

THEOLOGICAL FORUM MAY 2022

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Commend the Report "The Earth is the Lord's: A Theological Account of Creation Care" to congregations for study and instruct the Faith Impact Forum to provide opportunities and resources to aid reflection, conversation and response. (*Section 3; Appendix 2*)
3. Receive the Report "The Confessional Position of the Church of Scotland: Proposals for Reform" as a response to the instruction given by the General Assembly of 2021. (*Section 2; Appendix 1*)
4. Instruct the Faith Nurture Forum and the Theological Forum to introduce teaching on the confessional position of the Church and the vows of office holders for those entering into recognised ministries and eldership. (*Appendix 1, Section 4.3*)
5. Approve in principle the proposals for creating a Book of Confessions and corresponding changes to the vows and subscription of office holders, and instruct the Theological Forum and the Legal Questions Committee to bring an Overture effecting these changes to the General Assembly of 2023. (*Appendix 1, Sections 4.4 & 4.6*)

06

Report

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Theological Forum was established by the General Assembly to 'resource, express and challenge the theology that informs the life and work of the Church'. Its remit is to:

- (a) articulate and develop the doctrinal understanding of the Church in accordance with Holy Scripture and with reference to the confessional standards of the Church of Scotland;
- (b) express the theological vision of the Church in its worship, fellowship, witness and mission in and beyond contemporary Scotland;
- (c) respond to particular theological requests as and when these arise from the General Assembly, the Council of Assembly and the ecumenical partners of the Church;
- (d) draw to the attention of the General Assembly theological matters which the Theological Forum considers to be of pressing contemporary relevance;
- (e) stimulate wider theological reflection throughout the Church on key doctrinal, ethical and apologetic matters through the provision of appropriate materials and other activities.

1.2 The Forum has continued to serve this wide-ranging remit and over the last year has concentrated on those issues assigned to it by the General Assembly of 2021. Its work has been carried out through substantial reading, discussion, reflection and prayer in its meetings, and through consultation with the other Councils, Committees and Fora of the Church. The Forum has also advised upon a spectrum of issues that have arisen out of enquiries received from the wider Church. The following Report and Appendices are offered as an update on work carried out throughout 2021.

2 WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

2.1 The General Assembly of 2018 passed an Overture from the Presbytery of Melrose and Peebles, instructing the Theological Forum:

- (1) *to review the reports and debates on the role of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Church's life arising from the General Assembly of 1968 and the years following;*
- (2) *to give fresh consideration to the issues raised therein in light of developments within Reformed and ecumenical theology since 1646 in which the Church of Scotland has been actively involved;*
- (3) *to advise the General Assembly on the continuing role of a 'Subordinate Standard';*
- (4) *to look afresh at the wording and terms of reference of the Formula of subscription used in services of ordination;*
- (5) *to explore the possibility of producing a Book of Confessions, in print and/or on-line as a teaching resource for office-bearers, members and enquirers;*
- (6) *to report to the General Assembly of 2020.*

2.2 As part of its work on this issue, the Forum commissioned four papers and organised a conference titled *Westminster, Confessions and the Church*, which was held at New College on Wednesday 8 May 2019.^[1]

2.3 The Forum's interim report, 'Westminster, Confessions and the Church'^[2], was due to be presented to the General Assembly of 2020, but was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, the report was brought to the General Assembly of 2021, and, as this was an online event, the Forum organised a webinar called *Westminster, Confessions and the Church: An Open Discussion* on Wednesday 12th May 2021. The Forum is grateful to the 104 people who attended and for the high level of discussion on the day.

2.4 The Forum's 2021 interim report requested that the General Assembly:

5. Encourage Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to discuss the questions laid out in Section 23 of "Westminster, Confessions and the Church" (Appendix), along with any further or additional comments, and respond to the Theological Forum by 31 December 2021."

2.5 This deadline was extended into January, in order to give more time for reflection. To assist with this consultation process, the Forum was also asked by the General Assembly of 2021 to produce a video resource on the Westminster Confession of Faith, as follows:

4. Invite the Theological Forum to facilitate knowledge of the Westminster Confession by producing video resources on the Confession to allow Church leaders and members to study the Confession if they so wished; such material to assist the Church in gaining an understanding of its subordinate standard and thus allow engagement with the consultation which the Forum seeks.

2.6 The video can be accessed via the Church of Scotland's YouTube channel at the following web address: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Cmq_tG_mWw&t=496s.

2.7 The Forum is grateful for the time that Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and individuals set aside to discuss matters relating to the Westminster Confession of Faith and for the responses it received. Having taken them into consideration, and in response to Deliverance 6 of the 2021 interim report, to "*bring firm proposals regarding the confessional standards of the Church to the General Assembly of 2022*", the Forum now presents its report "The Confessional Position of the Church of Scotland: Proposals for Reform" in Appendix 1 of this Report.

2.8 Lastly, the Forum would like to thank the Legal Questions Committee for providing guidance and support on a number of complex legal matters and also our colleagues in the Presbyterian Church (USA), who took the time to speak with us about their Book of Confessions and its use in theological education and worship.

3. ECOTHEOLOGY

3.1 Part of the Forum's remit is:

(d) to draw to the attention of the General Assembly theological matters which the Theological Forum considers to be of pressing contemporary relevance.

3.2 The Forum is convinced that theological reflection on climate change and the present ecological crisis more generally, clearly falls within this section of the remit, indeed also as part of our commitment to the fifth Mark of Mission, "*to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.*"

3.3 The Forum is aware of the commitment already being made by Scottish churches to address climate change and there are now over 450 congregations registered with Eco-Congregation Scotland.^[3] Efforts are also being made at a national level by the Church of Scotland; the General Assembly of 2021 saw the Investors Trust disinvest from oil and gas companies and the Assembly also adopted the Faith Impact Forum's "Net Zero by 2030" framework for transitioning locally and nationally to net zero carbon emissions by the end of the decade. All of this is set against the backdrop of COP26 during which countries from all over the world brought forward plans to reduce their emissions and to update the Paris Agreement of 2015. The Forum welcomes these initiatives and all future efforts that seek to reduce human impact upon the environment.

3.4 The Forum has also identified the need, however, to ground this praxis in a robust theological account of the relationship between human beings and the natural world. This is done, in the report "The Earth is the Lord's: A Theological Account of Creation Care" (Appendix 2), by locating the fifth Mark of Mission within the wider, overarching theological narrative of creation, redemption and eschatology. When the Church's environmental mission is grounded in this theological framework, it can be understood not merely as an optional extra but as an integral part of the Church's creaturely identity in Christ.

3.5 What is offered in Appendix 2 is the culmination of work over a two-year period, during which time the Forum read widely across a broad range of biblical, systematic, historical, scientific and applied theological perspectives. The Forum also consulted with representatives from the Faith Impact Forum and Eco-Congregation Scotland and is grateful for their time and expertise.

4. RETROSPECTIVE APOLOGY

4.1 The Forum was asked on the floor of the 2021 General Assembly to consider theologically the issue of retrospective apology in relation to the historic persecution of those accused of witchcraft in Scotland between the 16th and 18th centuries. This request came from a spokesperson on behalf of an action group in Fife which is seeking pardon from the Scottish Government and an apology from the Church of Scotland for its involvement in the so-called 'witch-hunts'.

4.2 The Forum spent time exploring the various factors that might be taken into consideration when thinking about what makes particular apologies fitting and now offers the paper 'Apologising for Historic Wrongs', which can be found on the Theological Forum's webpage at <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/councils-committees-and-departments/committees/theological-forum>, as a resource for the Church in its continuing deliberations on this issue.

5. JEWISH-CHRISTIAN GLOSSARY PROJECT

5.1 A representative of the Theological Forum sat on a Working Group comprised of three members from the Church of Scotland and three Orthodox Rabbis from the Jewish community. This project was in partnership with the Chief Rabbi’s Office and aimed to create a theological glossary of terms shared but understood differently by both communities. The Glossary itself is pending publication at the time of writing this report but more information about its construction can be found in the Faith Impact Forum’s General Assembly report (*Deliverance 10; Section 5; Appendix 1*).

6. FUTURE WORK

6.1 The Forum anticipates further work on confessional reform and has also received requests to explore questions relating to ordination, call and orders of ministry, in light of widespread changes currently taking place. The Forum stands ready to assist the General Assembly and its Councils, Committees and Fora in any matter of theology and doctrine and would welcome consultation at an early stage in any significant pieces of work.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

7.1 The Forum values the hard work, commitment and contribution of each of its members and is grateful to all those who have sought its views and listened so graciously to its comments. It would also like to express its thanks to those who attended the webinar and to those who contributed to the consultation on the Westminster Confession of Faith.

