward affections and callings that are diametrically opposed to representing the character and purposes of God in the world (see Article 4: Sin and Evil).

The planned outcome of humans faithfully embracing the fullness

of their divine image bearing status with its special dignity/value, special relationship with God, and special capacity/calling would be the reality of what the Old Testament describes as *shalom* and the New Testament describes as God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom (and the *shalom* that is synonymous with that Kingdom) is present when humans live in an unhindered and loving relationship with God through worship and submission; when humans live in mutually loving and beneficial relationships with others; when humans embrace their role of reflecting God's character and purposes in all of creation; and when humans live in a healthy life-affirming relationship with themselves (physically, spiritually, emotionally). While there is no true *shalom* without God, who is the only source and giver of true *shalom* (Num 6:26; Judg 6:24; 1 Kgs 2:33; Ps 29:11; 85:8; Isa 9:6-7; 26:12; 53:5; 54:10; Ezek 37:26; Hag 2:9; 2 Cor 13:11), humans as image bearers are graciously invited into this *shalom*-making work in the world (Prov 12:20; Matt 5:9). However, God's Kingdom, while present today will only be experienced in its fullness after the final return of Jesus. [\[Return to article\]](#)

⁶ In Genesis 1:26-28, God describes human responsibility to “subdue” the earth and “rule over” the living creatures. In Genesis 2:15, God places Adam in the Garden to “work it and take care of it.” These responsibilities should be seen as complementary. **Humans were given the task both to rule over and care for creation on behalf of the Creator—a Creator who shows incredible care and love for the creation.** The creation is not owned by humans, but everything remains the Lord's who continues to reign as King over all creation (Ps 24:1; 95:3-5; 103:19). **Humans are given the responsibility for the “stewardship” of the earth which is what “sacred trust” means.**

When God calls Abraham, there is a promise that Abraham will “be a blessing” (Gen 12:2) and that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3; cf. 18:18). Stewardship of the earth is part of this calling to bless the whole world. Stewardship of the earth demonstrates both a love of God the Creator and a love of one's neighbour—not to mention a love for those neighbours not-yet-born who, until Jesus returns, be born into the world that we leave them. Stewardship of creation is not an unnecessary or peripheral task but part of the both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. (For more on the stewardship of creation, see Article 15.)

Being image bearers of God who is King does not mean that humans will robotically image the character and actions of our Creator. God is a free moral agent who creates and acts freely out of love. **As a result,**

God created us in a way that allowed us to embrace or reject our true calling. This is portrayed in Genesis 2 and 3 when God put Adam into the lush Garden of Eden which included everything that was needed including access to the “tree of life.” Adam could eat from any tree in the garden with only one exception. He was told that he “must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17).

This freedom and responsibility to obey or disobey God means that humans, in contrast to all other created beings on earth, are exclusively given the responsibility of being free moral agents who will experience the positive and negative consequences of their own moral choices (Deut 30:11-20; Josh 22:5; 24:14-15; Rom 12:1-2). [\[Return to article\]](#)

⁷ **Genesis 3 describes the profound change in all of creation which resulted when the first humans exercised their moral freedom poorly, refusing to bow in worship and obedience before God as King, and they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.** Article 3 recognizes that this “willful disobedience” on the part of these humans caused sin to enter the world and this produced profound consequences for humanity and for all creation. The focus here is not on the serpent or the tree or on who ate first, but on the “willful disobedience” of both Adam and Eve and the tragic consequences that this produced.

Christian theologians have labeled the events described in Genesis 3 as the “Fall” or the “original sin”—even though these expressions are never used in Scripture. The Old Testament writers never reference Genesis 3, and only Paul among the New Testament writers mentions the Genesis 3 events at all (cf., Rom 5; 1 Cor 15; 1 Tim 2). There has been much debate about how Adam and Eve’s sin has impacted all future humanity and the creation itself, including how that impact is transmitted to future humans, whether humans are born with imputed guilt or just a propensity to sin, and how Jesus could be fully human and yet avoid sharing the guilt of Adam and Eve. Article 3 does not wade into these intractable questions but states several convictions:

1. Because of their willful disobedience, **“sin entered the world.”** Sin here is a reference to the full presence of sin in the human world and not the ultimate origin of sin or evil as a power. From the point of Adam and Eve’s wilful disobedience, sin and evil are present on earth working in opposition to God’s life-giving and good purposes. Sin and evil produce wide ranging effects that fracture our relationships with God, other humans, creation, and even our own selves—while also opening the door to death, alienation, and the destruction of physical and spiritual life. God’s Kingdom intentions

are threatened by these conflicting forces that disrupt each of these four primary relationships.

