

Episcopal Ecological Network



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This paper
prepared for the
EpEN by
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Resolution A136:

Affirming the Compatibility of Science and the Christian Faith

Talking Points

Resolves:

That the 77th General Convention affirms that there is no inherent contradiction between holding and practicing the Christian faith and practicing or utilizing the outcomes of modern science and medicine; and be it further

That this Convention affirms that certain characteristics of faith, most explicitly the tenet that reason and tradition are essential to extending our understanding of God's Creation, are mirrored in science; and be it further

That in God's physical universe, the proper practice of science cannot and does not automatically lead its practitioners or others to lose faith in God, or to be led into beliefs that contradict the existence of God; and be it further

That the methods of modern science, when applied to a search for truth, contribute to our understanding of God's Creation such that we should use scientific information, after diligence as to its acceptance among scientific peers in relevant disciplines, to inform and augment our understanding of God's Creation, and to aid the Church in developing Christian programs and policies consistent with our faith and our understanding of God's Creation and our stewardship of it; and be it further

That this Convention encourages the dioceses and the parishes of The Episcopal Church to establish Christian education programs pertinent to this complementary relationship between science and faith, using the Catechism of Creation compiled by the Executive Council Committee on Science, Technology and Faith.

Explanation:

In recent years, a number of clergy and Christian educators have been seeking guidance on the relationship between science and faith in the Episcopal Church. This resolution clearly spells out the Episcopal Church believes that there is no contradiction between being a person of faith and a person of science. The passing of this resolution will become a useful tool for Christian education and formation programs in the Episcopal Church

In matters of faith, Episcopalians appeal to Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, sometimes called the "three-legged stool" of Anglicanism. This is parallel to the basic process of scientific tradition (See Kuhn 1962; LaTour 1988; and Callon 2004). In science, reason is the careful and thorough use of



Episcopal Ecological Network Talking Points

Resolution A136: Affirming the Compatibility of Science and the Christian Faith

Page 2

theory and data collection to offer up the best possible explanation for corporeal and related phenomena in God's Creation. The traditions of science are incorporated into its body through training at colleges, universities, research institutions and laboratories through the use of techniques, practices and beliefs consistent with those methods that have produced the best science in the past. Although there is no "scripture" in science, we may observe that the "text" of science is the phenomena to which it applies itself to understand, that part of the universe which exists in physical form as an extant body of God's glory.

The scientist makes his or her explanation of the universe in much the same way as St. Paul does when he asserts that "we see through a glass darkly". Science is an on-going process of observations of the natural world, formation of hypotheses, and testing of hypotheses through empirical evidence to form theories. Similarly, in Christian doctrinal development, our doctrines must be able to stand the test of time and the information we obtain through appeal to Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Sound Christian doctrines must be able to demonstrate "chronic vigor" (John Henry Newman, *Essays on the Development of Christian Doctrines*).

Both faith in God's creation and a scientifically based understanding of the cosmos are needed for the Church to discern and develop doctrines, liturgy and advice surrounding creation and science. Therefore, we encourage the study of the Catechism of Creation to enrich our Church in this aspect of our faith development.

Key Points

Resolution A136 serves as a renewed and refined commitment of the Episcopal Church to the ongoing interaction between our faith and the insight gained from science.

It offers anew the Catechism of Creation, as a tool for lifelong Christian Formation, in teaching about the stance of the Episcopal Church on the compatibility between science and faith.

By affirming *compatibility* we deny *conflict*.

The misguided 'conflict thesis' (that science arose out of and remains in conflict with religion) is unfortunately prominent in popular opinion - including within the church.

Promulgated by certain factions within the science-religion dialogue (i.e., fundamentalist Christians on the one hand and 'New Atheists' on the other), nearly all contemporary historians of science take this to be a patently (and laughably) false myth. This resolution will align the Episcopal Church with the mainstream of scholarly opinion,

Theology is not - and never has been - a closed system.

Anglicanism in particular values the 'three-legged stool' of scripture, tradition, and reason. This resolution affirms the Episcopal Church's commitment to the unity and diversity of knowledge.



Episcopal Ecological Network Talking Points

Resolution A053: Affirming the Compatibility of Science and the Christian Faith

Page 3

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Anglicanism in particular values the 'three-legged stool' of scripture, tradition, and reason. This resolution affirms the Episcopal Church's commitment to the unity and diversity of knowledge.

The Episcopal Church's affirmation of the compatibility of science and faith is in line with mainstream scientific opinion, reflected in the 2008 statement of the National Academy of Science and the Institute of Medicine with surmises: "Attempts to pit science and religion against each other create controversy where none needs to exist."¹

The Episcopal Church's affirmation is in line with consensus Christian opinion, including that of the Roman Catholic Church,² United Methodist Church,³ and others.

Notes:

¹ From *Science, Evolution, and Creationism* (2008), National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine. <http://nationalacademies.org/evolution/Compatibility.html> (Accessed 6/15/2012.)

² The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts: "Methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things the of the faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are." (159)

³ The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* (2008) states: "We find that science's descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology." (160 f.)

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