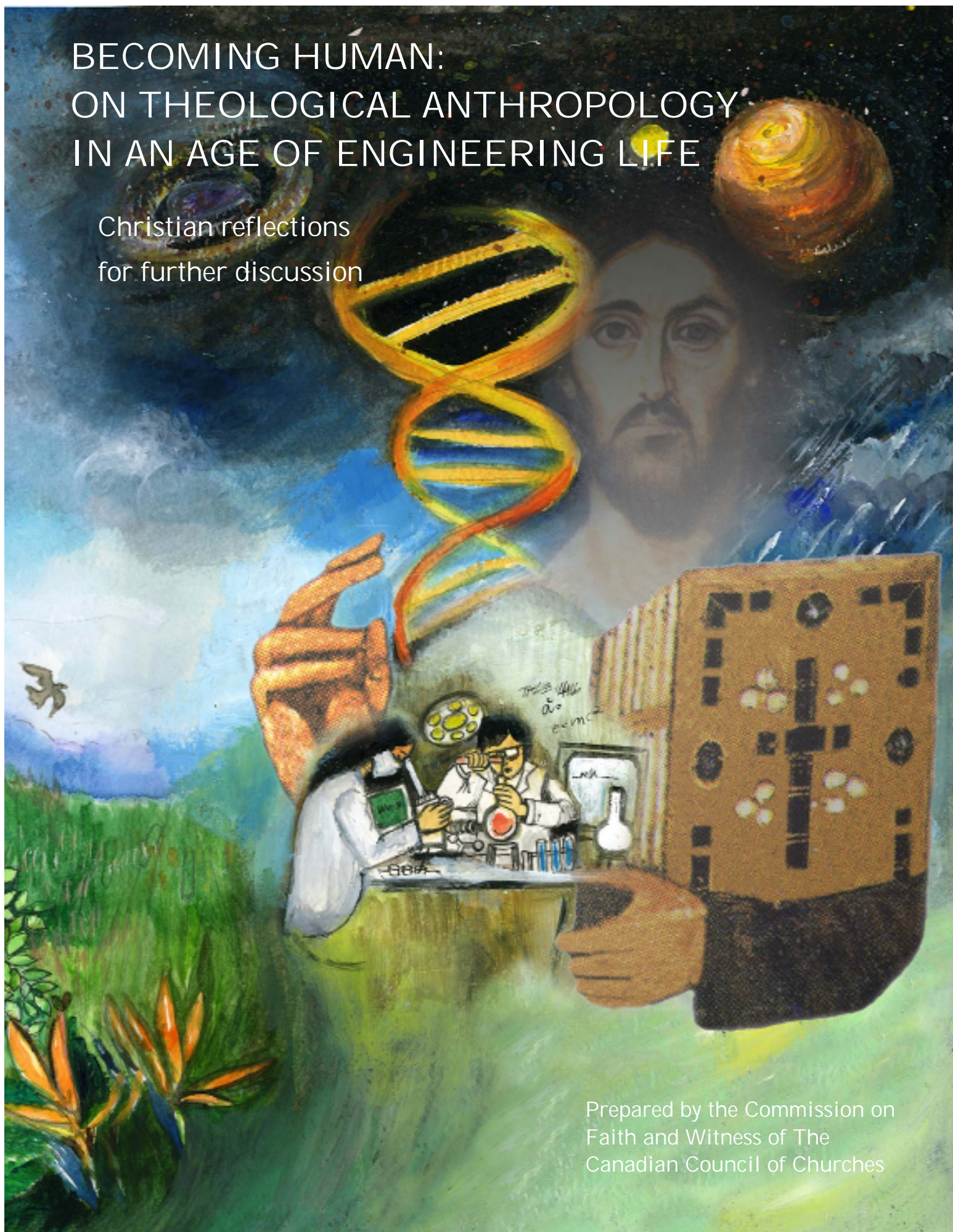
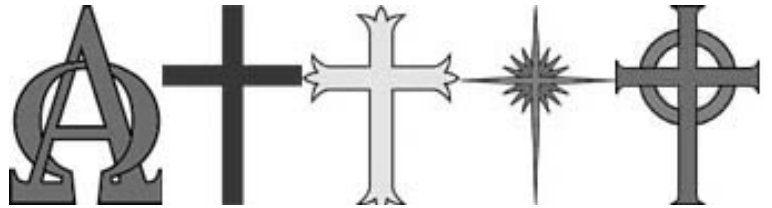


BECOMING HUMAN: ON THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN AN AGE OF ENGINEERING LIFE

Christian reflections
for further discussion



Prepared by the Commission on
Faith and Witness of The
Canadian Council of Churches



ASKING THE QUESTIONS

May the tissues (for example, stem cells) of a human fetus be used to look for a cure for Alzheimer's disease?

