

More Presbyterian Questions, More Presbyterian Answers

Revised Edition

Donald K. McKim

WJK WESTMINSTER
JOHN KNOX PRESS
LOUISVILLE • KENTUCKY

© 2011, 2017 Donald K. McKim

Revised edition

Published by Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Westminster John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396. Or contact us online at www.wjkbooks.com.

Scripture quotations from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible are copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked TEV are from the *Good News Bible—Old Testament*: Copyright © American Bible Society 1976; *New Testament*: Copyright © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976.

Book design by Sharon Adams and Allison Taylor
Cover design by Allison Taylor

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: McKim, Donald K., author.

Title: More Presbyterian questions, more Presbyterian answers / Donald K. McKim.

Description: Revised Edition. | Louisville, KY : Westminster John Knox Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017006344 (print) | LCCN 2017029394 (ebook) | ISBN 9780664263263 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781611648218 (ebk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)--Doctrines--Miscellanea.

Classification: LCC BX8969.5 .M37 2017 (ebook) | LCC BX8969.5 (print) | DDC 285/.137--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017006344>

☺ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Most Westminster John Knox Press books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. For more information, please e-mail SpecialSales@wjkbooks.com.

Contents

Preface to Revised Edition	xi
Preface	xiii
Ways to Use This Book	xvii
1. About Presbyterians	1
1. How do Presbyterians regard John Calvin (1509–1564)	1
2. What is the <i>Book of Confessions</i> ?	2
3. Do Presbyterians accept baptisms performed by other denominations?	3
4. What do Presbyterians believe about evangelism?	4
5. Are Presbyterians “fundamentalists”?	5
6. Can Presbyterians believe in evolution?	7
7. What do Presbyterians believe about the ecumenical movement?	8
2. Presbyterians and Others	10
8. What should be our attitudes toward other religions?	10
9. What are some differences between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics?	11
10. What are some differences between Presbyterians and Eastern Orthodox Christians?	12
11. What are some differences between Presbyterians and Episcopalians?	14
12. What are some differences between Presbyterians and Lutherans?	15
13. What are some differences between Presbyterians and Methodists?	16
14. What are some differences between Presbyterians and Baptists?	17

3. Presbyterian Theology	19
15. What is God like?	19
16. How should we speak of the Trinity?	20
17. Can we know God through nature?	21
18. What is accommodation?	22
19. What does “Father Almighty” mean in the Apostles’ Creed?	23
20. What does it mean to say, “God is holy”?	24
21. What is common grace?	25
22. What does “Jesus Christ” mean?	26
23. What do we need to believe about Jesus Christ?	27
24. What is covenant theology?	28
25. Why were the books we have in the Bible chosen to be in the Bible?	29
26. What are the differences between the Protestant and Roman Catholic Bibles?	30
27. What do Presbyterians believe about the Virgin Mary?	32
28. What is idolatry?	33
29. Are all sins equal?	34
30. What happens when we confess our sins?	35
31. What are different ways of understanding salvation?	36
32. Are babies who die, saved?	37
33. What is the atonement?	38
34. What is faith?	39
35. What is regeneration?	40
36. Must we have a “born-again” experience to be saved?	41
37. Can I be saved by “being good” or obeying the Ten Commandments?	42
38. Why do we say, “He descended into hell,” in the Apostles’ Creed?	43
39. What is the communion of saints?	44
40. What is the meaning of Maundy Thursday?	45
41. What is the meaning of Good Friday?	46
42. What is the meaning of Easter?	47
43. What is the ascension, and what do Presbyterians believe about it?	48
44. What is the “holy catholic church”?	50
45. Who or what is the “Antichrist”?	51
46. What do we mean by “eternal life”?	52