In the name of the Theological Forum

LIAM JERROLD FRASER, *Convener*
 NATHALIE MARES MacCALLUM, *Secretary*

Addendum

Rev Prof Susan Hardman Moore

Rev Prof Susan Hardman Moore resigned as Vice-Convener of the Theological Forum in January 2022. During her time in this role, she brought her expertise in the intersection of the disciplines of theology and history to the Forum’s conversations, reflection and writing, particularly in contributing to our report on Ecotheology. We wish her well in her continued service in the academy and the church.

LIAM JERROLD FRASER, *Convener*
 NATHALIE MARES MacCALLUM, *Secretary*

Appendix 1

1. The Confessional Position of the Church of Scotland: Proposals for Reform (2022)

1.1 The General Assembly of 2018 instructed the Theological Forum to undertake a full review of the role of the Westminster Confession of Faith in our Church, including the vows and subscription that office holders make in relation to it. Upon presenting our interim findings, the General Assembly of 2021 instructed the Theological Forum to return to the General Assembly of 2022 with firm proposals on the confessional standards of the Church. In this Report, we present the final conclusions of our review, and our proposals for the confessional reform of the Church.

1.2 While much of the content of this Report is detailed and complex, its intentions are simple: to help the Church reform itself by the Word of God as it responds to the changed context of 21st century Scotland, to locate the basic beliefs we hold in common, and to resolve centuries-old disagreement over the Westminster Confession, allowing us to move into the future with hope.

1.3 Our proposals are:

- To give ministers and other recognised ministries greater knowledge and confidence in their faith through teaching on the confessional position of the Church and the vows and subscription of office holders.
- To create a Book of Confessions that will contain the Westminster Confession of Faith and other statements of faith that express the range and depth of Reformed thought.
- To clarify the location of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that we hold in common.
- To amend the vows and subscription that office holders make in light of these changes.

1.4 In presenting these proposals, we believe that they meet the primary concerns of all sections of the Church. For those who do not agree with the Westminster Confession and want a contemporary faith that is fit for purpose, office holders will no longer have to make vows or subscribe to the Confession at all, and will have the opportunity to propose *new* confessions for inclusion in a Book of Confessions. For those who worry that a change in the status of the Westminster Confession will lead to doctrinal confusion, by retaining the status of the Westminster Confession as a subordinate standard, clarifying the location of the fundamental doctrines of the faith, and creating teaching on the Church’s confessional position, we believe that the Reformed nature of the Church will be strengthened. Finally, for those who think confessional reform is irrelevant and a distraction from ministry and mission, our proposed reforms will aid the internal unity of the Church, provide tools for teaching and discipleship, and facilitate greater partnership with other denominations.

1.5 We begin this Report by describing the current status and role of the Westminster Confession in our Church. We then explore some of the difficulties with the Church's existing confessional position, problems that – importantly – have implications for all sections of the Church. We conclude by explaining our proposals to remedy these difficulties: how by emphasising the beliefs we have in common, while recognising a greater range of Reformed and ecumenical voices, we can hold fast to the foundations of our faith, while being open to the leading of the Spirit in this day and age.

2. The Current Status and Role of the Westminster Confession in our Church

2.1 The question of whether the Westminster Confession should remain the sole subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland is a different question from whether we agree with the teaching of the Westminster Confession. The latter question is a purely theological and biblical one, while the former involves consideration of a wider range of factors. Among these are the shape and contents of the constitution of the Church, the vows office holders make, and the formula of subscription that they sign. The meaning of the Westminster Confession in our church is not only determined by the words of its text, or whether we agree with it or not, then, but how it is *used, situated and interpreted* within the constitution of our Church. As we will see, the use and function of the Confession in our Church gives rise to some surprising outcomes.

2.2 According to the First Article Declaratory,^[4] the Word of God contained in Scripture is the 'supreme rule of faith and life' for the Church. Yet the Second Article Declaratory declares that the Westminster Confession of Faith is the 'principal subordinate standard' of the Church. This means that while Scripture has ultimate authority, the Church of Scotland currently acknowledges the Westminster Confession as the best human guide to Scripture's teaching. It is 'subordinate' to Scripture, but is nevertheless the 'standard' to which all belief and theology should be held.

2.3 The Westminster Confession's status as principal subordinate standard thereby accords it, on one level, a great deal of status and honour. Of all the creeds and confessions of the Christian Church, the constitution of the Church of Scotland considers it the most reliable and truthful. Nevertheless, while the Confession is given a position of high status and honour, its authority over office holders and the Church as a whole is intentionally limited by a number of other measures. The first of these is the vows that office holders make and the formula of subscription that they sign. At ordination and induction, ministers do not declare their belief in the Westminster Confession and subscribe to it but vow and subscribe to the 'fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith'. Second, ministers and other office holders sign a short statement that summarises their vows and provides a written record of them. These measures mean that office holders declare their belief in the basic Christian doctrines *contained* in the Confession but not the entire Confession itself.

3. Difficulties with the Current Status and Role of the Westminster Confession

3.1 The Church of Scotland's practice in relation to vows and subscription is a consequence of the first difficulty with the role of the Westminster Confession in our Church: significant numbers of office holders reject its distinctive doctrines.

3.2 As we described in our 2021 report 'Westminster, Confessions and the Church', the Confession has been the subject of controversy for many centuries. In the 18th century, it played a role in the First and Second Secessions from our Church, secessions that resulted in the creation of multiple Presbyterian churches. This controversy reached unworkable levels in the 19th century, however, due to a number of factors. Chapter 4 of the Westminster Confession states that the world was created in six days.^[5] Without any indication to suggest that 'days' is intended in a non-literal way, many ministers and elders came to the conclusion that the Confession was at odds with contemporary science, and posed a threat to the public credibility of the faith. The greatest difficulty, however, was with the Confession's account of God's eternal decree, election and predestination. The majority of the Church's office holders came to the conclusion that the Westminster Confession was not biblical in claiming that 'some men and angels are predestined [by God] to everlasting life; while others are foreordained [by God] to everlasting death.'^[6] They considered it unbiblical to teach, as the Confession does, that all human beings are deserving of damnation and that salvation only occurs when God - for reasons that are completely unknowable - chooses to save a select few, while condemning the rest to perish eternally in hell. They were also unsettled by the implications for the Person and Work of Christ that this teaching entailed. For if the Father only intends to save *some* people, then Christ lived, and died, and rose again not with the hope of saving all people, but with the *deliberate intention* of saving only some. The rejection of the Confession continued as the 20th century moved on, with the Church of Scotland largely ceasing to teach its office holders about the Westminster Confession, and not requiring them to follow it.^[7] If one of the core functions of a confession is to present what a church believes and to guide the doctrine and teaching of office holders, then due to the rejection of its teachings, and its lack of use within the Church, it is questionable whether the Westminster Confession fulfils the function of a confession.

3.3 This issue - that the Church of Scotland has a subordinate standard which many of its office holders reject - gives rise to another difficulty: whether it is desirable for the Church to make its office holders vow and subscribe to a statement of faith that does not express the beliefs of the majority of its members or office holders.

3.4 One argument we have encountered with regard to this issue is that, while it is unsatisfactory to make office holders vow and subscribe to something that few believe or even read, to remedy it would not be a good use of the Church's time. How do vows or confessions make a difference to what the Church actually cares about, such as worship, and working in mission to the people of Scotland?

3.5 In a time of great pressures on the Church, this argument has certain attractions. Yet it understates the significance of vow-making, and the importance of office holders understanding what they are vowing and subscribing to. When we reach a new agreement with a bank, service provider or business partner, we carefully read and consider what we are agreeing to. When those of us who are married stood before our partner to make our vows, we understood and embraced the promises we were making. If that is true of everyday life, then it is also true of the vows we make

as office holders, and it is important that those who serve the Church both understand and agree with what they are vowing and subscribing to.

3.6 While the focus of confessional reform in the Church has centred on the Westminster Confession, the Forum has also paid close attention to the relationship between the Westminster Confession, the vows of office holders and the Articles Declaratory. As we noted earlier, the vows and subscription that office holders make refer to ‘the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith’ contained in the Westminster Confession. It is these doctrines, said to be present within the Confession, that office holders promise to be bound by. Yet what are the ‘fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith?’ Are the ‘fundamentals’ a matter of individual choice and conscience, something for each person to decide for themselves, or does the Church teach what doctrines are fundamental?