Should scientists clone human beings, simply because it is possible?

May humans manipulate the environment in whichever way suits them, no matter the effect on other species?

Should Christians care about the ozone layer?

Should Christian farmers grow genetically-modified foods?

This pamphlet is intended to be used as a resource and discussion-starter for Christians who wish to reflect together on some of the questions raised in our day by biotechnology. It introduces theological themes and language by which various Christian traditions give expression to the deep realities of which we are part.

Cover Design: Maria Zamora-Crosby
Layout: Jasmine Mayfair Li

When the Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Witness was asked to consider such important, troubling, and complex questions, we found we were led to the foundations of our faith. None of the questions is abstract; all are urgent, because they are about matters that are happening here and now to each of us. These matters have effects much bigger than we can see, but require that we make choices. In making choices, our humanity is disclosed.

In this short pamphlet intended for ordinary believers – and anyone else who is interested and concerned! – we obviously cannot say all that is possible to say about the new genetic sciences and technologies, or about how scientific and industrial activity affects the earth and all that is within it (Psalm 24:1-2)*. We can, however, speak of what is crucial and common to us as we wrestle faithfully with such subjects. The questions posed above constitute a mere beginning. We are not raising all the questions that could be raised. And we are not offering one-size-fits-all answers to the questions we have raised. We offer this publication as a guide for further exploration, further study and reflection. We encourage you to become as informed as possible about the fast-approaching scientific future; but we do not need great technical or scientific expertise to begin serious reflection on, for example, genetic engineering in light of our faith.

The Commission members belong to many different Christian families. We have different traditions, different ways of thinking,

understanding, speaking, and praying. Yet as we reflect together on such questions, we find that we all approach them from the same source. That source, that fundamental sense of who we humans are before the face of God, is shared by us all. And it is from that common source that we explore these exciting but difficult questions. As an experienced poet told an eager young person: "learn to love the questions." Even in the questioning, we learn to love God, and one another.



All of us have to wrestle with these questions in our own way, but we first need to help each other to understand "what humanity is all about" in order to make life-giving, life-respecting decisions. Indeed, we believe that facing up to our human condition is part of what it means to be human, and what it means to be Christian. Every generation must respond to the questions of its own time. Yet it is one of the delightful mysteries of being human that we learn how to live in a new age by drawing on the one living God of all ages, all times, and all places. This One God is the self-revealing Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

SO

Before harvesting fetal tissue, we must ask: "Is the fetus a human being? And therefore a member of the human moral community?"

Is the debate about the ozone layer simply an issue of ecological safety and economics, or rather a question of moral responsibility? Or even more, a question of justice and caring?

And so on.

* All scriptural quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. // is a symbol referring to parallel passages in other Gospels.



BEING HUMAN: THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Here in this pamphlet, we wish to express clearly and simply the source, the foundations, to which Christians look for wisdom and guidance in confronting such burning questions of our day and age. We hope these reflections will be of help to you in tackling the questions that are beckoning us.

Who are we as humans in the world? How do we relate to God, and how does God relate to us? These are questions of “theological anthropology.” Together, Christians seek direction from the Word which God has given us: in Christ, in Scripture, in the Church, in our own being, in our life of prayer, in all that is.

Let us say something of what our faith teaches us about being human.