4. Christian Life	53
47. What does it mean to say we are “in Christ”?	53
48. What is piety?	54
49. What is living for the glory of God?	55
50. How can “all things work together for good”?	56
51. What helps do we have for living the Christian life?	57
52. What does it mean to “take up our cross” and follow Jesus?	58
53. What do Presbyterians do during Lent?	59
54. Is it a sin to express doubt or to question our faith?	60
55. Is it a sin to be tempted?	61
56. What is Christian freedom?	62
57. How do we know we are saved?	63
58. Must I belong to a church to be saved?	64
59. Is our material prosperity a sign of God’s favor?	65
60. Must we always forgive other people?	66
61. How often do we need to repent?	67
62. What are the parts of prayer?	68
63. Why do we pray “in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”?	69
64. Must one have a “second baptism” in the Spirit to be a genuine Christian?	70
65. What is stewardship?	71
66. Does God call us to specific work or specific jobs?	72
67. What are the main ministries of the church?	73
68. Am I a minister?	74
69. Do Presbyterians believe in deathbed conversions?	75
5. Worship and Sacraments	77
70. How do Presbyterians observe Sunday?	77
71. Why do we pray for others in worship services?	78
72. What is the church year, and do Presbyterians follow it?	79
73. What are the parts of worship?	80
74. Why do we have hymns in worship?	81
75. What is the declaration/assurance of pardon in the worship service?	82
76. Why is there an offering collected in each worship service?	83
77. What is the lectionary?	84
78. How does preaching become effective?	85
79. What are the different modes of baptism?	86

x **Contents**

80. What is believer's baptism?	87
81. How often should the Lord's Supper be celebrated?	88
82. In what ways can I worship in my personal life?	89
83. What is the purpose of a funeral service?	90

6. Social-Ethical Issues **92**

84. What sources inform our ethical decisions?	92
85. Do Presbyterians believe in birth control?	93
86. Why do Presbyterians believe the church should be active in society?	94
87. What should the attitude of Presbyterians be toward government?	95
88. Do people have the right to rebel against unjust governments?	96
89. Can Christians participate in war?	97
90. Where do we see the reign of God in the world?	98

7. The Future **100**

91. What is Christian hope?	100
92. What about the Last Judgment?	101
93. Will evil be defeated in the end?	102
94. Do Presbyterians believe in purgatory?	103
95. What will heaven be like?	104
96. What will hell be like?	105
97. Will all people be saved?	106

For Further Reading **109**

Preface to Revised Edition

This book was published in 2011, following *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers* in 2003. I am grateful that both books have been used extensively throughout Presbyterian churches and that folks have found this approach helpful in understanding Presbyterian theology.

Recent changes in the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America [PC(USA)] have meant it is useful to update the books to reflect the addition of The Confession of Belhar to the *Book of Confessions* and present understandings and terminology in the *Book of Order*. Some other changes have been made along the way, including the addition of a few more questions and answers. For superb help and suggestions about what to modify here, I would like to thank David Maxwell of Westminster John Knox Press. His comments have been very valuable. My thanks also go to David Dobson and Julie Tonini of the press for their support and splendid work.

The need for these modifications highlights that change is a feature of our Christian faith and that Presbyterian understandings and expressions, particularly in the PC(USA), do take place—by the leading of the Spirit of God, we believe. A theological way of understanding change is to see change as God moving us from where we are to where God wants us to be. Even when the changes seem relatively small, they still represent this action of God’s guiding providence. As it is in the church’s life, so it is in our own lives.

Changes in my life in these last years have led my beloved wife, LindaJo, and me to welcome grandchildren to our family. We

xii **Preface to Revised Edition**

now rejoice in life with Stephen and Caroline and their children, Maddie, Annie, and Jack; as well as with Karl and Lauren. These blessed members of the family God has given lead me to praise, thanks, and gratitude.

This book continues to be dedicated to wonderful friends. Sadly, Jack Walchenbach has died, and he is missed.

Changes come, within the church and in our own experience. As we move along, my hope is that these books will continue to benefit the church. May they be a blessing to all who seek further understandings and nurture in their lives of faith. May we all seek to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Donald K. McKim
Germantown, Tennessee
Advent 2016

Preface

I have been very gratified by the reception of *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers* (Geneva Press, 2003). Besides its use by individual readers—including seminary students—many churches turn to it for study groups, Sunday school classes, new member classes, session meeting devotionals, and even some confirmation classes. This was my hope in writing the book, and I am most appreciative of those who have found it helpful in their journeys as Presbyterian Christians.

