

IS HUMAN PREDATION ON OTHER SPECIES AN ACCOMMODATION OF THE FALL OF
CREATION OR PART OF GOD'S INTENDED PLAN FOR CREATION?

By

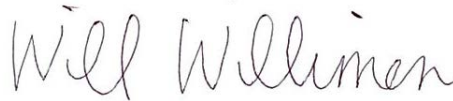
Joseph Armando Sandoval

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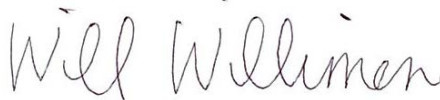
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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
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ABSTRACT

The scriptural witness has indications that it is acceptable to kill animals for food but also indicates that originally human beings were vegetarians and will be yet again when this world is claimed as part of God's kingdom. This thesis offers a theological analysis of the practice of humans eating animals. Is it an accommodation of humanity's fallenness after their expulsion from the Garden? Or is it part of God's design for the world? An in-depth look at the whole of scripture is employed for arguing both sides. Additionally, the thesis offers comparative analysis of a variety of theological approaches to animal rights and animal welfare. The thesis considers scientific revelations about animal's cognitive abilities for language and problem solving, as well as recent studies on animal grief in order to re-assess the underlying question of ethical relationship between animals and humans. The thesis argues that God has put humanity in a set of circumstances which are meant to encourage understanding of animals as part of its own growth. Specifically, human growth toward the role of being a stewards of creation, that is to say nurturers and not exploiters of God's creatures. Fallenness is not the issue. But growth is. Thus the provision that allows humanity to kill and eat animals is afforded, while humans still require the ability to kill animals for their own sustenance. What awaits is a time when humanity and animals are in peaceful community with each other, with no death or violence in the world and a full realization of the image of God in humanity.

INTRODUCTION

In western culture there has been a gradual awakening to the life conditions of non-human animals (henceforth referred to as “animals”) and a growing sensitivity to ways that humanity causes harm to animals. This is partially evidenced in the gradual increase of laws and organizations created to protect animals from abuse and from over-harvesting since the early 19th century.

After several failed attempts to enact laws in the British parliament that would address the mistreatment of animals, the first law enacted in the west that was concerned with the welfare of animals was the *Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act 1822*. Written to prevent the cruel and improper treatment of cattle, it protected ox, cow, heifer, steer, sheep, or “other cattle.” Around the same time civic organizations dedicated to the protection of animals were established. In Britain, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) was organized in 1824 and in 1840 was given royal status. In the U.S. the founding of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) followed in 1866.

These organizations came about mainly as a response to the cruel treatment of animals in hauling carriages, scientific experiments, and amusements such as fox-hunting, bull-baiting, and cock-fighting. Although some of the adherents to these causes were likely vegetarians and early animal-welfare advocates, the main concern of these organizations was to prevent the cruel abuse of animals, not to discontinue the use of animals all together as food sources or service animals.

In the twentieth century careful attention was given to preservation of animal species as a resource. In 1900 the U.S. Congress passed the Lacey Act, which was designed to protect indigenous species within the U.S. by limiting the foreign import of wild animals into the country. In 1937 the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act imposed an eleven percent tax on all hunting equipment. The revenue is used exclusively to establish, restore and protect wildlife habitats. In 1934 the sale of Federal Duck Stamps began in the U.S. to provide a means to purchase or lease habitat for migratory birds. In 1946 the International Whaling Convention was established in response to the rapid decline in whale populations. It later banned whaling except in cases where it was done as an expression of traditions among certain ancient cultures. In 1973 the Endangered Species Act provided for the conservation of species that are threatened with extinction.

In the late twentieth century the first Earth Day (later to be Earth Week) was celebrated. This celebration was organized to create awareness of environmental issues. At the same time there was a proliferation of laws and organizations that expanded the protection of animals from unnecessary pain or harm. The Animal Welfare Act of 1966 (AWA) specifies standards for the treatment and care of certain species of animals used for research, pet use, or exhibition. The Act was amended in 1970, 1976, 1985, 1990, 2002, 2007, 2013 to expand its scope in the number of species protected and the limitation as to how animals may be used. The Horse Protection Act

protected horses from inhumane training practices. The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 prevented the wanton killing of marine mammals and enforced the humane killing or taking of animals for cultural or research purposes.