God created all that is. This is a truth so huge we can barely glimpse it. This is what we are born into: there is a world around us and within us that we did not make. We did not make ourselves; we are not the source of our existence; in other words, we are called into being. And if we are called, if the world around

us is a gift, then there is some origin to this world, some One, the “Giver of Life.” This is what St. Paul has in mind when he writes, in his Letter to the Romans, about the world around us being full of signs of the Creator (1:19-21). Without God nothing came to be (John 1:3); in Christ, all things have life. The exact molecular structure of things, their DNA, their physics, physiology, biology, chemistry – these are scientific realities which can help illuminate what God has made and given life to. Yet they do not take away from the simple truth that all real things belong to God, because it is God who gives them life and form and being, who maintains and sustains creation. This means that to be is to be in ongoing relationship with God: that is the secret truth at the heart of all reality.

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. God’s own gift is the fundamental reality of all that is; but to humans on this earth (our concern here is not with other possible intelligent moral creatures in the universe), God has given something unique. Drawing on Genesis 1:26, we say that humans – male and female – are created in the image and likeness of God. Over the centuries,

Christians have found many ways to express what is meant by this phrase. We could say simplistically: "we look like God"; or, "to see a human being is to glimpse who God is." Such phrases struggle to put into words the awesome, inexpressible truth of who we really are. Here, we discover that we can't understand what it means to be human, unless we understand that being human means being in relationship with God. More: it means being like God. We cannot fully know who we are without knowing God. And to discover God is to discover who we are (1 John 3:2). We cannot penetrate the mystery of God's own being, for God alone is God, and we are other than God. Often we

humans hold back from one another, afraid or reluctant to give or reveal ourselves. Yet God is poured out for us in a love that reaches out to

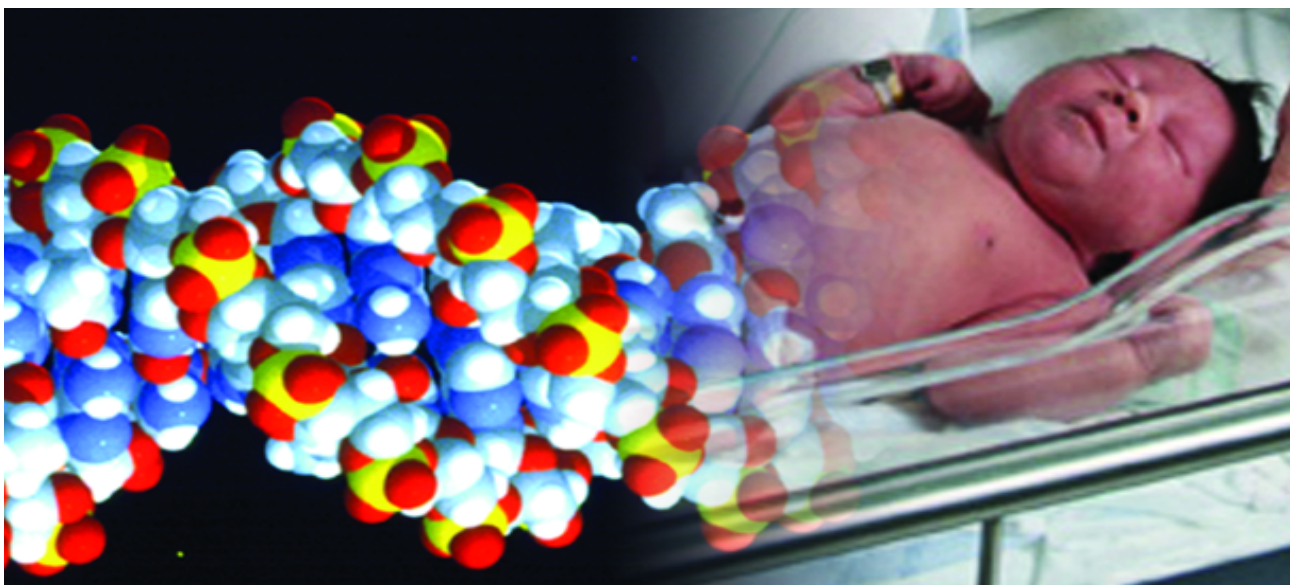
the other, a love so intimate that it takes flesh; God chooses to show us and share with us the life of the divine Trinity.