3.7 As a matter of fact, Cox, Herron and Weatherhead – amongst other authorities – are unanimous in stating that the basic doctrines of the Christian faith are contained in the First Article Declaratory.^[8] The First Article reads:

I. The Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church; worshipping one God, Almighty, all-wise, and all-loving, in the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; adoring the Father, infinite in Majesty, of whom are all things; confessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, made very man for our salvation; glorying in His Cross and Resurrection, and owning obedience to Him as the Head over all things to His Church; trusting in the promised renewal and guidance of the Holy Spirit; proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God through faith in Christ, and the gift of Eternal Life; and labouring for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world. The Church of Scotland adhere to the Scottish Reformation; receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life; and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon.

3.8 It is clear from the First Article itself, taken with the Eighth Article Declaratory,^[9] that the Church is bound by the content of the First Article. Yet this has not always been apparent to office holders. This is due, in part, to the condensed and quasi-legal form of the First Article, yet also because teaching on the Church’s constitution forms little or no part in the training offered for eldership or the recognised ministries of the Church. The result of this ambiguity is that it is not always clear what beliefs office holders of the Church of Scotland have in common, and the Church sometimes struggles to articulate a clear and consistent message to our neighbours about our purpose as a Church, and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

4. The Proposals of the Theological Forum

4.1 In discerning the way forward, the Forum has consulted widely, and has heard from all sections of the Church. We have held two public conferences on the subject of confessional reform, the first in person in 2019 and the other online in 2021. At the General Assembly of 2021, we also invited Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to send us their views concerning confessional reform, and produced a video to help them in their deliberations. As of early March 2022, we have received 57 submissions on the issue of confessional reform from Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and individual members, more than any other issue the Theological Forum has considered. In addition, our video on the Westminster Confession is one of the most watched on the Church of Scotland YouTube channel, having had 2,346 views as of early March 2022. As such, while individual commissioners may feel that they do not have much interest in the issues presented in this report, the notion that *no one* is interested in confessional reform is clearly not the case.

4.2 We have listened carefully to all the views expressed to us. They are held with integrity, and there is truth in all of them. After considering the submissions made to us, and after much discussion and consideration, the Theological Forum believes it has found a way forward that will satisfy the majority of office holders and members. We believe that the following proposals will clarify our faith, allow for a greater range of Reformed identities in our Church, and give us a confessional position that is fit for purpose in the challenging context of 21st century Scotland.

4.3 Training for Recognised Ministries

4.3.1 Our first proposal is a simple yet crucial one: that those entering into the recognised ministries of the Church should be taught about the confessional position of the Church and be instructed in the meaning of their vows.

4.3.2 Currently, provision for both of these is fragmentary. Some in training may be instructed in the confessional position of the Church and some not. Some may be told about the meaning of their vows and others not. We think it is reasonable that those in recognised ministries – especially parish ministers – should understand the confessional position of the Church, and understand what they are vowing and subscribing to. This basic element of training could be delivered either by the Church itself or by academic providers working in unison with the Church.

4.3.3 In addition to training for recognised ministries, if the General Assembly accepts our deliverance this year, we will return in a future Assembly with the proposal to produce a short, accessible guide to the vows and subscription that elders – as opposed to other office holders – have to make in collaboration with Faith Nurture. This will allow elders to better understand the vows they are making and enable them to enter into eldership with greater confidence and integrity.

4.4 A Book of Confessions

4.4.1 Because the Westminster Confession no longer performs the functions of a confession in our Church, we propose the creation of a new Book of Confessions to contain the subordinate standards of the Church. The Westminster Confession would retain its status as a subordinate standard of the Church but would be joined by other historic and contemporary statements of faith.

4.4.2 The Book of Confessions would have two functions. The first would be to preserve the status of the Church of Scotland as a confessional Reformed Church. Since its Reformation, the Church of Scotland has been a confessional Church. This means that it has not declared its faith through a supreme human leader, nor through a fixed liturgy, but through statements of faith: statements, couched in human words, that declare its understanding of the Word of God

contained in Scripture. The Book of Confessions would continue this practice. The Book would not only identify and present a range of individual doctrines but the *whole faith* of the Church of Scotland, covering crucial matters such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and our understanding of ministry and mission.

4.4.3 The fact that the Book of Confessions would contain a number of documents is a recognition of two realities. The first is that the same Word of God contained in Scripture, and received by the Church of Scotland, can be articulated in different ways at different times. If this were not the case, then Scripture might remain a collection of ancient texts rather than the 'lively oracles of God', able to speak into and transform every lived context. The second, however, is that there are *multiple Reformed identities* present within our Church. Some of our brothers and sisters believe and follow the Westminster Confession of Faith in its entirety, while others look to the Scots Confession, the 1992 Statement of Faith, or other Reformed confessions. This is not a weakness of our Church, but allows for a range of Reformed perspectives to be heard and considered. If the only Reformed identity was one centred on the Westminster Confession, then – somewhat ironically – John Calvin and John Knox, who lived before the advent of the Confession, could not be considered truly Reformed. Recognising multiple Reformed documents in a Book of Confessions allows these texts to speak to each other, to Scripture, and to us, allowing a dynamic engagement with the Bible, our present context and our tradition. Out of this dialogue, new light on God's Word can be revealed.

4.4.4 The second function of the Book of Confessions would be to act as an aid for office holders as they teach and disciple in 21st century Scotland. Ministers and other recognised ministries will have a single point of reference for seeking to understand the teaching of the Church, and explaining it to members and enquirers. They will have rich theological resources from across the history of our Church to draw upon, and to bring into conversation with contemporary issues. The Book will form the map and compass of the Church, providing it with landmarks by which to navigate the shifting terrain we find ourselves in.

4.4.5 We are proposing that the initial documents to be included in the Book of Confessions are:

The Scots Confession

The Westminster Confession

The 1992 Statement of Faith

4.4.6 The choice of these documents has been determined by their historic recognition by the Church and their likely acceptance by current office holders. Many other documents were considered, but failed to meet at least one of these criteria. The documents chosen also possess a number of other merits. The Scots Confession has been chosen because it was the first confession of the Reformed Church of Scotland and its emphasis on the Trinity, the continuity of the Church of Scotland with the medieval Church and its account of election and predestination are worthy of close study. The Westminster Confession has been included because it has played a prominent role in the life of the Church of Scotland for centuries, and because it still has much to teach us regarding the sacraments, the threefold office of Christ and other areas of Reformed doctrine. Lastly, the 1992 Statement of Faith has the merit of being the most accessible of the proposed documents. It also contains the crucial statement 'God is love'.

4.4.7 The selection of these documents makes it clear that the Theological Forum has no desire to dilute or discard the Reformed identity of the Church of Scotland. As the First Article Declaratory makes clear, the Church of Scotland is a product of the Reformation. Further, by recognising the different ways in which it is possible to be Reformed, the Church of Scotland is not placing itself in a minority position among the worldwide Reformed Church, but within the majority. Only a minority of global Reformed Christians recognise the Westminster Confession as their sole subordinate standard. The majority recognise it as one authoritative confession amongst others or recognise *other* Reformed confessions in its place.

4.4.8 While we have selected the documents above to form the initial contents of the Book of Confessions, we are also proposing that there should be a mechanism for *adding* documents to the Book. These may be existing statements of faith such as the Barmen Declaration or the Belhar Confession, or – if the General Assembly instructs it – a new confession of faith. This is important, as the Church must be able to reform itself in light of the Word of God contained in Scripture. Identifying a mechanism for adding confessions would therefore allow the Church to confess its belief that God is still speaking today into our particular context and is passionately concerned with issues such as equality, ecology, and social justice that historic confessions do not address or do so in ways that are different from our current understanding of the Word.

4.4.9 It must be stressed, however, that the constitution and legal framework of the Church of Scotland sets *limits* as to what can be included in the Book of Confessions. The legal status of the First Article Declaratory means that, for example, it would not be possible to include a statement of faith that denied the supremacy of the Word of God, or which denied other fundamental Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, or the Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection of Christ. According to the Eighth Article Declaratory, everything the Church does must be done in light of the First Article Declaratory. In addition, legislation of the General Assembly dealing with baptism, the Lord's Supper, and other ordinances set additional limits on what could be included in any Book of Confessions.

4.4.10 The biblical and Reformed character of the Church of Scotland, along with a correct interpretation of the historic meaning of its subordinate standards, would also be preserved by the new requirement, discussed above, for teaching on the confessional position of the Church. If the General Assembly were to create a new Book of Confessions, teaching on the Book would become a part of training for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and other recognised ministries. This is the practice in the Presbyterian Church (USA), where ministers are tested on their knowledge of their own Book of Confessions, and how they would use the Book in parish life. As such, if the Church chooses to create a Book of Confessions, the Westminster Confession and other historic Reformed confessions are likely to be read and used *more* than they currently are.