Just as laws become more protective of animals, so did advocacy groups become more stringent in their beliefs regarding the treatment of animals. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) organized around the simple declaration that “Animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way.” Other movements have organized around the belief that animals have rights and are entitled to personhood. One of these movements, the Nonhuman Rights Project is attempting to expand an interpretation of the writ of Habeas Corpus in common law (the legal concept that individuals have a right to bodily liberty) to include animals.

The increased sensitivity to the welfare of animals is having an effect on how western culture thinks of food. More vegetarian options are available in restaurants and in frozen food cases in grocery stores. The sale of vegetarian foods has steadily increased since the late 1980s from \$138 million to over \$600 million in 1999.¹ Animal-based food products are being sold with the label “free-range,” “grass-fed,” and “cage-free.” The food industry is listening to people like Temple Grandin who studies the way animals perceive their environment with an eye toward reducing animal stress in the slaughtering process. Synthetic meats using vegetables, cultured protein or printed protein are making their way to markets and restaurants.

In addition to the growing sensitivity to the welfare of animals, science is telling us that the distinctions between animals and humans are not so clear. Research with chimpanzees², dogs³, and birds⁴ suggest that all animals show some degree of ability with language, problem solving, and tool making. In other research, animals have shown the ability to grieve the loss of companions, both of the same species and different species⁵. The findings from these research efforts challenge the notion that human beings should, on the basis of their abilities, be uniquely considered to be worthy of protection as individuals with a right to life.

Contemporary research, coupled with the expansion of non-human animal advocacy, raises a poignant question. Are humans killing and eating beings with whom we should be seeking relationship? In light of a mounting wave of public interest in animal welfare, evidenced by the growing prevalence of laws and organizations dedicated to improving the treatment of animals, as well as scientific studies suggesting that animals and humans share enough characteristics to make one pause before

¹ Donna Maurer, *Vegetarianism : Movement or Moment?* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002), loc. 80.

² R. A. Gardner and B. T. Gardner, "Teaching Sign Language to a Chimpanzee," *Science* 165, no. 3894 (Aug 15 1969), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.165.3894.664>.

³ A.K. Reid J.W. Pilley, "Border Collie Comprehends Object Names as Verbal Referents," *Behavioural Processes* 86, no. 2 (2011).

⁴ Jennifer Ackerman, *The Genius of Birds* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), Kindle.

⁵ Barbara J. King, *How Animals Grieve* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

reducing an animal to a mere senseless brute or a machine, then it seems humans who choose to eat animals face an ethical dilemma.

Christians in particular are likely to have a hard time accepting what science and personal experiences with animals are calling us to realize because Christian ethics tends to be framed by scripture. Specifically, the cleanliness codes seem to affirm the eating of animal-based protein. In Leviticus the instruction is: “Any animal that has divided hoofs and is cloven-footed and chews the cud—such you may eat.” (Lv 11:3) God’s instruction to Noah, once he has landed on dry land, says that meat is permissible (Gn 9:1-3), as does Peter’s vision before he ministers to Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:9-16).

While the examples above offer scriptural support for the practice of humans eating non-human animals, other portions of the biblical narrative push in another direction. The first creation story in Genesis indicates that humanity once lived on a vegan diet (Gn 1:29-30). The writings in the book of Daniel point to a vegetarian practice as commonplace among Jews (Dn 1:8-17). These examples gesture towards a tension within the biblical witness regarding the practice of humans eating non-human animals. Is there a scriptural basis for observing vegetarianism or veganism, or is this burgeoning contemporary movement merely an expression of misplaced sentiments towards beings who are not worthy of them?

Individuals and organizations who advocate for animal rights and animal welfare and who seek to ground their advocacy within the Christian tradition argue that the fall of humanity in the garden is the critical event that distorted man’s image and indeed, the whole world order. Before the fall, man had what we would now call a vegan diet. But that diet was only possible because God provided a garden that allowed the first man and woman to eat the fruits and nuts of trees and other green things without any knowledge of how to grow things or any effort to cultivate them. When God expelled the man and woman from the garden they had to feed themselves through their own toil. One of their solutions was to kill and eat animals. God accommodated man and woman in this regard. But God’s creative efforts are being hindered by this accommodation.

Following seminal philosophical works on animal rights like Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* and Tom Regan’s *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* more recent works by Andrew Linzey, Stephen Webb, and David Clough offer scripturally-based, theological reasons for extending special considerations for animal welfare. Seemingly in response, Christopher Southgate, Keith Ward, Holmes Rolston and others have made arguments that the way animals are currently treated is the way things are supposed to be.