The questions and answers in that book just scratched the surface of issues Presbyterians think about these days. Our Christian faith is a constant movement of faith seeking understanding, as St. Augustine said centuries ago. So it is natural—indeed, necessary—for us as Christians to probe questions of our faith and inquire about what our faith has to say about many things.

This book is an attempt to provide more answers for questions raised by Presbyterians. The answers are not full and extensive. They are not the only ones that can be given to these questions. But I hope they will provide a measure of satisfaction and will open doors to further reflection and discussion. A selection of resources to help in this quest is at the end of the volume.

There are seven sections. This is to encourage daily or weekly study for individuals, or some combination grouping of questions for groups to consider. Of course, the book can be read straight through or dipped into where and when one wants, for no special occasion.

As in the earlier book, I have written primarily for laity and students who are interested in Presbyterian and Reformed theology.

Presbyterians are part of the Reformed theological tradition, rooted in the sixteenth-century Reformation. We look to reformers such as John Calvin (1509–1564), Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), and others as having provided helpful theological ways to understand God’s revelation in Scripture.

But the Reformed tradition is a living and vital tradition. Wherever Reformed Christians went, they wrote statements of faith and catechisms, creedal expressions of what they believed about their faith. So questions and answers are part of the Reformed heritage. This impulse to articulate faith continues today.

The primary locus for this book is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which has been my lifelong home. The PC(USA) has a *Book of Confessions* that gives us guidance for belief. I have used the *Book of Confessions* as the only source for quotations here and have abbreviated it as *BC* in the text. Many other sources could have been tapped to expand the discussions. But I wanted to keep the answers as clear and focused as possible. While my context is the PC(USA), I believe there is much here that is applicable to other Presbyterian denominations and Reformed churches as well.

It has been wonderful to see other volumes of this sort emerge—for Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists.* My ecumenical hope is that as greater theological understanding emerges among churches, we will recognize more clearly the strength and power of our unity in Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church (Col. 1:18). We need always to keep our parts of speech straight: We are “Presbyterian Christians,” or “Lutheran” or “Methodist” Christians—the denomination is the adjective modifying the noun, “Christian,” which is most important.

*See F. Belton Joyner Jr., *United Methodist Questions, United Methodist Answers: Exploring Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Martin E. Marty, *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2007); Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Questions, Baptist Answers: Exploring Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). Marty hopes that “other Christian communions will pick up and trade on the example until there is a little shelf of question and answer books” (9).

So this book is for Presbyterian Christians interested in knowing more about Christian faith in its Presbyterian expression. I believe we participate best ecumenically when we understand our own theological heritage deeply. What follows is a modest offering to help Presbyterians and, I hope, the ecumenical church as well.

This book is also given to Presbyterians to encourage our reflection on theological questions and issues. There are treasures in our theological tradition to help us understand and live our Christian faith in this twenty-first-century world. I hope some of these treasures will be found here.

As always, I express gratitude for my family who blesses me. Since the first book was written, LindaJo and I have welcomed two wonderful daughters-in-law into our family. We rejoice for Stephen and Caroline and for Karl and Lauren.

It is a pleasure to dedicate this work to long-standing Presbyterian friends. Jack and Diane Hodges are two of our favorite people. David and Linda McCreery and Jack and Pat Walchenbach have been dear friends since our days at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. For their lives and our friendship, I am deeply grateful.

Donald K. McKim
Germantown, Tennessee
Easter/Resurrection of the Lord
April 4, 2010

Ways to Use This Book

This book can be used in different ways.

Group study. This book has seven chapters, designed so that groups in churches can study the book through a quarter of the church year. I hope this approach will encourage participants to read each chapter and then discuss it when the group gathers weekly. I imagine each question and answer will evoke further questions or perspectives, which can be discussed by the group as a whole. Of course, the time period for the group study can be extended into virtually any format. I trust that church groups of all types will find this book to be helpful.