4.4.11 Use of the Book of Confessions would also be aided by two forms of guidance that would accompany it. The first would be short introductions prefacing the statements of faith contained in the Book of Confessions. These would explain how the statements of faith came to be written, what is distinctive about them, and what role they have played in the life of the Church of Scotland. The second would be accessible resources giving further information about the contents of the Book of Confessions, along with study questions and ideas for its use in parish life. These additional forms of guidance will allow as many office holders and Church members as possible to read, understand, and use the Book of Confessions.

4.5 Identifying the Location of the Fundamental Doctrines

4.5.1 A number of respondents to our consultation expressed a fear that an increase in the number of subordinate standards could result in an erosion of the place of doctrine in the Church. In particular, some respondents felt a Book of Confessions could result in the Church of Scotland losing sight of even the most basic Christian doctrines, endangering belief in the Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement and Resurrection of Christ.

4.5.2 For this reason, the Forum is proposing that the location of the fundamental doctrines be identified in the vows and subscription of office holders as 'expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds'. This would provide clarity as to the location of the fundamental doctrines, and address the fear that the creation of a Book of Confessions might endanger these beliefs.

4.5.3 We propose that the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds be identified as the location of the fundamental doctrines in our Church for the following reasons:

First, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds already enjoy a level of status and authority within the Church of Scotland. They are printed in the front cover of *The Book of Common Order*, feature in its liturgies, and are often used at ordinations. As such, they are already part of the life of the Church of Scotland.

Second, the short and relatively accessible form of the Creeds is useful for teaching and discipleship. Due to personnel shortages, more and more elders and members are being asked to preach and lead services. By locating the fundamental doctrines of the faith in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, those leading worship would have short summaries of the faith to help them in their tasks. The Creeds have already been used as the basis for a number of *Learn* publications, and so accessible guides to them already exist. Having short summaries of the faith, supported by *Learn* resources, would also help ministers, elders and other office holders to disciple enquirers, and work with those interested in the Christian faith.

Third, emphasis on the Creeds is useful for strengthening the unity of the Church of Scotland. Shared statements of faith such as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds remind us that we have more in common than what separates us, and that though we may disagree over secondary issues, we are a single Church with a common faith. It is by the action of the Trinity in Christ's Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that we have been made one people out of many, and it is these saving and unifying actions that the fundamental doctrines express.

Fourth, emphasising our shared belief in Christ would not only contribute to the unity of the Church of Scotland but would help our partnerships with other churches. The Creeds are recognised by almost every other Christian denomination in Scotland, whether this be the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church or the Free Church, amongst many others. Currently, however, the First Article Declaratory – which is thought to contain the fundamental doctrines – is only recognised by the Church of Scotland. The increased visibility of the Creeds in the vows and subscription of office holders would make it clearer that the Church of Scotland is part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and that while we are members of different denominations, all Christians are united in the one, single, and indivisible Body of Jesus Christ. This not only has implications for our consciousness of unity, but also increases the possibility of concrete missional partnerships on the ground. Clarifying the beliefs that we share with the majority of Scottish and world Christians makes it clear that – while we continue to have differences and distinct emphases – we share the same fundamental faith, and can therefore cooperate in at least some areas of mission.

4.6 Changes to Vows, Subscription and Other Documents

4.6.1 Having provided an overview of our proposed changes and the rationale behind them, we turn now to the concrete changes themselves. While the changes listed below are substantially those that will feature in any enacting legislation, they should be understood as *indicative* only. If the General Assembly approves our proposals in principle, the final wording of the Overture may differ slightly from that discussed below. Nevertheless, the *intention* behind the final wording and its *effect* will be identical to that outlined. The intention is to achieve a sustainable balance of unity and diversity within the Church, and the effect will be that office holders declare their belief in the fundamental doctrines of the faith, and promise to be guided by the Book of Confessions.

4.6.2 The way in which the Church has historically orientated office holders to its official confessional position is through vows and subscription. The Forum is proposing that the Church continue with this practice in relation to the proposed Book of Confessions, and the historic Creeds of the Church. Our proposals will, therefore, be effected through an amendment to the third vow that ministers and a number of other office holders make, the addition of a new vow and a corresponding change in the formula of subscription signed by all office holders.

4.6.3 The third vow currently reads:

Do you believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church?

In light of the changes proposed above, this would be amended to read:

Do you believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds?

This vow assures the Church that the office holder believes the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, and that the office holders of the Church of Scotland share the same basic beliefs.

4.6.4 In professing a belief that the fundamental doctrines are expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, it is important to understand what *is* being said and what *is not* being said. It is being said that if we wish to know where the fundamental doctrines are found, we should look to the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Yet it *is not* being said that office holders would now vow or subscribe to the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as opposed to the Westminster Confession. Rather, office holders would be asked to declare their belief in the *fundamental doctrines* expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. In addition, it *is not* being claimed that these texts say *everything* that can be said about the fundamental doctrines. The majesty of God is so infinite that it is impossible for human words to fully describe it, and the work of God so high and deep that if every creed, confession and hymn of praise were piled up, they would still fall infinitely short of doing justice to it. However, *it is* being said that these texts are truthful summaries of Scripture's teaching, and that they express God's majesty and work *in part*, if not fully.

4.6.5 This also forms part of a response to those who worry that more emphasis on the Creeds of the Church might be stifling or unduly constraining for faith and worship. It is sometimes claimed that doctrine is the enemy of faith and worship, a preoccupation with the head when we should be focussing on the heart, and the spontaneous action of the Spirit. Yet this is to misconstrue the relationship between doctrine, faith and worship. The Creeds are not akin to the growing plant itself, but to the trellis that supports it, or the skeleton that gives structure to flesh and blood. They are not the life of the plant or body, but help make that life possible by structuring and supporting it. As such, rather than being the enemy of faith and worship, the fundamental doctrines of the faith expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are great aids to them, providing a firm foundation upon which worship and discipleship can stand.

4.6.6 In addition to this amended vow, a new vow would be added:

Do you confess the Catholic and Reformed Faith of the Church as expressed in its Book of Confessions, and promise to be guided by the said Book in your life and doctrine?

This vow would clarify what the nature of our faith is: it is Catholic and Reformed. We will consider these two words in turn.

4.6.7 'Catholic' is a Greek-derived word meaning 'Universal'. Its use here expresses the fact that the Church of Scotland is founded on the fundamental doctrines embraced by the early Church and shared with all other Christians. Because there is only one Lord, one basic faith, and one baptism, there is only one Church, and when we ordain women and men to the offices in our Church we do not only ordain them to office in the Church of Scotland alone, but to office in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. 'Catholic' also makes it clear that the Church of Scotland is in full continuity with the medieval Church of Scotland. The Scottish Reformers did not create a new Church, but reformed the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church existing in Scotland at the time. The use of the word 'Catholic' also has two other benefits. It refers back to the use of the word 'Catholic' in the Preamble to ordinations and inductions and to the First Article Declaratory, ensuring that the Forum's proposed reforms use a terminology that is in harmony with our existing constitution. The use of the word 'Catholic' also expresses the fact that, while the Church of Scotland is a separate denomination from the Roman Catholic Church, we recognise and respect all that is true in Roman Catholic tradition. This is important for our Roman Catholic neighbours - and Scotland as a whole - to hear. By owning our Catholicity, the Church of Scotland rejects any artificial separation between ourselves and our Roman Catholic neighbours, and affirms that we have more in common than what separates us.

4.6.8 Nevertheless, while the Church of Scotland is Catholic, it is also *Reformed*. It was decisively shaped by the Scottish Reformation, and in its worship, understanding of ministry, and sacramental theology (i.e. its belief and practice in relation to Baptism and Holy Communion) it stands with John Knox, John Calvin, and other members of the worldwide Reformed Church. It is also closely related to - but not to be conflated with - our Presbyterian polity. Reformed churches such as our own generally affirm representative government, the accountability of Ministers, and the exercise of oversight (or *episkope*) by Church courts rather than by individuals. Nothing in the proposed Book of Confessions conflicts with these Reformed distinctives. Indeed, our selection of documents for inclusion in the proposed Book of Confessions affirms them, and shows the continuity of these statements of faith with each other and with the current theology and ecclesiology of the Church of Scotland.