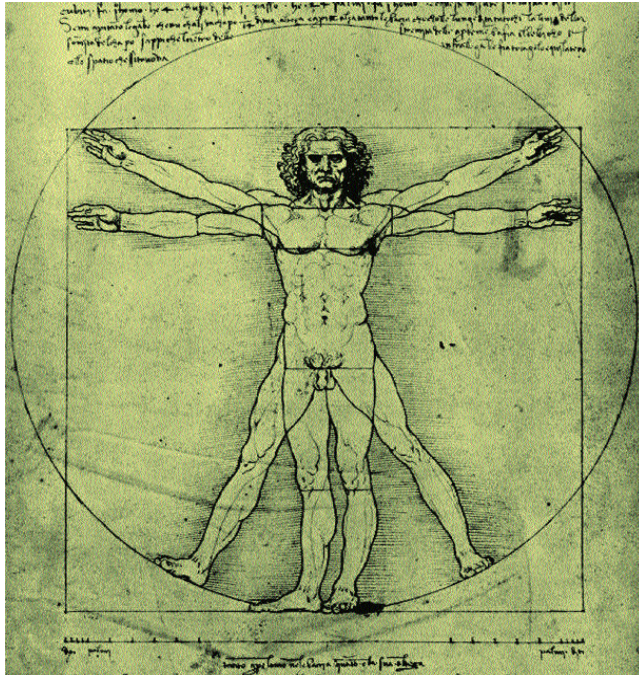
It is Christ, above all, who fully shows us God's image in human form. The divine Word has become flesh in Christ's incarnation. In Christ, God's Wisdom takes on all that it means to be human, perfectly and permanently; Christ also

teaches us how to bear God's image (Colossians 2:9-10). The strange reality is that Christ's bearing of the divine image discloses our true humanity as both bestowed and acquired, gift and attainment.

I am, you anxious one.
Don't you sense me, ready to break
Into being at your touch?
My murmurings surround you like
shadowy wings.
Can't you see me standing before you
Cloaked in stillness?
Hasn't my longing ripened in you
From the beginning
As fruit ripens on a branch?

Rainer Maria Rilke





We believe that Christ has overcome sin and has given us the way to be restored and renewed.

Still, failure to take the pervasive reality of sin into account makes us even more vulnerable to error, selfishness, destruction and conflict. When we are redeemed, we are called to take sin into account. Since we seem to be attracted to evil like flies to carrion, we must cultivate habits of caution, humility, and self-criticism. We are redeemed in order to complete creation, to carry on God's eternal creative work. Our humanity will not be fully disclosed until the consummation of the world, and until then we are stewards, care-givers, scientists-and-artists, set in the garden to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). In this way, we become like Christ.

Sin is a present reality in the world, affecting everything that happens. Different Christian families speak in different ways about the origin of sin, how it works its way into our lives, and how to overcome it. But we all agree that sin is present among us, trips us up, keeps us from becoming who God means us to be, and hinders us from caring faithfully for creation. (Even what we call "inhumanity" is part of the human condition.) In every decision we make, we must remember how constantly we fail to love, fail to be all that we are made for, fail to live up to our calling. That, too, is the human reality.

Christ crucified and risen, transfigured and glorified, discloses the image and likeness of God. We die to rise with Christ (Romans 8:1, 10-11).

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps gráce: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

"Dying to rise with Christ" is the special vision of all Christians, our unique belief that when God teaches us how to bear the divine image—how truly to be human—the

lesson includes the inevitable tragedy of the Cross (Matthew 16:21//). Everything we have said in this pamphlet before now is the common heritage of all humanity—all people on earth are created in the image of God, and all authentically creative actions have the potential to further God's creative designs and

purposes for the world. But through their faith in Christ, Christians have grasped that sharing in divine creativity enacts a burden of responsibility. Above, we called the bearing of the divine image "gift" and "attainment"; both the gift and the attainment – dare we say achievement? – are to bear the Cross with Christ (Matthew 16:24-26//).

Recognition and acceptance of the Cross as personally our own, a necessary dimension in our creative life as God-bearers, changes our entire perspective on being human. It requires that we accept that all of our joy in our creative power must be measured through the same sense of tragic responsibility that led God, who "so loved the world," to give even his only Son to the Cross (John 3:16). How can we comprehend that the Cross and the Resurrection represent God's most creative act? And so that act must become for all of us the true measure of our creativity. And the first step in applying this measure is to come to grips with the reality of sin. Genetic engineering is done in a broken, morally disordered world that is groaning in travail (Romans 8:22).

