



CANADIAN CONFERENCE
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

ARTICLE 3 [MB Confession of Faith]

Creation and Humanity

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 world view, 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 center of the universe. Such a philosophical stance has formidable implications for the whole spectrum of ethics and human endeavors. 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 (Gen. 1:1-2:1; Ps. 8:3-8; 24:1-2; 89:11; 95:5; 104:1-35; Prov. 8:22-31; Isa. 40:12-31; John 1:1-4, 10; 17:5; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 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 (Gen. 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 (Ps. 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 (Rom. 3:9, 23; 5:12; 7:7-25; Eph. 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 (Gen. 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 (Gen. 2:16-17; Josh. 22:5; 24:14-15; Prov. 2:1-5; Rom. 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 (Rom. 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 (Rom. 5:17, 21; 6:4; 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:20-27; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6; 5:16-19; Gal. 3:28; 6:15; Eph. 1:4, 9-10; 2:11-22; 4:24; Col. 1:15-17; Rev. 21:1-5).