4.6.9 Having discussed the first part of the new vow, we turn to its last clause, the promise of office holders 'to be guided by the said Book in your life and doctrine'. By promising to be 'guided' by the Book of Confessions, office holders are promising that their beliefs, teaching and life will be informed and shaped by the Book of Confessions. The form that this guiding takes will differ, of course, depending on the type of ministry or service the office holder is undertaking.

4.6.10 It is important to note what is *not* being intended by the use of the word 'guided'. The word 'guided' does not mean 'dictated to' or 'fully controlled by' but *informed* and *shaped* by. Office holders are *not* vowing or subscribing to every word of every statement of faith in the Book of Confessions. That would be both repressive and futile. Neither is liberty of opinion being endangered. The liberty of opinion clause will remain in the Preamble to ordinations and inductions, ensuring that office holders are not constrained by anything in the Book of Confessions save those matters that touch upon the fundamentals of the faith. Liberty of opinion is one of the ways in which the Church discerns the true meaning of Scripture and God's will for the present day, and nothing in our proposals jeopardizes this. Yet the use of the word 'guided' *does* ensure that ministers in particular will *read, understand, and take seriously* the Book of Confessions. To use an analogy, if we go on a walking tour of a city while on holiday, we are usually happy to follow our guide. Yet if we come to believe that our guide is guiding us into some danger, then we are at liberty to depart from our guide and go our own way.

4.6.11 In addition to these additions and amendments, it would also be necessary to amend several other documents and texts such as the Formula of Subscription, and the Preamble to ordinations and inductions.

4.6.12 The Formula of Subscription currently reads:

I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church. I acknowledge the Presbyterian government of this Church to be agreeable to the Word of God, and promise that I will submit thereto and concur therewith. I promise to observe the order of worship and administration of all public ordinances as the same are or may be allowed in this Church.

4.6.13 This would be amended to read:

I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. I promise to be guided in my life and doctrine by the Book of Confessions of this Church. I acknowledge the Presbyterian government of this Church to be agreeable to the Word of God, and promise that I will submit thereto and concur therewith. I promise to observe the order of worship and administration of all public ordinances as the same are or may be allowed in this Church.

4.6.14 The Preamble currently reads:

The Church of Scotland holds as its subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith, recognising liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the Faith, and claiming the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret or modify its subordinate standards: always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained in the said Confession – of which agreement the Church itself shall be sole judge.

4.6.15 This would be amended to read:

The subordinate standards of the Church of Scotland are contained in its Book of Confessions, recognising liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the fundamental doctrines of the Faith, and claiming the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret or modify its subordinate standards: always in agreement with the Word of God, and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds – of which agreement the Church itself shall be sole judge.

4.6.16 Lastly, the Second Article Declaratory currently reads:

II. The principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland is the Westminster Confession of Faith approved by the General Assembly of 1647, containing the sum and substance of the Faith of the Reformed Church. Its government is Presbyterian, and is exercised through Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, and General Assemblies. Its system and principles of worship, orders, and discipline are in accordance with "The Directory for the Public Worship of God," "The Form of Presbyterial Church Government" and "The Form of Process," as these have been or may hereafter be interpreted or modified by Acts of the General Assembly or by consuetude.

4.6.17 In order to effect the creation of a Book of Confessions, the first sentence of the Second Article Declaratory would be changed to remove reference to the Westminster Confession as the *principal* subordinate standard, and will include reference to the Book of Confessions instead.

5. Timeline

5.1 In this report, we have presented all of our proposals to the Church. We have done this so that there is clarity and transparency about the proposed changes, and that commissioners are in a position to make fully informed decisions.

5.2 Yet while we have presented all of our proposals this year, the timeline for deciding upon them will be different. This year, the substantial reform the Forum is bringing for the decision of the General Assembly is that concerning teaching on the confessional position of the Church. This only requires the consent of the General Assembly, and does not need to be sent down under the Barrier Act.

5.3 The second deliverance is to agree, in principle, the reforms outlined in this report, and instruct the Theological Forum and the Legal Questions Committee to draft the legislation needed to effect these changes and bring it to the General Assembly of 2023. This gives the Theological Forum and the Legal Questions Committee time to ensure that every legal aspect of this complex issue is considered, while affording office holders who worry that the Church is moving too fast with confessional reform greater opportunity to consider the issues outlined in this report. If the General Assembly of 2023 passes the Overture then it will be sent down to Presbyteries under double Barrier Act Procedure. This requires two subsequent General Assemblies to pass the Overture, and for two thirds of Presbyteries to pass it in two successive years. This procedure is laid down by the Eighth Article Declaratory of the Church, and cannot be expedited.

6. Conclusion

6.1 These are the proposals of the Theological Forum on the Westminster Confession of Faith and the future confessional position of the Church of Scotland. In presenting them, we believe that they achieve the right balance of unity and difference within our Church, not allowing unity to harden into uniformity, or difference to lapse into disorder. In addition, we believe that our proposals respect and preserve the primary interests of the overwhelming majority of office holders and members, while also offering a number of advantages over our current confessional position.

6.2 For those who disagree with the Westminster Confession's teaching on God's character and the nature of salvation, and who resent that they must make vows and subscribe to it, our proposals release them from this obligation, while also giving them the ability to propose *new* statements of faith suitable for this day and age. For those who are concerned that the adoption of a Book of Confessions will erode the biblical and doctrinal basis of the

Church, the clarification of the fundamental doctrines of the faith, teaching on the Book of Confessions, constitutional safeguards on its future contents, and the continued status of the Westminster Confession as a subordinate standard will ensure that the Reformed character of the Church continues. Finally, for those who question the usefulness of this process, our proposals will bring greater unity to the Church by clarifying the location of its fundamental beliefs, make cooperation with other churches easier, and produce a range of new teaching and discipleship materials. In addition, successfully resolving the question of the Westminster Confession will conclude an issue that our Church has wrestled with for centuries, and allow us to move on to other areas of pressing concern.

6.3 The Theological Forum invites the Assembly to enact the confessional reforms contained in this report, that we might strengthen our shared faith, be open to the leading of the Spirit, and reform our Church by the Word of God as we seek to serve and witness to the Scotland of today.

Appendix 2

1. The Earth is the Lord's: A Theological Account of Creation Care (2022)

1.1 In our worship as a Church, we focus a great deal on our relationship with God and our relationship to our neighbours. Yet the Church does not only hope for union with God in Christ, or reconciliation with our neighbours, but for a *new creation*: for a world in which suffering, and decay, and death are banished, and human beings are at one with God, themselves, and the world. In short, the scope of salvation in Scripture is not only personal or corporate but *cosmic*, encompassing God, human beings, other animals, and nature itself.

1.2 The cosmic scale of salvation means that we must hold theologies that properly address the importance of creation to God and to the Church, and counterbalance theological traditions that focus attention on human beings alone. Yet in our present context, a greater understanding of humanity's responsibilities and calling toward creation takes on added importance. We are in the midst of a climate emergency. Global temperatures are rising, giving rise to freak weather patterns, rising sea levels, the destruction of ecosystems, and the risk of ever-greater famines and population movements. In short, there has never been a more important time to understand what God requires of the Church and of all humankind in relation to creation, and the role He has given us within it.

1.3 The appropriateness of *the Church* addressing this crisis is more problematic, however. On the one hand, some within the Church are hesitant that, in a context marked by massive numerical decline and rising unbelief, creation should be a priority for the Church.^[10] On the other hand, some academic commentators blame the Church for *creating* the ecological crisis, and are therefore sceptical about the capacity of Christian theology to provide solutions.^[11]

1.4 We must state clearly at the outset of this report that Scripture does not directly deal with the ecological crisis as we know it today. When the books of the Bible were written, humanity did not possess the ability to cause irreparable damage to the climate. Nevertheless, Scripture offers us a number of key principles concerning creation and humanity's place within it, principles that enable us to produce a biblical and theological response to the climate crisis.

1.5 In the following report, we offer a theological account of creation and our place within it, an *ecotheology*. We begin by examining what Scripture says about creation, noting that we can only understand creation and humanity's role within it by looking to Christ. We then chart the way in which humanity has responded – or failed to respond – to Scripture's teaching, and conclude with what God is saying to our Church today through the Word. We argue that we must fundamentally change our relationship to creation, and that the Church of Scotland, as a territorial church, must use its congregations, buildings, and resources as catalysts to galvanise wider Scottish society in its care for creation.

2. Foundational Principles for Ecotheology

In this section, we will explore the principles that animate Scripture's teaching on creation, and humanity's place within it. We then conclude with a synthesis of this teaching.

2.1 Christ: the Origin and End of Creation

2.1.1 Scripture begins with this statement:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. (Genesis 1-3)

2.1.2 As a Church, we worship God as Lord not only because God saves us from sin and death but because God is the *creator* of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. No matter its complexity and sophistication, everything in creation – including humanity – has its existence from God, and from God alone.