Our creativity itself is part of what is image of God in us. In the Incarnation of Christ we see God's participation in humanity, as well as human participation in the life of God (see Philippians 2:5-11). This is our heritage and our vocation: we are creature and

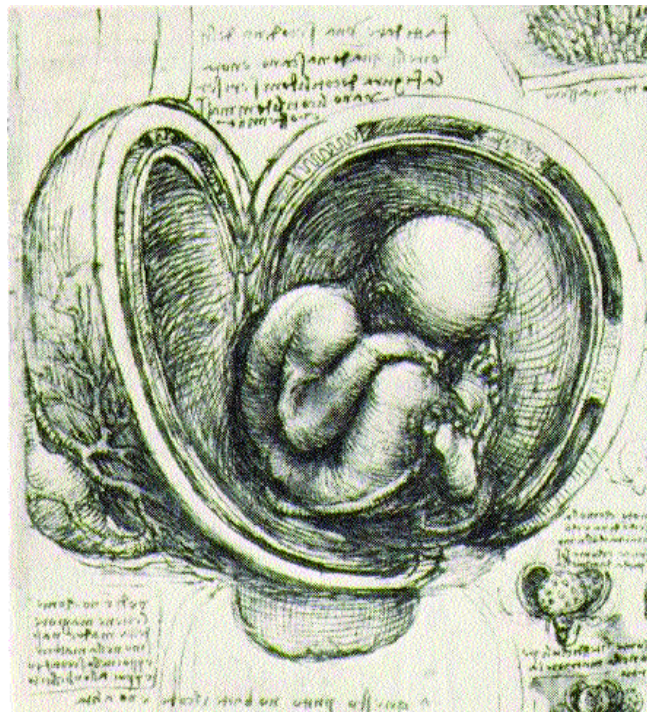
creative, discovered and discoverer, recipients and stewards.

God is creator, and in making us like himself, God made us creative. We believe that God delights in seeing us exercise our capacity for creativity, whether we are scientists or blues musicians. Unlike God, we can't make something from nothing, but we can take what God has given, and out of it create something beautiful and new.

We even go so far as to say that humans are created co-creators. When we are being fully

Birds, beasts, all things
Adore him in their kinds.
Thus all is hurl'd
In sacred Hymnes, and Order, The great Chime
And Symphony of nature. Prayer is
The world in tune,
A spirit-voyce,
And vocall joyes
Whose Eccho is heav'ns blisse.

Henry Vaughan, "The Morning Watch"



human, we create well, and we beautify the world. But we must learn to distinguish between true creativity and destructivity, or manipulation, or oppression. We are at our best when we act with humility, respect, awe and wisdom, and weave these capacities into everything we create. Like it or not, we have power, God-given power. Failure to use this power would be a failure to become who we are meant to be; however, in using it we must remember the original blessedness of all things. Things are sacred because they are God-filled, because it is God's Spirit in creation that gives them life. What we call "nature" has been hallowed – as we acknowledge in our theologies of incarnation and sacrament, for instance – and is therefore not simply matter at our disposal.

God entrusted to humans a special responsibility to know, love and care for creation. In saying this, we have said more than we can ever understand. It does teach us, though, that we humans do not exist in isolation: we all belong to each other, because we all belong to the one God. And we are made of the same "stuff" as the earth, the plants and animals, the trees, the stars, the amoebae, the winds and clouds (Psalms 8; 148). We belong to them, and they belong to us. What is created is God's very own, of and for God, but truly other than God. Our joy, our labour, is to take care of all that is. We don't always understand what this means or what it might look like, but we strive to do it well. What is the meaning of God's command to have "dominion over" creation (Genesis 1:28)? Science began with the naming of the creatures, and this required Adam – which

means "humankind" – to discern what God had done (Genesis 2:20, Romans 8:19). We make choices and decisions, some wise, some foolish; we pray for grace.

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle
and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"

Faith and Culture.