Individual study. This book is also designed for individual study. I wrote it for those interested in knowing about Presbyterian beliefs. These may be persons who have a general interest, those who are considering membership in Presbyterian churches, those who are joining Presbyterian churches from other denominations, seminary students, or longtime Presbyterians who would like a focused look at our theological understandings. Individuals can use this book in nearly any way. I hope some will be encouraged to delve further into the many resources available so that their Christian faith will be enhanced by greater understanding.

1

About Presbyterians

1 How do Presbyterians regard John Calvin (1509–1564)?

Presbyterians are always associated with John Calvin. This is a common connection made by people who are familiar with the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions as well as by those who have a less detailed picture.

John Calvin was a sixteenth-century French scholar who studied law and the liberal arts under leading Renaissance humanists. This training led him to be concerned with interpreting ancient texts, since the motto of the humanists was *Ad fontes*—“to the sources.” Calvin became aligned with the concerns for reform of the Roman Catholic Church being led by Martin Luther (1484–1546) and soon gained notoriety for the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), which he prepared to help people understand the Christian faith.

A series of events led Calvin to Geneva, where he began to teach and preach. A dispute with the authorities forced him to leave the city and become a pastor in Strassburg for three years. But Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541 and led the Protestant Reformation in the city until his death in 1564.

Calvin’s teachings spread throughout Europe and into the New World. He and his followers became known as “Reformed” Christians, and they sought the reform of the church based on Scripture. His followers—sometimes called “Calvinists”—established churches based on Calvin’s theological understandings.

2 More Presbyterian Questions, More Presbyterian Answers

This Reformed tradition is one branch of Protestantism, distinct from the Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions.

Calvin advocated a “presbyterian” form of church government, meaning a church governed by “presbyters” or “elders.” Under such a system, local churches are governed by elders chosen by the congregation; churches in a region form a “presbytery.” Larger groupings of churches form a “synod,” and the churches together constitute a “General Assembly.” Ruling elders and ordained ministers of the Word and Sacrament, also called teaching elders, have equal roles in church government.

Presbyterians look to Calvin as a guide for interpreting Scripture and gaining theological understandings. We do not “worship” Calvin; indeed, we recognize limitations in his own thoughts and formulations. But Calvin has been the major theological influence in the Reformed tradition, and his insights still provide guidance and nourishment for Presbyterian Christians today.

2 What is the *Book of Confessions*?

In 1967, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) voted to adopt a book of confessions as the doctrinal standard for the denomination. For over three hundred years, Presbyterians had looked primarily to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as the single most important confession to express what Presbyterians believe. The *Book of Confessions* was a collection of ten documents from the early church to the present time that were other expressions of the Reformed faith to which Presbyterians adhere.

In the *Book of Confessions* when it was adopted in 1967 were two documents from the early church: the Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed. Also included were six documents from the Reformation era: the Scots Confession (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), the Westminster Confession (1647), and the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms. Two contemporary documents were the Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934) and the Confession of

1967. Together, these confessions represented some of the breadth of the Reformed theological tradition, since they were expressions of Reformed Christians from different times and places.

In 1983, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America merged with the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) to heal a division that had occurred with the American Civil War. The new denomination became the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, or PC(USA). In 1993, the denomination adopted A Brief Statement of Faith, which is now included in the *Book of Confessions*. Most recently, in 2016, The Confession of Belhar (1986), which was written in the midst of South Africa's apartheid practices and called for unity, reconciliation, and justice grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, was added to the confessional standards.

Confessions help us understand Scripture. They are expressions of what Reformed Christians believe is revealed in the Bible. They are theological formulations that are natural expressions of vibrant Christian beliefs. Reformed Christians have the urge to confess their faith!

Additional confessions of faith may be added to the *Book of Confessions* in future years. New confessions will use new terminology to address matters of vital Christian belief. The Reformed and Presbyterian tradition is a living, growing tradition. We seek always to hear God's word to us anew, even as we continue to confess the theological truths that have guided us to this day.

3 Do Presbyterians accept baptisms performed by other denominations?

Presbyterians are Presbyterian Christians. That is, "presbyterian" is our way of being Christians. There are many other denominations and bodies of Christian believers with whom Presbyterians share common beliefs. So we are first of all "Christians" and then "Presbyterians." We participate in the ecumenical church, which is the church of Jesus Christ spread throughout the world.

