



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

General Information

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), or PC (USA), traces its history to the 16th Century Protestant Reformer, John Calvin. Calvin's central principles remain the core of Presbyterian beliefs and include: the sovereignty of God, the authority of scripture, justification (remission of sins) as an undeserved gift from God through Jesus Christ, and the "priesthood of all believers" (i.e., the obligation of both ordained and lay members to share their faith with others).

In addition, the Church has a strong social justice message, encouraging members to use their gifts to transform society "by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God" (Book of Order, G-2.0500).

Number of members in the United States and Canada: 3 million

Governing Body: The PC (USA) has four levels of government: the Session (which has spiritual and financial responsibility for local churches); the Presbytery (which ordains ministers and oversees the activities of Sessions); the Synod (which oversees Presbyteries and adjudicates conflicts between Sessions and Presbyteries); and the General Assembly (which sets Church priorities and strategies, protects the Church from errors in faith and practice, and is the final court of appeal for all conflicts).

All levels of government are subject to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which is divided into two parts: The Book of Confessions, which outlines the beliefs of the Church, and the Book of Order, which describes the structure and rules of the Church. National Offices for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are located in Louisville, KY.

Official Statements on Animals

According to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), all creatures are created, sustained and redeemed by God. Human beings have been given a unique mission to act as "stewards" of our fellow creatures: a mission that should be pursued with joy, thanksgiving, and humility. God's call to stewardship is a call to love all living creatures: paying close attention to them and actively pursuing their wellbeing.

"In worship Christians rejoice and give thanks to God, who gives and sustains the created universe, the earth, all life, and all goods. They acknowledge God's command to be stewards. They confess their own failures in caring for creation and life. They rejoice in the promise of the redemption and renewal of the creation in Jesus Christ, proclaimed in the Word and sealed in the Sacraments. They commit themselves to live as God's stewards until the day when God will make all things new."

--from PC (USA) [The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church \(USA\) Part II: Book of Order 2009-2011](#), W-7.5002

<http://oga.pcusa.org/publications/2009-2011-boo.pdf>

"Wherever we turn our eyes, we see the living and true creatures of God which, if they be observed, as is proper, make a much more vivid impression on the beholders than all the images or vain, motionless, feeble and dead pictures made by men, of which the prophet truly said: 'They have eyes, but do not see.' (Ps. 115:5)"

--from PC(USA) [The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church \(USA\) Part I: The Book of Confessions](#), 5.021

<http://oga.pcusa.org/publications/boc.pdf>

"As stewards of God's creation who hold the earth in trust, the people of God are called to: use the earth's resources responsibly without plundering, polluting, or destroying; develop technological methods and processes that work together with the earth's environment to preserve and enhance life; produce and consume in ways that make available to all people what is sufficient for life; work for responsible attitudes and practices in procreation and reproduction; use and shape earth's goods to create beauty, order, health, and peace in ways that reflect God's love for all creatures."

--from PC (USA), [The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church \(USA\) Part II: Book of Order 2009-2011](#), W-7.5003

The principles of creation-care set out in the Constitution have inspired the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to issue official statements on specific topics related to animal protection. These statements have included calls to: place human and animal life above property rights and development; allow the needs and limits of the non-human world to place limits on economic growth and material consumption; allow wild animals and places to remain wild and free; protect endangered species.

"People and all other living things are to be valued above rights of property and its development."

--from National Council of Churches - ["Past Denominational Statements, PCUSA, UPCUSA, PCUS: Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal,"](#) 1971 (UPCUSA).

<http://www.nccecojustice.org/downloads/anth/pres.pdf>

"Human stewardship is not a dominion of mastery. It is a dominion of unequivocal love for this world. It is to be exercised with respect for the integrity of natural systems and for the limits that nature places on economic growth and material consumption."

--from National Council of Churches- "[Past Denominational Statements, PCUSA, UPCUSA, PCUS: Stewardship](#)," 1984 (PCUSA)

<http://www.nccecojustice.org/downloads/anth/pres.pdf>

"Keep wildlife wild and free. Avoid irreversible change. Protect and expand remaining public wildlands...Respect life, the more sentient the more respect. Think of nature as a community, more than a commodity...Preserve wildlands in all the diverse kinds of American ecosystems, including wildlands near urban areas; and restore degraded wildlands, reintroducing all the original native fauna and flora where possible. Stop cutting remaining pristine forests on public lands...Prohibit trade in endangered wild animals and endangered plants, or products derived from them. Stop indiscriminate killing of wild animals."