We also create structures, like laws and roads. Each particular people expresses its life in history by creating culture. As God's created co-creators, this is part of our human

task. But as people subject to sin, we cannot avoid the truth that these structures are tainted by sin. How can what is false, broken, and twisted in our ways be made whole? This is what we call "redemption": the real presence of





Christ in all these things, opening them to the healing power of God. Can science, a powerful part of our cultural heritage and future, be “redeemed”?

Faith and Science. Christians have many ways of understanding and expressing the givenness of creation, and of conversing with scientific discoveries and explorations. But we agree that faith and science need not be at odds with each other; rather, if we receive both gifts with creativity, courage and compassion, we can all benefit. We are not calling for a halt to scientific or technological activity. Scientists are often condemned for “playing God,” but their work can actually help us “become

human,” so long as we remember our stewardship. Our vocation is to nurture, rather than just to exercise our own capacity to do something merely because we can do it; as Jesus taught, “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:26-27). So we rejoice in human capacities, which have given so much to human society.

Yet, while neither deifying nor demonizing science, we need to recognize its non-neutral character. Science as a social practice embodies values, interests, and ideologies. An allegedly “objective” science without conscience can easily become destructive, not creative. God’s will for the world is shalom, in the full-blooded sense of the word. And so we are calling people to remember and recover our moral and theological resources, and to move forward, thinking God’s thoughts and doing God’s work, as creatures, within nature.

But even more than this: as we pursue our immense potential for scientific and technological discovery, insight, and intervention, the Christian vision of the Lord on the Cross must ever be before our eyes as the light by which we measure the truth and value of our creative work. Moral responsibility is clearly essential, and imposes limits and controls in the name of what is just and right and good. And the Cross takes us beyond responsibility, indeed beyond all logic of

We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life.

Ephesians 2:10 (New Jerusalem Bible)



justice, into the tragic world in which God acts creatively and redemptively. This imposes on us a further requirement besides self-control: we must create with humility (Mark 10: 43-45). When we attempt to answer such a precise scientific question as, for example, the

value of experimental or therapeutic use of fetal tissue, we must do so in the light of the cross. The same is true of all the other questions we have mentioned, and of every question that is asked in the name of "Becoming Human."

Creating Our World. All that we are exists in time and space. Words such as “eternal” and “mystery” point to the greatness of all that we are part of; but we receive them in the intimacy of the flesh, in hands and toes and eyelids, in bicycles and micro-chips and algorithms – in the physical reality which we are also part of. That’s why it is so important for Christians to care for creation. This means helping to build hospitals, schools and soup kitchens; becoming computer technicians and street-cleaners and astro-physicists. It means getting mixed up in the messiness, beauty, unpredictability and delight of the world in which we live. Often this world is a place of struggle, even chaos; but it is also a place where God’s grace is given, given abundantly, to become fruitful with our participation.



'Twas much, that man was made like God before,
But that God should be made like man, much more.
John Donne, Holy Sonnet

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on a cross.