This thesis offers critical analysis of these discrete positions and then makes an argument informed by both sides in order to argue that both a wholistic reading of scripture and the most advanced scientific research supports a vegetarian / vegan lifestyle as ethically normative. The thesis then addresses the practical implications of this view and the form of Christian witness that it might shape in a local church setting.

While the hope is that the argument this thesis makes is convincing, the author wants to make clear that the decision to engage in vegetarianism/veganism is a matter

of personal conscience. There is no condemnation for those who eat meat, nor is there any exalted status for those who refrain from eating meat. Vegetarianism/veganism in this life is not a requirement for salvation in the next. Vegetarianism/veganism is, however, a way of embracing a community of people and animals that seems to be an eschatological end held out to us by God. We may receive it by our actions and know its joys, or we may refuse it and still receive it by God's grace. The choice is ours.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST HUMAN PREDATION ON ANIMALS

Those who want to find in scripture guidance towards a way of life that is without the practice of killing other species for food will be frustrated. There is no clearly worded prohibition against such behavior. In the areas of scripture where we may look for such prohibitions, such as Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, we would find only directions on what animals are considered permissible to eat for the Israelites after their escape from Egypt. The remainder are labelled as “unclean” (Lv 11:4, NRSV). Refraining from consumption of food that is unclean is the closest thing to a prohibition against predation that one may find in scripture.

Cleanliness, as it applies to animals, is a concept that was apparently taken as universally understood. This usage for the word “clean” first appears in Genesis as part of the story of Noah (Gn 7:2) without explanation. This would seem to suggest that the Hebrew Bible, or at least the Pentateuch, was addressing an audience who was familiar with the concept of only eating foods that were clean.⁶

Also, this could explain why no overt prohibition of taking animals for food exists. In the writings of the Hebrew Bible human consumption of animal flesh was likely understood as a practice among the Israelites that would not soon be abandoned. The best one could expect of the Israelites was to be selective with regard to which types of animal flesh that they would eat.

This was something that was seemingly taught at an early age. The prophet Isaiah speaks of a Messiah child who will be born during the Syro-Ephraimite conflict but will be eating curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil (unclean food) and choose the good (clean food) (Is 7:15). The point of the statement is that Jerusalem will soon no longer be under siege and the people will no longer be forced to eat food that is not approved for them. But the circumstances under which this statement makes sense points to a tradition of indoctrinating children into a discipline of eating foods that have the greatest likelihood of maintaining good health.

The codification of healthy eating practices in the Pentateuch layers a divine mandate over what was likely a part of the Israelite culture for many generations.⁷ In a cultural milieu laced with pagan food traditions, the cleanliness codes sought to affirm the supremacy of a deity that made all things, provides the raw materials for sustenance, and also gives followers a set of instructions on things to avoid and things that are good. God provides. Therefore God, and God alone, is to be worshipped and thanked.⁸

⁶ Walter Houston, *Purity and Monotheism : Clean and Unclean Animals in Biblical Law*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 18-19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

But instead of reading the food cleanliness codes as a permission to kill and eat animals, those against eating animal flesh interpret the instructions that God gives in the practice of eating animals as an accommodation of practical necessity. The Exodus story in Israelite history depicts a period of forty years of wandering in wilderness. Because of their nomadic lifestyle they were not so much consumers of vegetables and grains as herders and consumers of sheep and goats. Grains, fruits, and vegetables were the produce of a settled people and were not available to the Israelites except through trade and displacement of people who were farmers of crops, orchards, and vineyards. Animal flesh and manna were largely the staples of the Israelites in their wanderings, eating wild game risked exposing the people to disease, hence the instructions on what animals were clean for them.

If the guidance on eating animal flesh is an accommodation to human necessity, then one may regard that accommodation as a response to a temporary condition. Psalm 111 indicates that God provides food to his people because he is ever mindful of his covenant with them. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years and were provided sustenance while they wandered, but at the close of that forty-year period, the Israelites were given land on which they could plant and grow food crops, orchards, and vineyards. God through Isaiah tells King Hezekiah that Jerusalem will soon be relieved of the siege of the Assyrians and they will be able to resume consumption of what grows from the land (2 Kgs 19:29-31).