2. Because of their willful disobedience, **“human nature is distorted.”** Human nature is a reference to the fundamental and basic thought and behaviour patterns that are universal to humans. The original humans were created as divine image bearers with special dignity/value, a special relationship with God, special capacity/calling to reflect God’s character and participate in God’s purposes in the world. Even after the first humans sinned, every subsequent human being is still a divine image bearer carrying the special dignity bestowed on them by God (cf. Gen 9:6), but something significant has changed. The special relationship with God and the special capacity/calling to reflect God’s character and purposes in the world are all broken and tainted by the presence and power of sin. All people without Christ are “dead in [their] transgressions and sins” (Eph 2:1). Only God can heal and fully restore humans to what he originally created them to be.
3. Because of their willful disobedience, **“people are alienated from God and creation.”** Humans are no longer born automatically into a situation of health and wholeness with God and creation—what is commonly called “original righteousness” where humans are fully able not to sin. Instead all humans now stand in need of redemption. Article 3 does not dive into how this alienation is passed on to subsequent humans. The main options include:
 - All humans involuntarily (at conception or birth) are part of Adam and Eve’s sin (cf. Heb 7:9-10 for an analogy) and thus inherit Adam and Eve’s guilt as well as the tainting of human inclinations (cf. Ps 51:5; Rom 5:18-19; 1 Cor 15:22). This perspective reads Romans 5:12 about death spreading to all people “because all sinned” to mean that all people automatically inherited and participated in the first sin. Another key argument is that since Paul calls humans “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), this must mean that humans have inherited a guilty sinful nature worthy of divine judgment. The many biblical statements about universal human wickedness (1 Kgs 8:46; Ps 14:2-3; Rom 3:10-12) and the universal deceitfulness of the human heart (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ecc 9:3; Jer 17:9) imply that sin and guilt must be passed on to all humans in some physical or spiritual way at conception or birth. This passing on of sin and guilt is what it means that “in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22).

- All humans are born neither morally good nor morally guilty but rather as morally innocent beings. Humans are born into a broken and sinful world, but they do not become guilty of sin until they knowingly and voluntarily embrace sin. The sad news is that universally all humans “have turned away, all have become corrupt” (Ps 14:3), “all sinned” (Rom 5:12), and all are following the ways of this world, gratifying the cravings of the flesh (Eph 2:1-3), and unable to defeat the power of sin (Rom 7:14-24). This universal propensity to embrace sin and rebellion against God is why human wickedness is universal, human hearts are deceitful, and all are dead in their transgressions and sins. In this perspective, it is not inherited sin and guilt that makes one a sinner, but the universal mimicking of and identification with Adam and Eve in their sin. It is because all humans have identified with or joined with Adam that “in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22). Being “in Adam” is an act of deliberate identification, just as being “in Christ” is an act of deliberate identification. Jesus was born fully human with the same propensity and temptations that we experience (Heb 4:15), but Jesus did not embrace sin and thus did not join with or identify with Adam and Eve in their willful disobedience (“He committed no sin”; 1 Pet 2:22).

Both perspectives, although different, fundamentally agree about the universality of human sin (viz., “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Rom 3:23), and about the universality of the human need for salvation in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Gal 2:16). Both agree that humans are not the way they should be (Rom 3:9-18) and that humans are unable on their own to live out the calling and mission God has for them but are in desperate need of salvation by grace alone (Eph 2:8-9).

4. Because of their willful disobedience, “**creation is under the bondage of decay.**” This is a phrase taken almost directly from Romans 8:21 (“bondage to decay” NIV, NRSV; cf. bondage/slavery “to corruption” KJV, NASB; ESV). Creation is now home to death, destruction, and decay in a way different from God’s original intention (cf. Rom 8:19-21).

Because of their willful disobedience, “**humans and all creation long to be set free.**” The biblical story is one of constant longing, lament, and hope for freedom as humans live in a world that is alienated rather than one that is reconciled (Rom 8:1-4). Creation also is groaning as it awaits liberation (Rom 8:21-22). Revelation 21-22 describes what this

freedom will look like one day when God’s Kingdom comes to earth as it is in heaven (see Article 18: Christ’s Final Triumph). [\[Return to article\]](#)

⁸ Article 3 now moves to the fullness of gospel hope that is described more completely in Article 5: Salvation. Sin, guilt, and death are not the end of the story. God is conquering and ultimately abolishing all “evil, suffering, and death.” The entire biblical story is a record of what God has done, is doing, and will do to bring about his full and final good intentions for the world (see Note #1). Article 3 points here to the future return of Jesus and the full arrival of the “new heaven” and the “new earth” (cf. Rev 21:1-5; See also Article 18: Christ’s Final Triumph).