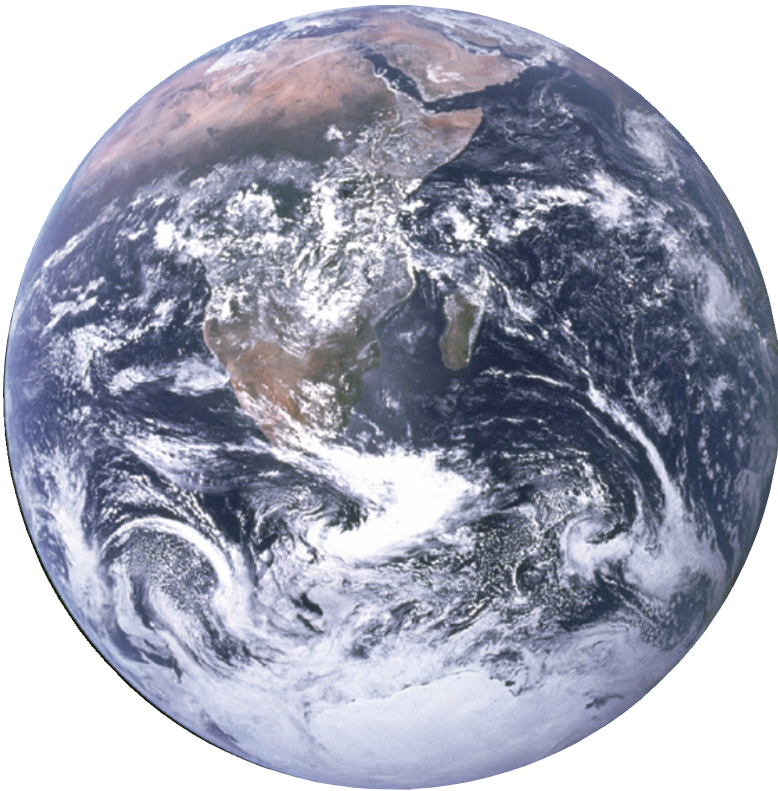
Philippians 2:5-8

SO, WHAT ABOUT THOSE QUESTIONS?

We invite you to take these thoughts on the meaning of being human, and in light of them, consider how we might respond to the questions which technology and science – and especially genetics – are now posing for us. We do so prayerfully, with trust and faith in the goodness of God and God's creation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the light of all that has been said, let us reconsider our initial questions.



1) May the tissue (for example, stem cells) of a human fetus be used to look for a cure for Alzheimer's disease?

- Is the human fetus (or even embryo) a "human being"?
- What difference does that make?
- We see donating organs as a virtue; is the use of the fetus any different? Why?
- How do we deal with competing human needs? Can one need supersede another? For example, is an imposed sacrifice of one life for another justifiable?
- If we are going to "use" people (or animals, or plants) as "things", how do we do so humbly and wisely?

2) Should scientists clone human beings, simply because it is possible?

- Who bears decision-making responsibility for bringing life into existence? And for caring for it thereafter?
- Does it make a difference whether we are talking about cloning sheep or cloning human beings?
- Are there moral limitations on the freedom of scientific enquiry? How would we recognize those limits?
- If we as Christians hold to the views stated in this pamphlet, what should we be teaching scientists?
- What do we mean when we say scientists are "playing God"? (Surely it must mean more than wielding "the power of life and death," since we've always naturally had that power.)



3) May humans manipulate the environment in whichever way suits them, no matter the effect on other species?

- Can we “be human” independent of the totality of the natural world?
- If God entrusted to humans a special responsibility for creation, what does that require of us today?
- If we loved creation as much as God does, how would we act towards it?
- What would it take to make the world Paradise? (“Eden” is not “Utopia”.)

4) Should Christians care about the ozone layer?

- Should we care about it for our sakes, or for its own sake? Is this a question about what is good for us, or about what is good?

- Where is creation going? In the ways that we use science, are we acknowledging and furthering God’s intention for creation? What are the consequences of ignoring God’s intention?

5) Should Christian farmers grow genetically-modified foods?

- How do Christians understand what constitutes “progress”?
- What ethical issues do we need to consider in the subject of genetically-modified foods? For example: human safety, environmental safety, control, commodification, economic power.
- Ought living organisms to be patented and owned?

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Here are a few of the many publications available on this topic. We have chosen those which reflect on the ethics of biotechnology from the perspective of our Christian churches.

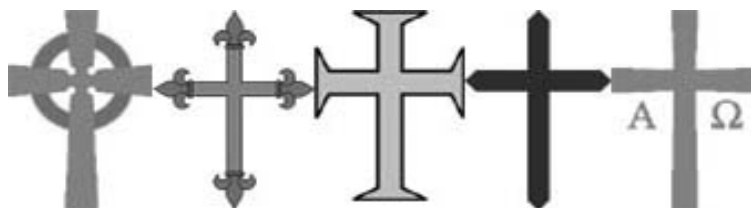
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The Commission on Faith and Witness brings together representatives of the 20 different denominations represented on the Council. Together we work to reflect theologically on matters of concern in our own day, and on questions of historical interest to the churches. Our work in recent years has included: a statement on euthanasia and assisted suicide; service kits published annually to help churches celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; a forum on ecumenical dialogues in Canada; a handbook on marriage in our churches. For these and other publications, please consult our website.



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We would also appreciate hearing your feedback, including how you have used this resource.

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