

## **Presbyterian General Assembly asked to endorse evolution**

By Carmen Fowler LaBerge June 16, 2014

DETROIT, Mich. — Via a commissioner’s resolution (CR), the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is being asked to consider designating the second Sunday in February (Charles Darwin’s birthday) as “Evolution Sunday.”



Evolution Sunday is defined in a letter that the commissioner’s resolution would like the GA endorse and send to its constituent congregations. The CR contends that the PCUSA would be expressing its close relationship with United Methodists, one Episcopal Church diocese, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America synod, and other pro-evolution clergy who have endorsed the idea.

The PCUSA’s Office of Theology and Witness as well as the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy have advised against the resolution.

Their advice reminds commissioners that the PCUSA has clear statements on the matter dating back to 1969 and incorporated in the denomination’s most recent Study Catechism in 1998.

“The assembly has spoken most clearly in the 1969 statement, ‘Evolution and the Bible,’ from the former PCUS, reaffirmed by the 214th General Assembly (2002). The statement affirms that there is no necessary contradiction between Christian faith as expressed in our church’s confessions and an affirmation of evolution as the means of creation. It does not go so far as to suggest Christians must affirm the scientific consensus on evolution: “Neither Scripture, our Confession of Faith, nor our catechisms, teach the creation of man by the direct and immediate acts of God so as to exclude the possibility of evolution as a scientific theory,” and that “it is not

necessary to understand the Genesis account as a scientific description of Creation” (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1969, Part I, , p. 59, <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/theologyandworship/evolution/>)

**Question 27. Does your confession of God as Creator contradict the findings of modern science?**

**No.** My confession of God as Creator answers three questions: Who?, How? and Why? It affirms that (a) the triune God, who is self-sufficient, (b) called the world into being out of nothing by the creative power of God’s Word (c) for the sake of sharing love and freedom. Natural science has much to teach us about the particular mechanisms and processes of nature, but it is not in a position to answer these questions about ultimate reality, which point to mysteries that science as such is not equipped to explore. Nothing basic to the Christian faith contradicts the findings of modern science, nor does anything essential to modern science contradict the Christian faith. ...

The rationale of the resolution states that, “Evolution has been wrongly viewed in some Christian communities as contrary to Christian beliefs. As a scientific theory based solidly on extensive scientific evidence, it has shaped our thinking in the natural sciences and has become the underlying theory for numerous medical advances. As a scientific theory it does not contradict the existence of God, but can be seen as a natural, creative process in God’s creation.”

The letter reads:

“Within the community of Christian believers there are areas of dispute and disagreement, including the proper way to interpret Holy Scripture. While virtually all Christians take the Bible seriously and hold it to be authoritative in matters of faith and practice, the overwhelming majority do not read the Bible literally, as they would a science textbook. Many of the beloved stories found in the Bible — the Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark — convey timeless truths about God, human beings, and the proper relationship between Creator and creation expressed in the only form capable of transmitting these truths from generation to generation. Religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth. Its purpose is not to convey scientific information but to transform hearts.

“We the undersigned, Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as ‘one theory among others’ is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children. We believe that among God’s good gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator. To argue that God’s loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris. We urge school board members to preserve the integrity of the science curriculum by affirming the teaching of the theory of evolution as a core component of human knowledge. We ask that science remain science and that religion remain religion, two very different, but complementary, forms of truth.”

This CR has been assigned to Committee 13 and appears as [item 13-09](#) on the assembly agenda.

The PCUSA General Assembly is meeting in Detroit through June 21.