2.1.3 God, then, is the Creator of the universe. Yet while the Book of Genesis begins Scripture, it *is not* the only account of creation given within it. In order to understand *why* the world exists, and what humanity's role within it is, we must look not only to Genesis but to *Christ*.

2.1.4 In the Gospel of John we read:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1: 1-5).

2.1.5 Here, John takes the familiar Genesis passage of God bringing light and life from darkness and chaos, and reveals that it was through *Christ*, God's Word, that the world was created. Creation does not come first, then Jesus and his salvation a great time later, but rather, Christ and creation belong together.

2.1.6 This is elaborated further by Paul in his Letter to the Colossians:

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Colossians 1: 15-19)

2.1.7 This is a rich passage with many nuances. For now, however, we will focus on what Paul means by creation being created 'through', 'in' and 'for' Christ. When Paul says that all things were created 'through' Christ, he means that Father, Son and Spirit were intimately connected with every aspect of the creative act. By the action of the Holy Spirit moving across the waters of chaos, God brought order and regularity to the universe and the earth. Through the Son, the Father created all things to manifest his glory, and predestined them toward their ordained ends and purposes. Through the regularities of nature and his providential will, God the Father rules the universe in love, revealing his wisdom and power through the things he has made (cf. Romans 1: 20). In this way, Scripture rejects a so-called 'deist' view of creation, in which God creates the universe at a distance and then leaves it to its own devices. Rather, God worked – and is working – closely in all of its operations.

2.1.8 When Paul teaches that creation was created 'in' Christ, and that he is the 'head' of the Church, he means that the universe in its totality, and human beings in particular, were created to bear Christ's likeness. It was created to be good, and righteous, and to glorify the Father just as the Son glorifies him, rather than follow its own conception of good, or glorifying itself.

2.1.9 Lastly, Paul's belief that creation was created 'for' Christ, in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, means that one day Christ will return to claim creation and restore it to his will. He will then reign in it forever as its Lord and King. In short, creation was not created for human beings, or even for the Church, but for Christ alone.

2.1.10 Through passages like John 1: 1-15 and Colossians 1:15-19, we see that creation and salvation are not separate from each other, but are two aspects of God's relationship to our world. Salvation is not redemption *from* our humanity or *from* our world, but the re-creation and perfection of our humanity and *of* our world, so that it better resembles the glory of Christ. We also see that human beings and creation were not created by God and then left to their own devices. Rather, being made 'in' and 'for' Christ means that human beings and creation as a whole were created to manifest God's glory in ways appropriate to them. We will explore what these ways are later in this report.

2.2 God is the Sustainer and Perfector of All Things

2.2.1 Through the action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is intimately present to every point of space-time, creating, sustaining and perfecting all things. God is not only concerned with creation as a whole, however, but has a particular concern for animal life. As we read in Psalm 104:

These all look to you [human beings and animals]
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.
May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works. (Psalm 104: 27-31)

2.2.2 The Psalmist here provides a vivid description of God as the carer and sustainer of all things, deeply concerned with the wellbeing of all animals – not only humans – and in whose beauty and goodness God rejoices as a loving Father. Passages such as this are important, for they make it clear that God is not only interested in the welfare of human beings, but of *all* life.

2.2.3 God is not only concerned with *sustaining* life, however, but with *perfecting* animal life, and creation as a whole. While God declares creation to be 'very good' (Genesis 1: 31), as John 1 and Colossians 1 make clear, material creation is incomplete without the presence of its creator. Without God, creation is corruptible, decaying, and born to die. Yet with God, creation is transformed into *new creation*, and becomes what it should be. Isaiah describes the new creation in this way:

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11: 6-9)

2.2.4 God and humanity, human beings and animals will live together in harmony, and death and suffering will be ended. This new creation will not be brought about by human beings alone, however, but by the action of God, who through the saving presence of Christ and the Spirit will perfect human beings, other animals, and nature itself.

2.3 God – and not humanity – is the Ruler of the Earth

2.3.1 Because God is creator, sustainer and perfecter, in whom all things live, and move, and have their being, God is the *ruler* of the earth. Psalm 24 declares that:

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it

2.3.2 The Psalmist is clear that all who live in the world belong to God. This is not – as Psalm 104 makes clear – ownership as *tyranny*, but ownership in the sense of stewarding, protecting, and safeguarding. Because it is *God* who owns the world, this means that neither human beings nor any other creature can lay claim to it. It exists for God's purposes alone, and not for anyone else's.

2.4 Human Beings Were Created to Steward the Earth

2.4.1 The first account of the creation of human beings is given in Genesis 1. Two passages of this account are relevant to our study:

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' (Genesis 1: 26)

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1: 28)

2.4.2 These verses link being made in God's image with the exercise of dominion over other animals and the earth as a whole. Historically, some in the Church and the West more generally have understood this dominion to mean that human beings are permitted by God to dominate, use, and dispose of other animals and the natural world in any way they see fit. This – according to one line of interpretation originating with White – is what is meant by being made 'in God's image',^[12] and has played a decisive role in bringing us to the point of ecological disaster.

2.4.3 While this view has been historically prevalent at times, because God – as we have seen – rules the world for the *benefit* of all creatures, it cannot be authoritative or final. Corroboration for this is found in the second account of creation given in Genesis 2. We read that:

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2: 4-8)

And at verse 15:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (Genesis 2: 15)

2.4.4 Genesis 2 makes it clear that human beings are not fundamentally different from other animals, but are formed from the 'dust of the ground' as much as they are (cf. Genesis 2: 19).^[13] This chapter also gives us more information about what God put human beings on earth to do, the 'first commandment' addressed to us.^[14] God did not place human beings in creation to abuse it. Rather, as verse 15 makes clear, the purpose of human beings is 'to till and to keep' the earth. That – along with glorifying God – is why human beings were put on the earth. The Hebrew words we translate as *till* and *keep* are important. They have the connotation of both *stewarding* and *protecting* the earth, as well as *working* to improve it. None of this should be surprising. If God rules the earth by sustaining and perfecting it, then 'being made in God's image' means that human beings are created and called to do the same. Insofar as we do this, we manifest God's desire to protect and perfect creation, thereby acting as God's 'image' to each other and to the rest of animal life.

2.5 Our Relations with People and Animals Must Be Just

2.5.1 God's intentions for human beings were revealed further in the Law of Israel and the Prophets. Here, God is revealed more clearly as a God of righteousness and justice. As it says in Deuteronomy:

*his work is perfect,
and all his ways are just.
A faithful God, without deceit,
just and upright is he* (Deuteronomy 32: 4)

God's nature and character mean that we, who are made in God's image and called to God's service, must also be just:

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6: 8)

2.5.2 In the Law of Israel, this demand for justice was institutionalised in a variety of ways. Slavery, indenture, and hoarding of land were governed in a way different from other ancient cultures, and reversed every 50 years through the Jubilee (Leviticus 25: 8-13). When harvesting, parts of the field had to be left unharvested, and any dropped grain left behind so that the poor would have enough food (Leviticus 19: 9-10). This teaching would be reaffirmed during the ministry of Christ and the apostles. Jesus strongly links future salvation and judgment to our treatment of the poor (Matthew 25: 31-46), and – despite disagreeing

on some other matters - Peter and Paul are agreed that the Church must care for those who have least (Galatians 2: 10).

2.5.3 This demand for justice does not extend only to human beings, however, but – perhaps surprisingly – to other animals. We read in Exodus:

For six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief (Exodus 23: 12)

And in Proverbs:

*The righteous know the needs of their animals,
but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.* (Proverbs 12: 10)

2.5.4 Here, God commands Israel to treat non-human animals with kindness and consideration, and allow them to enjoy the same Sabbath rest as human beings. While God may have ordained animals to be of use to human beings in their work of stewarding and working the earth, there are *limits* to what can be done with them, limits that do not come from human conscience or self-forged ethical frameworks, but from the righteous command of the Lord.^[15]

2.5.5 This principle of justice - along with the other principles we have discovered so far - reflect the fundamental relationships and structures that God has formed within creation, something we might call the *spiritual* or *integral ecology* of creation, a theme brought out strongly in Pope Francis' recent Encyclical *Laudato Si'*.^[16] Human beings stand in relation to both God, their neighbours and to the rest of creation. Being made in God's image, we exercise an analogous rule over creation as he does. Yet, being born of the earth and created to maintain and work it, we are as much a part of creation as anything else, and our rights here are limited. So long as we maintain these relationships in the way God intended, God, human beings, and creation remain in harmony with each other, and living things flourish. Yet if we do not maintain these relationships in a just way but misuse or abuse them, we reject both our own natures and that of nature itself, a situation from which dangerous consequences can arise.