--from National Council of Churches- "[Past Denominational Statements, PCUSA, UPCUSA, PCUS: Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice](#)," 1990 (PCUSA)

<http://www.nccecojustice.org/downloads/anth/pres.pdf>

"When human actions and inactions desecrate the natural systems ordained by God, they affront the Creator. When decisions and actions protect and restore creation's integrity, diversity, beauty, and interconnectedness, they affirm God's wisdom and glory and please the Creator. The Creator-Deliverer calls human communities to work with God to rectify the abuses whereby human impacts upon the earth are leading to a mass extinction of living species.

This mass extinction would fundamentally alter and undermine the life and well-being of the human and other creatures that survive. It would rob all future generations of the gifts of wholeness and diversity that God intends. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) calls Presbyterians, other citizens, governments, and societal institutions to face the severity of this threat, and to take the steps in practice, policy, and systemic change that will prevent mass extinction and preserve the biodiversity essential to the flourishing of life."

--from National Council of Churches- "[Past Denominational Statements, PCUSA, UPCUSA, PCUS: Mass Extinction and Biodiversity](#)," 2001 (PCUSA)

<http://www.nccecojustice.org/downloads/anth/pres.pdf>

Historical References on Animals

The writings of John Calvin (1509-1564) form the foundation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). According to Calvin, God has placed the creatures of the earth in trust to humanity and one day will require us to give an account of the ways in which we have used or abused that trust. Animals are children of God and therefore deserve to be treated with care and with justice. Indeed, the need to provide animals with adequate care was so important to

Calvin that he listed it as one of the few acceptable reasons to be absent from church on Sundays.

"[Scripture] declares that [earthly blessings] have all been given us by the kindness of God, and appointed for our use under the condition of being regarded as trusts, of which we must one day give account. We must, therefore, administer them as if we constantly heard the words sounding in our ears, 'Given an account of your stewardship.'"

--from John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol II. Henry Beveridge, trans. Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society (1845), 297.

"The meanest animals are equally the children of God, because they were created of the original seed of the Word of God."

--from John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol I. John Allen, trans. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work (1921) 444-445.

"For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?...It is an unjust thing that the husbandman should lay out his pains to no purpose in plowing and thrashing, but that the end of his labor is the hope of receiving the fruits. As it is so, we may infer, that this belongs to oxen also."

--from John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Vol. I., John Pringle, trans. Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society (1948), 287.

"But it must be remembered that men are required to practice justice even in dealing with animals."

--from John Calvin, Commentaries, Vol. 7, Joseph Naroutunian, trans. Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton Press (2005), 285.

"Everyone in each house is to come [to church] on Sundays, unless it be necessary to leave someone behind to take care of children or animals..."

--from John Calvin, "Ordinances for the Supervision of Churches in the Country." Reprinted in J.K.S. Reid, Calvin: Theological Treatises. Philadelphia: Westminster Press (2000), 77.

For Calvin, animals provide a mirror that reflects the wisdom and goodness of God. Knowledge of God, therefore, can be gained through knowledge of God's creatures, so we should "dwell long upon them" and fix them "deeply in [our] heart."

"God therefore presents before us in his creatures a bright mirror of his admirable wisdom, so that every one that looks upon the world, and the other works of God, must of necessity break forth in admiration of him, if he has a single spark of sound judgment."

--from John Calvin, Calvin's Bible Commentaries: Corinthians, Part I, John King, trans. Forgotten Books (2007), 59.

"But though we are deficient in natural powers which might enable us to rise to a pure and clear knowledge of God, still, as the dullness which prevents us is within, there is no room for excuse...It were, indeed, a strange defence for man to pretend that he has no ears to hear the truth, while dumb creatures have voices loud enough to declare it; to allege that he is unable to see that which creatures without eyes demonstrate, to excuse himself on the ground of weakness of mind, while all creatures without reason are able to teach. Wherefore, when we wander and go astray, we are justly shut out from every species of excuse, because all things point to the right path."

--from John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol I, Henry Beveridge, trans. Edinburgh: T&T Clark (1863), 62.