This new heaven and new earth (or the “new creation”) is where God’s Kingdom will be fully present, God’s will fully done, and all contrary forces eliminated. This is the goal of the entire biblical story—the full restoration of God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. While many Christians have assumed that believers are destined for “heaven” as a disembodied “spiritual” reality, the Bible describes how our present creation is waiting in expectation for the day when it will be “liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). The Bible also describes the future “redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23) where Christians will dwell together with God in the new creation (Rev 21:3-4). The new earth (aka new creation) is the future hope of redeemed humanity.

Article 3 and the Bible itself do not provide clarity about the location and the nature of the new earth/creation that God will create (for more on this question, see Article 18: Christ’s Final Triumph). However, it does declare a confident hope of this coming reality. This hope, however, should not lead to escapism or disinterest in our present earthly reality, but rather to a renewed commitment to active worship of God and participation in God’s Kingdom work.

⁹ Jesus came to earth to reconcile, re-create, and restore the world back toward God’s ultimate Kingdom purposes. **The new creation is where these ultimate Kingdom purposes exist in their fullness and Jesus “hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power” (1 Cor 15:24).** In the new creation, God can again dwell fully and freely among his redeemed people in a redeemed creation (Rev 21:3-7). People who have been forgiven and purified will live joyfully with God in a relationship of obedience and intimacy. The redeemed will also live in unhindered fellowship with other humans marked by mutual love, encouragement, and blessing. The

redeemed will steward and rule over the new creation as God intended. Finally, each redeemed person will live at peace with themselves, stewarding well their redeemed physical bodies, minds, and hearts. The presence of God's *shalom* will be fully evident because it will be unhindered by sin, death, and destruction. In Christ, all things are being created anew (cf. Rev 21:5).

While the fullness of the new creation will only be revealed at the final return of Jesus, signs of its presence and nature are available for those “in Christ.” For those who have accepted God's forgiveness through Christ, “the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor 5:17). Disciples of Jesus experience signs of God's Kingdom today even while waiting in hope and anticipation for its full coming. Disciples of Jesus experience forgiveness and the ongoing transformation into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:29). As a result of being “in Christ,” they experience God's presence dwelling with them through the Holy Spirit. They can see glimpses of the reconciliation with others as they join the “new family” called the church where people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” come together (Rev 7:9). They can see something of a healed relationship with creation as they steward the physical creation well and live with a spirit of gratitude. Finally, they can also taste some of the healing available through Jesus, physically, spiritually, and emotionally, as they embrace their new identities as children of God, citizens of God's Kingdom, and members of the body of Christ and reject all that wants to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).

These “first signs” of the new creation (viz., love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, reconciliation, healing, justice, etc.) present among Christians today are to be fully enjoyed and embraced as a foretaste of the fullness of the Kingdom yet to be fully present when Jesus returns. But these signs are not simply for the benefit of Christians but are meant to be signs of God's Kingdom shining out God's light before a watching world (cf. Matt 5:13-15; 2 Cor 4:4-6; Col 2:15; For more on the mission of the Church, see Article 7: The Mission of the Church). [[Return to article](#)]

ARTICLE 3

Creation and Humanity

LIVING THE CONFESSION

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" (Gen 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 (Rom 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 (Ps 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 (Gen 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 (Ps 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; Rev 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 (Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:19-20). A second is God’s continual mandate to care for His creation in light of His restorative goal for the universe (Gen 1:28; 2:15; Ps 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

ARTICLE 3 | LIVING THE CONFESSION

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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Article 3: Creation and Humanity

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

**Beauty erupted out of darkness,
order sparkled where chaos once reigned—
a universe clean and pure.**

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it;
the world, and all that fills it.

**O Lord, you delight in your creation,
and all creation delights in your care and sustaining
presence.**

But who are we, that you should take notice of us,
we poor mortals, that you even look at us?

**O God, you were not content with beauty alone.
You desired love,
and created us in your image
to love you and live with you.
You made us, male and female, in your image.
You gave us the world to name it and care for it,
to enjoy it and offer it back to you
in ministries of exploration and stewardship.**

Holy God, we failed you at the beginning.

We have sinned ever since.

As sin entered the world through one human,
and death through sin,

so life and salvation have entered through Jesus Christ.

**God's light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness cannot put it out.**

**We live with the pain of Eden's curse;
we live with the promise of Eden regained.**

ARTICLE 3 | RESPONSIVE WORSHIP READING

All creation waits with bated breath,
for the glorious return of Christ,
who makes all things new;
and God will be all in all.

**Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad,
let the sea roar, let the fields celebrate!**

**Then the trees of the forest will rejoice before the Lord,
for He comes;**

He comes bringing justice to all the earth.