2.6 Through Our Sin, Human Beings Harm Creation and Ourselves

2.6.1 If human beings had accepted the sovereignty of God and their allotted role as keepers and workers of the earth, then the spiritual ecology between humanity, God and creation would have been preserved. Sadly, from our first ancestors onward, human beings have been unwilling to accept their place in the universe, resulting in devastating consequences for both us and for creation. Genesis 3 picks up the story:

The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked... (Genesis 3: 2-7)

2.6.2 By refusing to listen to God, and by thinking that our idea of right and wrong was superior to God's, the relationship of human beings to God and creation was changed forever. Rather than experiencing ourselves as being part of nature, in harmony with animals, plants and wider creation, human beings began to view themselves as being different from other animals, and alienated from nature. The result is that nature began to be approached as something to be endured and conquered rather than loved and maintained:

*cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,*

2.6.3 Because of our disobedience, the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve are no longer fed from the hand of a loving God, but must eke out a precarious existence filled with anxiety and violence (cf. Genesis 4: 1-16).

2.6.4 The corrupted relationship between humanity, God and creation culminates in Genesis 6 with the near destruction of the world:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. (Genesis 6: 11-13)

2.6.5 We see here the principle first explored in Genesis 3, that the spiritual and moral decay of human beings can negatively affect the natural world. This principle is explored further by the Prophets. Hosea prophesies:

*Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;
for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
and no knowledge of God in the land.
Swearing, lying, and murder,
and stealing and adultery break out;
bloodshed follows bloodshed.
Therefore the land mourns,*

*and all who live in it languish;
together with the wild animals
and the birds of the air,
even the fish of the sea are perishing. (Hosea 4: 1-3)*

2.6.6 Hosea's prophecy presents a three-part movement of spiritual and ecological corruption. First, like Adam and Eve, Israel refuses to accept God's sovereignty and revealed law. This unbelief and ignorance gives rise, second, to moral decay, with lies, theft, and violence all escalating. The result of this moral decay is that the earth and all its animals mourn, not only for the spiritual death of human beings, but for the consequences this has for creation itself. Rather than progression or evolution toward ever-greater perfection, the tape of creation begins to wind backwards, with the six days of creation playing out in reverse:

*'For my people are foolish,
they do not know me;
they are stupid children,
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil,
but do not know how to do good.'
I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no light. (Jeremiah 4: 22-23)*

We are back again at the first day of creation, human evil having completely unmade God's beloved creation, making it waste and void once more.

2.6.7 We must be careful, of course, not to overexpand the scope of the prophets' warning. Not everything in nature that is destructive is the direct result of human action, with many natural calamities being part and parcel of what it means to live in a world that is not yet fully redeemed. Yet, on the other hand, we must not unduly limit the prophets' warning, and in a time of ecological crisis we should take seriously their vision of the close integration of moral and ecological decline.

2.7 Christ Restores and Perfects Nature

2.7.1 Human beings, then, were created to steward God's creation, and improve it through meaningful and productive labour. Yet because they refused to accept God's sovereignty and God's revealed purposes for themselves and creation, their relationship to God and creation became distorted, giving rise to serious problems for both humanity and nature.

2.7.2 This situation was never the Father's intention, however, and in his mercy, grace, and love, he had predestined an alternative. In his own beloved Son, he would reveal what perfect, loving, and obedient humanity should be, and through the Son's Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, would raise all of creation to *new creation*.

2.7.3 For those with eyes to see, there were hints of this in the particular circumstances of the Resurrection itself. In John's account of the Resurrection, the empty tomb is located in a *garden*. This is a reflection of the first garden of Eden, suggesting that a new act of creation (or recreation) has taken place. Second, when Mary comes to the empty tomb, she at first believes that Jesus is a *gardener*, and that it is he who has moved Christ's body (John 20: 1-18). Just as Adam and Eve were created to maintain the garden of Eden, so too does the second Adam, the perfected human being, resemble a gardener, someone who will fulfil humanity's purpose by restoring our right relation to the earth, and bring about a new creation. The Book of Genesis, the Gospels' account of the Resurrection, and the new creation recounted in Revelation thus form three movements in the one overarching drama of creation and redemption.

2.7.4 If these subtleties were lost on those who first witnessed the Resurrection, Paul makes them explicit. In this complex – but crucial – passage from his Letter to the Romans, he says: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

2.7.5 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8: 18-30)

2.7.6 Following the witness of the prophets, Paul closely links the moral and spiritual decay of human beings with the corruption of the world. Just like us, Paul looked out at a world filled with pain, hunger, sickness and death, and longed not only for a *better* creation, but a *new* creation: one in which these evils are erased forever, and material creation is perfected. Paul believes that this new creation has been revealed in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, when God the Father, in the power of the Spirit, freed Jesus from the constraints of sin, death, and suffering. With the Holy Spirit within us as the first indication (or 'first fruits') of this new reality, Paul looks forward to the day when human beings will enjoy the same total victory as Christ does, and will be fully recreated in him.

2.7.7 Paul makes it clear, however, that this will not only be humanity's victory, but *creation's* victory. As we saw earlier, one of the roles of human beings is to act as stewards of the earth, and safeguard the wellbeing of other animals. Yet this role has been obscured or marginalised due to false understandings of human dominion. As our humanity is perfected in Christ, however, a just relationship to the earth will be restored. We will treat animals with respect and nature with care, and creation itself will share in the incorruptibility and perfection won for it by Christ, he

who is the Great High Priest not only of humankind but of creation itself.

2.7.8 It is this image of the new creation with which Scripture concludes. In Revelation 22 we read: Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22: 1-5)

2.7.9 According to Revelation, salvation is not salvation *from* creation, but the salvation *of* creation, with human beings as one part of it.^[17] This salvation began with the creation of all things through, in and for Christ. It then went awry with our first ancestors, was fulfilled in the garden of the Resurrection, and concludes in the new creation, beside tree and river. In the recreated earth, humanity and creation are reconciled and restored through the saving presence of God in Christ: no longer at odds, no longer alienated from each other, but living for and with each other in a spiritual ecology of love and eternal Sabbath rest.

3. Historical Developments

3.1 It is clear from the foregoing that biblical teaching on creation has much to teach us. God is the creator, sustainer and perfecter of the world, who ordained creation to be conformed to the glory of the Son. Human beings help manifest God's image and glory through stewarding and working the earth. To this end, he allowed them to employ the labour of animals, but only insofar as they respect them and treat them with kindness. Sadly, human beings refused to accept the sovereignty of God and their allotted place within creation. Stepping over the boundaries God erected, human beings corrupted themselves, endangering their fellow beings and creation as a whole. Yet through the Resurrection of Christ, God wishes to restore human beings and creation to their proper place, bringing a new creation out of the old.

3.2 As we will now see, recent history has closely followed the spiritual ecology revealed in Christ and recorded in Scripture: that a false view of God and ourselves corrupts our relationship to creation and imperils the planet itself. While space precludes a full treatment of the history of ecological disaster wrought on the earth by human beings, we will now trace the contours of our recent – distorted – relationship with creation, before turning to what God wants us to do about it.

3.3 Across history, human cultures have related to nature in myriad ways. Some of these have been harmonious and benign, and others have been rapacious and damaging. While instrumentalist and abusive attitudes towards nature have long existed in European culture, prior to the early modern period, our ancestors existed in an intellectual and technological world that *limited* the impact of human activity upon the earth. Intellectually, Europeans viewed themselves as being more integrated with nature than many of us would today. In an economy based largely on agriculture and farming, it was clearer that human beings had to work with the cycles and rhythms of nature rather than imposing artificial patterns upon it. It also meant that human beings and animals lived close together, often sharing the same housing. While there were gradations of being ranging from inanimate matter up to God, human beings were therefore part of a great *chain of being* that integrated them into wider creation.

3.4 This integration was also manifested in the *meanings* that people attached to animals and nature, and how they related these to Scripture. God had not only written one book – the Bible – but two: Scripture and nature, and God used both to teach us. This meant that animals and nature were spiritually significant, and were part not only of a chain of being but a chain of meaning, one which human beings did not stand over and against but were part of themselves.^[18]

3.5 Looking beyond the intellectual culture of Europe, we discover other ways of thinking about the relationship between humans and creation, such as in native American, Australian aboriginal, and Māori communities. For example, while there is a tendency in Europe to think about this relationship in temporal or historical terms, other cultures have focused much more on the nature of this relationship in spatial terms that are tied to the land. Speaking generally, these other communities often focus more on the places rather than the times in which they live. They tend to have a greater recognition of the way in which they are a part of the natural world and are therefore defined by the natural environments that they inhabit. Consequently, they often have a stronger commitment to trying to learn about *who* they are in reference to *where* they are, every bit as much as they do in reference to *when* they are. This inspires a much deeper concern for caring for and sustaining their surrounding geography.