"Undoubtedly were one to attempt to speak in due terms of the inestimable wisdom, power, justice, and goodness of God, in the formation of the world, no grace or splendor of diction could equal the greatness of the subject. Still there can be no doubt that the Lord would have us constantly occupied with such holy meditation, in order that, while we contemplate the immense treasures of wisdom and goodness exhibited in the creatures as in so many mirrors, we may not only run our eye over them with a hasty, and as it were, evanescent glance, but dwell long upon them, seriously and faithfully turn them in our minds, and every now and then bring them to recollection."

--from John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Henry Beveridge, trans. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers (2008), 101-102.

"Therefore, in order to be compendious, let the reader understand that he has a genuine apprehension of the character of God as the Creator of the world; first, if he attends to the general rule, never thoughtlessly or obviously to overlook the glorious perfections which God displays in his creatures; and, secondly, if he makes a self application of what he sees, so as to fix it deeply on his heart."

--from John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. I., Beveridge, trans. (1863), 157.

Contemporary References on Animals

In a recent issue of its quarterly magazine, "ideas! For Church Leaders," the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) asked its readers to imagine what would happen if John Calvin walked into a church service today and heard someone announce an upcoming animal rights rally. The article explains that Calvin would approve of the announcement, since he spoke repeatedly of God's mercy to animals and of our need to mirror God's mercy in our own behavior.

"You cringe as the casually dressed man (wearing Birkenstocks and a 'Save the Planet' T-shirt) stands up to announce the vital importance of all church members attending a rally in support of animal rights. When he goes on to suggest that God's call for justice means we need to take some pretty drastic steps to protect mistreated animals, you can't believe it. What is [Calvin] going to think of this liberal drivel?"

"You mutter words of outrage to the professor sitting close by. He turns around and, with an eyebrow cocked, says, 'Well, you know, actually, he said something along these lines himself. Animals don't have lawyers, they can't bring lawsuits. So God wants us to do our part to make sure people do right by all creatures.'

"Those who fail to care for horse, or cattle, or donkeys, show their own wickedness. If they say, 'It doesn't matter to me; it's just a brute beast,' the answer is, 'Well, yes, certainly. But it is also a creature of God!' Scripture tells us that God's bounty and mercy extend to every animal of the earth. It doesn't say this only of humans, whom God created in God's image; the beasts are definitely also included. But if we have rightness and equity in us, we will show it not only toward our neighbors who are closer to us--our brothers and sisters--but we will show it even to the brute beasts. God, after all, has created and formed them, and God deigns to keep them by his providence, providing them with food, and, in a word, caring for them."

--from "[When Calvin Came to Call](#)," by Christopher Elwood. ideas! For Church Leaders, Fall 2009. (Reproduced)
<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/curriculum/ideas-magazine/>

Calvin's call to care for animals has a firm foundation in scripture, explains the PC (USA). Although Genesis gives humanity dominion over creation, this term is synonymous with service and stewardship, not with exploitation. We can see this more clearly if we look at the Genesis account in conjunction with other biblical stories of creation, such as Psalms 8, 65, and 104 and Job 38-40. When all these creation narratives are read together, we understand that humans are one species among many loved by God.

"It is to be noted, however, that the terms 'dominion' and 'subdue' in the Genesis account are not to be taken as giving humankind the right of 'exploitation.' Dominion is to be understood in the sense of 'service.' It is to be expressed as stewardship, as care of and as commitment, to the well-being of nature."

--from [The Dialogue Between Theology and Science: GA Minutes 1982](#), p.3.
<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/theology-worship-education/>

"Genesis 1 is not the only account of God as creator in the Bible. Psalm 104, Psalm 65, Job 38-40, and Psalm 8 are other examples. While human beings are given a prominent role in Genesis 1 and Psalm 8, in [Psalm 104], as in the latter chapters of Job, humans are simply one species in the vast choir of creation. Psalm 104 describes an intricate system where all creatures are dependent on God for food. Here, the interplay between water, the landscape, and the rhythm

of seasons sounds like an ecology textbook, and the human race receives no more attention than lions or wild goats. In the eyes of this hymn writer, the appropriate response to creation is not dominion but humility and praise."

--from Presbyterian Hunger Program, Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table: Readings for Reflection and Actions, 32.

"Psalm 104:27-30 reminds us that we are not the only creatures God feeds. All creation is dependent on the breath of God and food from God's hands. Nor does nature exist to serve humanity: indeed most of the creatures mentioned have no economic value. Wild donkeys, wild goats, storks, and lions are all described as part of God's good creation with value independent of how they might benefit human beings. Even Leviathan, a fearsome sea monster, is not a predator or pest; it is God's plaything, formed to 'sport' in the water."

