



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, forgiveness of sins as an undeserved gift from God through Jesus Christ, and the obligation of lay and ordained members to share their faith with others. The Church has a strong social justice message, affirming "that neither the Church as the body of Christ, nor Christians as individuals, can be neutral or indifferent toward evil in the world."

Information about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including the Church's beliefs, structure, and history, can be found by going to <http://www.pcusa.org/ministries/101>.

Number of members in the United States: 2.3 million

Official Statements on Animals

Humanity is called upon to "reflect God's love for all creatures"

- **According to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), all creatures are created, sustained and redeemed by a loving 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 God's 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, (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2009), W-7.5002

- "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](#), (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 5.021
- "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), [Book of Order](#) , W-7.5003

The integrity of life, including animal life, is more important than economic growth and material consumption

- **The principles of creation-care set out in the Constitution of the PC (U.S.A) have inspired the Church 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 and to allow the needs and limits of the non-human world to place limits on economic growth and material consumption.**
 - "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), 2:C:1.
 - "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), 6:5

Efforts to protect wildlife “affirm God’s wisdom and glory and please the Creator”

- **The principles of creation-care have inspired the PC (USA) to issue official statements supporting the protection and restoration of wildlife and wilderness areas. Current threats to endangered species “affront the Creator,” but efforts to “protect and restore creation’s integrity, diversity, beauty, and interconnectedness...please the Creator.”**

- "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), 9:3:A, 3:B.

"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), 15.

Historical References on Animals

John Calvin: Animals are "equally the children of God." We must treat them with justice

- **The writings of John Calvin (1509-1564) form the foundation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). According to Calvin, animals are children of God and deserve to be treated with care and 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.**
 - "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.

Calvin: God will require us to give an account of the way we have treated His creatures

- **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. We should treat creation as though we constantly hear God whispering, "Give an account of your stewardship."**
 - "[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, 'Give 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.

Calvin: Animals reflect God's wisdom. We should strive to understand and love them

- **For Calvin, animals provide a mirror that reflects the wisdom and goodness of God. Knowledge of God 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.
 - "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 obliviously 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., 157.

Contemporary References on Animals

Human dominion should be understood as service, not as exploitation and domination

- **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), 3.
- "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.

Eating lower on the food chain is an act of justice that protects the earth, human health, and animals

- **The biblical injunction to care for all God's creatures has inspired the PC (USA) to ask its members to "live our beliefs about justice" by 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 animal suffering.**
 - "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.
 - "Eating lower on the food chain and decreasing the amount of meat you eat can have significant environmental benefits. Raising livestock requires significantly more resources (in grain, water and fuel) than growing the grain, fruit, and vegetable staples of a vegetarian diet."
--from PC(USA) [Alternative Thanksgiving Ideas](#), Vegetarian Options, 2.
 - "Seventy percent of all the grain in the United States goes to feeding herds of livestock. It takes up to sixteen pounds of grain to produce a pound of beef. In fact, the world's cattle alone consume a quantity of food equal to the caloric needs of 8.7 billion people--more than the entire human population on earth."
--from [Just Eating?](#), 27.
 - "Human waste is an environmental problem in some places, but in the U.S. farm animals produce 130 times as much manure as we do."
--from [Just Eating?](#), 25.
 - "In 2005, the American Cancer Society reported the results of an extensive study which confirmed that high consumption of red and processed meat increases your risk of colon cancer, the third most common cancer that annually kills 56,000 men and women in the U.S. High consumption was defined as only 3 or more ounces per day for men and 2 or more for women."
--from [Just Eating?](#), 21.
 - "The meat industry does not always handle animals humanely."
--from [Just Eating?](#), 61.

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