One of our common beliefs with all other Christians is our belief in the Trinity. We believe in "one God," whom we know as "three

4 More Presbyterian Questions, More Presbyterian Answers

persons”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This core conviction is a basic Christian doctrine that the whole Christian church has held to since the early centuries.

Christian churches also administer baptism. Some churches baptize infants as well as adults. Some churches baptize only adults who confess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Historically, Presbyterians have baptized both infants and adults.

Presbyterians accept the baptism of other denominations as being valid Christian baptisms if they were carried out with the “Trinitarian formula.” This means that a baptism is considered valid if it was administered “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

Despite differences in understanding about the nature of baptism among denominations, what matters most—and what unites Presbyterians and other Christians, as well as all Christians together—is our worship of and obedience to the “one God in three persons” we confess as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This common confession of who God is finds celebration in baptism. So Presbyterians recognize the theological validity of a baptism carried out in another church or denomination if that baptism was administered in the name of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For Presbyterians, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the two sacraments of the church. They unite church members with each other, and they unite us all in the church, with the God we know in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. So accepting as valid the baptism of a person of another denominational body, carried out in the name of the triune God, is an expression of the ultimate unity of the Christian church.

4 What do Presbyterians believe about evangelism?

Evangelism is the sharing of the good news (gospel; Gr. *euangelion*) of Jesus Christ through a variety of means. This makes evangelism central to the life and ministry of Christian churches. Presbyterians believe the church is to call people “to be reconciled

to God and to one another” (*BC* 9.07) and by the power of the Holy Spirit has the courage “to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior” (*BC* 10.4). We have the strongest impetus to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in both “word” and “deed,” by what we say and what we do, throughout the whole world.

Like the New Testament, we accent preaching as a primary way by which the message of God’s love in Jesus Christ (John 3:16) is shared with the world. Through preaching, salvation can happen as people respond to Christ in faith (1 Cor. 1:18–21) by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3).

Presbyterians have emphasized God’s election as God’s graciously giving faith and salvation. We believe salvation is the gift of God’s grace alone (Eph. 2:8–9). God has chosen us in Christ, according to God’s “good pleasure” (Eph. 1:4–5), and we do not by our own will or power respond to the gospel. In the past, some people (called “hyper-Calvinists”) said there was no need to evangelize or preach the gospel because if God chooses whom to save, God does not need preachers to preach! What they missed is the command of Christ to proclaim the gospel (Matt. 28:16–20) and the recognition that God uses preaching as the means by which the gospel story is proclaimed and, thus, believed.

Presbyterians today realize the message of Jesus Christ can be expressed in many different ways in addition to preaching and teaching. Evangelism is not an “end” in itself for churches. We do not try to gain church members to make ourselves “successful.”

Instead, evangelism is our grateful response to the “good news” that God has come to us in Christ, that we can become a “new creation,” and that we have been given the “ministry of reconciliation” to call people to “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:16–21).

5 Are Presbyterians “fundamentalists”?

The term “fundamentalism” came to prominence in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1920s during the “Fundamentalist-Modernist” controversy. At

6 More Presbyterian Questions, More Presbyterian Answers

that time, many people believed the use of scientific methods to study the Bible (called “biblical criticism”) along with advances in the sciences in many fields—and especially the theory of evolution—posed strong challenges to traditional Christianity. A series of twelve paperback books called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth* was published between 1910 and 1915 to defend the claims of traditional Christian faith and to answer the charges of the movement known as “liberal theology,” which held that many Christian claims should no longer be believed by modern persons in light of advancements in science and contemporary biblical studies. From these and a series of popular meetings, the “five points of fundamentalism” emerged. These doctrines were: the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, Christ’s bodily resurrection, and Christ’s literal (premillennial) second coming.

The Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy included ongoing struggles in churches and within the larger American culture over these and related issues. The Presbyterian Church has gone through many debates that relate to the nature of Scripture and matters of biblical interpretation that were part of this larger conflict. Fundamentalists urged a literal reading of the Bible, including the early chapters of Genesis, and this led them to oppose evolution. Their view of biblical authority was that Scripture is an inerrant document, without any errors of any kind in all it affirms. This inevitably led to clashes with other theological views of the nature of the Bible and its appropriate interpretation.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, fundamentalism in the United States often became allied with conservative, political ideologies. Many denominations—most prominently, the Southern Baptist Convention—proclaim themselves fundamentalist.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not considered a fundamentalist denomination. We recognize varieties of ways of interpreting Scripture, and most members of the denomination do not see the Bible as “inerrant.” We stress “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27), rather than reducing Christian faith to a small number of doctrines.

6 Can Presbyterians believe in evolution?

Struggles over the theory of evolution have been frequent and often bitter. Since it was proposed by Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man* (1871), Christians have taken different approaches on whether evolution is contrary to or compatible with Christian faith. This issue raises a larger one about the nature of the Bible. Christians who reject evolution do so because of what they believe the Bible is and how it should be interpreted. They believe the Bible is true and contains nothing contrary to truth in whatever it affirms in any area, including science and history. This belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is a hallmark of American fundamentalism. According to this view, the first chapters of Genesis, which describe creation, should be interpreted literally because they are presented as statements of fact. Since the Bible is the “Word of God,” it must be true in all it affirms. A literal interpretation of the “days” in Genesis means rejecting evolution as a scientific theory since it does not match the biblical account.

Some Christians in the PC(USA) and other Presbyterian denominations hold to the inerrancy of Scripture and reject evolution on these grounds. But the majority of PC(USA) members view the Bible differently and in ways that uphold biblical authority while enabling them to be open to the findings of science.*

One view is to recognize the Bible as God’s Word and as a book with a theological purpose—to believe that it intends to answer “why” questions instead of “how” questions. Science tells us “how” things happen—how plants or animals or humans may evolve over time. The Bible, written by people in ancient cultures through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, intends to tell us what we can find in no other source: why things are as they are and why God created the heavens and the earth.

In this way, we recognize that evolution, and other scientific findings, can provide important information within the realm of

*The 2016 General Assembly of the PC(USA) affirmed there is no contradiction between faith and science.

the “how,” while theology and the Bible itself tell us in a unique and authoritative way “why” humans are created—by whatever scientific means God chose to use. Thus, the full authority of the Bible is upheld, and there is no inherent conflict between “science” and “faith” or between evolution and Christianity.

7 What do Presbyterians believe about the ecumenical movement?

The term “ecumenical” comes from the Greek word, *oikoumenē*, meaning “the inhabited world.” The modern ecumenical movement is widespread and in various ways seeks to bring about unity among various Christian churches throughout the world. This occurs formally through organizations, as well as informally on local levels, with churches working cooperatively on projects of mission and ministry or in services of worship, learning, and fellowship.

Important features of the ecumenical movement have been concerns for cooperation among church bodies, desires for mutual understanding of different theological views, and respect for other Christians in recognition of our common witness to the gospel. Jesus prayed that his disciples “may all be one” (John 17:21). How that can and should be expressed by contemporary church bodies is an ongoing quest.

The most prominent expression of the formal ecumenical movement is the World Council of Churches (First Assembly, 1948). In the United States, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (1908) and its successor organization, the National Council of Churches (1950), have played important roles.

In 1960, the Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church, Eugene Carson Blake (1906–1985) preached a sermon in San Francisco in which he called for the union of major U.S. Protestant churches. This led to the formation COCU, the Consultation on Church Union, in 1962. In 1969, a formal merger proposal among the denominations was rejected. Since no structural union of the Protestant churches could occur, emphasis was put on “intercommunion” or “full communion.” This meant the recognition of the

validity of the rites and ministries of other denominations, while churches maintained their own identity. In 2002, COCU became Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC), which recognizes intercommunion among full member churches.

Not all Presbyterian denominations in the United States have been part of these groups. But the PC(USA) and its predecessor denominations have participated in these formal ecumenical organizations. The PC(USA) encourages ecumenical cooperation on all levels for churches, recognizing that our impetus should be toward a greater expression of the theological unity the “whole household of God” (Eph. 2:19) has under Jesus Christ, the great head of the church (Col. 1:18).