--from Just Eating?, 32.

<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/just-eating/>

The biblical injunction to care for all God's creatures has inspired the PC (USA) to ask its members to consider reducing or eliminating their consumption of meat. The intensive factory farming of animals has led to massive water pollution, adverse impacts on human health, an unjust distribution of vital resources, and immense animal suffering.

"We must change our diets for the sake of personal and planetary health. How we eat and structure our food system--with the myriad implications on the environment and social justice issues--is one of the supreme challenges we face in this century. ... Never have so many people--an estimated one billion--grown fat and obese from over-consuming, while an equal number suffer debilitating hunger. Never before have so few entities--the giant retailers, seed, livestock factory, food processing and agricultural chemical corporations--controlled so much of the global food system. Never have human actions so affected the health of the global environment and all living creatures."

--from John Robbins, The Food Revolution: How your diet can help save your life and the world, 2002. [Reproduced by the PC\(USA\)](#)

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/hunger/food-and-faith/>

"Eating...can be an opportunity to thoughtfully live our beliefs about justice--a vehicle for practicing our faith... Good nutrition is stewardship of a gift God gave us--our bodies...Choose healthier sources of proteins... Animal proteins such as beef or whole milk dairy products come with a heavy helping of saturated fats. Vegetable proteins come with plenty of fiber and vitamins."

--from Just Eating?, 6.

<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/just-eating/>

"If Americans were to reduce their meat consumption by only 10 percent for one year, it would free 12 million tons of grain for human consumption--or enough to feed 60 million people (Robbins, 2002)."

--from Just Eating?, 28.

<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/just-eating/>

"Factory farms dump millions of gallons of manure into the environment every year. Most factory farms, which raise thousands of animals in close quarters, store manure in lagoons that can be larger than football fields, and then spray it untreated on land. Excess manure flows into nearby waterways, killing fish, polluting drinking water and spreading antibiotic-resistant bacteria into the environment....Although nearly 30 years ago the Clean Water Act identified large feedlots as a primary source of pollution... 70 percent of large factory farms... escape regulation..."

--from "[Speak Out for Stronger Controls on Factory Farm Pollution](#)," in Washington Office: the voice of Presbyterian public policy

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/washington/>

"We are called through our covenant relationship to participate as stewards in God's creative work...To these ends, we resolve as a community of faith, to work together with others at local, state, and national levels in organizations, governments, and businesses to find short and long term political, economic, and public policy solutions to the crisis in rural America, the environment, and our local economies with solutions that: Provide access to adequate, affordable, sustainably grown food for all; Oppose the raising of domestic animals where the animals are not provided humane living conditions, including sufficient space to move, and to nurture their young, and with access to clean air and water, and without use of antibiotics except in response to a specific health need..."

--from PC(USA), [Caring for God's Earth: A Policy Statement on Local Economies and the Environment](#)

Every year the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) participates in Earth Day celebrations with sermons, prayers, and blessings that remind us that the earth and all its creatures are precious to God and deserve to be loved and protected by us.

Prayer: "Gracious God, thank you for the beauty of other creatures, the delicate flowers bringing springtime glory to mountain meadows, the hawks gliding on air currents, the luminescent colors of tropical fish, the graceful movements of a frolicking whale, the warmth of a puppy or kitten, the pleasure of a young bear sliding down a snow-covered hillside. Help us to understand how much they give you joy.

"Let us remember how much of your creation is in peril this Earth Day ...Righteous God, hear our prayer. Hold all these threatened creatures in your care. As we have protected others in the

past, help us to see how we can now protect them from extinction, and permit them to live out their role in the ongoing story of your love for Your creation. Amen."

--from PC (USA), "[Earth Day Sunday 2002: Protection of God's Creatures.](#)"
<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/environment/>

Blessing: "The earth is precious to God, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator. So love it... care for it... and with all your mind, with all your heart, preserve it for your children and love... as God loves us."

--from PC (USA), "[Earth Day Sunday 2002: Protection of God's Creatures,](#)" adapted from Chief Seattle (1855)
<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/environment/>

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For more information, visit The Humane Society of the United States Faith Outreach program at www.humanesociety.org/faith