3.6 While other cultures maintained healthier relationships with creation, intellectual and technological changes in Europe gradually altered our relationship with nature, exacerbating instrumentalist and abusive tendencies that were already present. In a process described by Peter Harrison, British Protestant thinkers such as Francis Bacon came to believe that the Fall had alienated humanity from creation. Creation did not – to borrow images from St Francis' *Canticle* – greet us as our sister and brother, but as a distant other, one that we could no longer understand or control. This alienation could only be overcome – so it was thought – through natural philosophy (later science) and technology. Knowledge and control over nature would then restore humanity to the position enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the Fall, ushering in a new Eden.^[19]

3.7 These intellectual changes were matched by technological ones. Advances in seafaring and navigation led to the European discovery of the Americas and other new lands. Rival powers felled thousands of acres of forest to build warships, and erected furnaces and smelters to equip ever-larger armies to conquer the world. This unprecedented use of natural resources was matched by a domineering and unethical approach towards non-Europeans. Men, women and children in the Americas, Africa and elsewhere were indentured or enslaved as economic commodities, Europeans treating those made in the image of God as if they were chattel.^[20]

3.8 In a Scottish context, the desire to maximise profit with little regard for the poor or for sustainable economic and ecological models contributed to the mass eviction of Scots from the Highlands and Islands. Crofters and other small tenants were evicted from their homes and livelihoods to make way for sheep or deer, and forced to emigrate or move to overcrowded cities. This not only devastated traditional communities and cultures, but added to deforestation, monocultures, intensive mining, and other practices that harm the wildlife and landscape of Scotland to this day.^[21]

3.9 With industrialisation, this instrumentalist attitude toward nature began to imperil animal and human life itself. The burning of coal in massive quantities ensured Britain's – and later other European nations' – dominance of the world, its factories producing consumer goods to flood foreign markets, and sophisticated armaments to quell them into submission. Yet the pollution caused by industrialisation would have massive implications for human and animal life, and the life of the world itself. Factories and mines produced poisonous gases and liquids that suffocated the poor and poisoned the rivers. CO₂ emissions began to change the atmosphere of the planet as a whole, with global warming beginning to incrementally increase from the middle of the 19th century onward.

3.10 With imperialism and globalisation, industry was planted in almost every part of the globe, spreading pollution and dangerous emissions beyond the shores of Europe and North America. With the advent of the internal combustion engine, air travel, and industrial logging operations in the Amazon and other places, the scene was set for what we face today: a climate crisis of unprecedented danger.

4. What Is the Church to Do?

4.1 When confronted with the enormity of the crisis facing us, the Church encounters two temptations. The first is *defeatism*. Given that scientists think aspects of climate change are irreversible, and that greater damage will only be averted by massive changes to our personal and social behaviour, it is easy to feel demoralised and disempowered. What can I or my church do to avert a global catastrophe? The second temptation, however, is *misplaced confidence* that God will step in and sort the situation on our behalf. Is God not the author of creation and new creation? Has the Father not shown his mighty hand in history when he parted the Red Sea, raised Christ from the dead, and converted the Roman Empire to the faith?

4.2 While both of these temptations are understandable, due to the biblical principles we have discussed in this report, the Church must stand firm against both of them. Against defeatism, we must affirm that the sovereign Lord is with us and our world through Christ. He loves creation, and has given us the skill, and wisdom and technology to change our behaviour and renew a healthy spiritual ecology with nature. Against misplaced confidence in divine intervention, we must remind ourselves that God has given *us* the task of protecting and living peacefully with creation. God could have breathed life into human beings that lacked the capacity for personal agency and action, and kept and tilled the earth alone. Yet this God did not do. Being made in God's image means that we must work *with* God to preserve the earth, helping it to be conformed to the full glory of creation revealed in Christ.

4.3 In contrast to doing nothing, or sinking into defeatism or misplaced confidence in divine intervention, the first action of the Church in this time of climate crisis should be this: to repent. We must name the situation for what it is: a grievous sin against God, our neighbours, and our fellow creatures. We must accept that the majority of environmental damage to this point in time has been caused by Western nations, and accept that we have obligations not only to the planet but to developing nations, who will be most affected by climate change. We must accept our responsibility for this situation, and resolve to do better in the future.

4.4 Yet repentance, if not accompanied by other measures, is likely to be inconsistent or fleeting. For that reason, we must radically change how we think about ourselves, our relationship to creation, and our relationship to God.

4.5 Paul tells us that the Church should not be conformed to this world - this world of individualism, consumerism, and environmental rapacity - but be *transformed* through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). That begins with learning new principles and rules with which to structure our thinking, feeling, and relating to the world, such as have been presented in this report. It means no longer thinking of ourselves as standing over and against nature, of dominating animals and the planet for our own needs, but that we are part of an integral – or spiritual – ecology, connecting God, creation, animals, other people and ourselves. It means realising that the biblical vision of an integrated and inter-connected world is not only a spiritual truth but a scientific fact, one which we ignore at our peril.

4.6 Yet when our minds are transformed in this way, so also must our hearts and our actions. This is where the theology of the Church meets its worship and mission. As the family and household of the living God, who have the Holy Spirit as the first fruits of the new creation, we are called to be the sign, instrument, and foretaste of the new world God is creating. This means, first, that we must witness to God's future intentions for creation through our *worship*. In praise, prayer, Word and Sacrament, God's Church embodies something of the new creation, making it visible in the here and now. We raise the concerns and cries of our world to the throne above, remember God's nature and goodness, and – through God's Spirit – reimagine and enact a different kind of world. In this, the Sacraments are of great importance. God takes the material things of our world – water, bread, and wine – and through them reveals the future, in which material creation will be perfected through the presence of God in Christ.

4.7 When we reimagine our world in this way, however, we not only see God's new creation but are motivated to work for it in *mission*, a truth reflected in the Fifth Mark of the Five Marks of Mission.^[22] We are led out of our Sanctuaries to adopt new behaviours and habits, using our personal and congregational resources to safeguard creation and bring justice to the world's poor, who will suffer most from our inaction. In doing so, we not only – or even primarily – act as responsible citizens, but as *Christians*, as those who, in Christ and the Spirit, are called to manifest the Father's intentions for humanity and the world.

4.8 This missional ecology takes a number of forms. The first is public witness and activism. The COP26 Conference in Glasgow was an historic gathering of governments and nations from every part of the world. Yet the conference was not only attended by world leaders but thousands of people from organisations, businesses and churches. The Church

of Scotland has an established role in the public life of Scotland, providing opportunities for the Church to campaign for climate justice and ecological care. This is not an abdication of our call to witness to the Gospel, but an opportunity to campaign for climate justice in Christ's name, and demonstrate that God cares about our shared home.

4.9 Missional ecology should not only take place in the public square and the corridors of power, however, but in every town and village across the country. The Faith Impact Forum, Eco-Congregations Scotland, Tearfund and other parts of the Scottish Church have produced resources and activities to inspire and guide congregations, and to embody God's call for climate justice in lived communities of faith. As a territorial church, serving and witnessing to the people of Scotland, the Church of Scotland must renew the vision of our Celtic forebears, and form its parishes into *colonies of heaven*, outposts of the new creation. Through our worship, our buildings, our glebe land, and our congregational life, we have to demonstrate that it is possible to live and flourish in a *different* way, one that touches the Earth lightly, and provides counter-cultural leadership to a dying world.^[23]

4.10 This report can help provide the biblical and theological truths to provoke and inspire that leadership, but it is only you – by God's Grace – who can make it happen. Let us pray that change comes before it is too late.

References

- [1] Keynote speakers included Very Rev Principal Stafford Carson (Union Theological College), Professor David Fergusson (University of Edinburgh), Professor Paul T Nimmo (University of Aberdeen) and Professor Amy Plantinga Pauw (Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary). The conference papers have since been published in the journal *Theology in Scotland* and are available in digital format at the following web address:
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- [15] Cf. Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 398-9.
- [16] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, **https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html**
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- [21] See Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul* (London: Aurum Press, 2004).
- [22] Anglican Communion, *Five Marks of Mission*
<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>
- [23] Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 222.