So, one can see that the types of food chosen for the Israelites are based on the prevailing conditions of the time. But when environmental conditions pose no limitation, there seems to be a preference for vegetables. The prophet Daniel was taken into exile by king Nebuchadnezzar and was to be fed from the royal rations. But Daniel decided that he would not eat the royal rations for fear of defiling himself. Instead he chose to eat vegetables and to drink water. Daniel's preference improved his health and those of his fellow prophets. The outcome was a perception that vegetarianism was a means to better health (Dn 1:3-13).

In instances when God is directly providing food for a person's sustenance, he shows a preference for vegetable-based food. Elijah after escaping the wrath of Jezebel and making a day's journey in the wilderness falls asleep and wakes up to find that God has left him a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. (1 Kgs 19:1-9) God also directs Elijah to visit a woman in Zarephath who is preparing to die because of a drought and a famine in the land. He tells her to make him a little cake of meal out the meager stores of meal and oil that she has. She obeys even though she believes that he is depriving her and her son of sustenance. But the jar of meal and the jug of oil do not give out. She and her household are able to eat for many days, thus saving their lives (1 Kgs 17:7-16).

In view of these passages, animal flesh could be considered the food of expedience. It serves as sustenance for seasons in human history when no other alternatives are available. But this is a myopic view of scripture. As shall be covered in chapter two, there are plenty of sections of scripture dedicated to methods of worship

involving sacrifice and human consumption of animals. And yet there are verses which seem to indicate a time when human and non-human animals are to live in harmony.

The writings of Isaiah point to a time when God's anointed one will come as a king to save the people of Israel, bring peace to the land, and establish harmony among all living creatures (Is 11:6-9, 65:25). The act of making sacrifice is looked upon as barbarism and idolatry instead of faithful worship,

"Thus says the Lord:

Heaven is my throne

and the earth is my footstool;

what is the house that you would build for me,

and what is my resting place?

All these things my hand has made,

and so all these things are mine,

says the Lord.

But this is the one to whom I will look,

to the humble and contrite in spirit,

who trembles at my word.

Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being;

whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck;

whoever presents a grain-offering, like one who offers swine's blood;

whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol

These have chosen their own ways,

and in their abominations they take delight.

I also will choose to mock them,

and bring upon them what they fear;

because, when I called, no one answered,

when I spoke, they did not listen;

but they did what was evil in my sight,

and chose what did not please me." (Is 66:3-4)

Instead of singling out sacrifice that is done insincerely, Isaiah seems to be saying that sacrifice itself is no longer faithful worship. The practice of sacrifice and presumably the consumption of the flesh that results is an abomination. His prescriptions against such practices, however, are going unheeded. There is still a gap between what the people's practice is presently and what will be when the Messiah comes.

God through Isaiah seemingly wants to take back what was given to humanity. Where once there was a way to restore the relationship with God by humanity through the sacrifice of animals, now God desires a humble and contrite spirit, who is obedient to the point of trembling at the hearing of God's word.

When the life of an ox is equated to that of a human being and the life of a lamb to that of a dog, there is an implied equity among all creatures that recalls the condition

of creation before the Israelites were wandering in the desert and sacrifices were an endorsed form of worship. It recalls a condition before Noah is given the earth following the flood and God allows him to eat every moving thing (Gn 9:1-6). Isaiah is speaking of a time before the fall of humanity when God and humanity roamed together in a beautiful garden and every green plant was given to all creation for food. In this happy time, no living being predated on any other living being (Gn 1:29-30).

The fall of humanity could then be viewed as the critical event which is responsible for the loss of harmony among the beings of creation. The act of killing other beings is what shatters that harmony. Sacrifice, which can be thought of as a mindful and reverent way of killing an animal for food, is what was once the prescribed means of atonement. But the Messiah will be a restorative force, healing the rift among God's creatures and calling them to the existence that they had before the fall.

The Christian tradition locates the arrival of the Messiah in the event of Jesus Christ. Jesus' effect upon the world through his life and teaching has been to call people towards an awareness of God's kingdom within themselves as well as an embodiment of God's kingdom in between "the already and the not yet" (Lk 17:20-21). The kingdom of God becomes reality in the world when love replaces hate and care for others replaces violence. Predation upon other creatures for food, no matter how sensitively it is carried out, is a violent act and hinders the expression of the kingdom of God in this world. From this perspective any provision in scripture that regulates human predation is an accommodation of the fallen-ness of humanity. God's desired end for the world is much like its condition at its beginning, that God may have a loving and intimate relationship with creation, and for creation, a loving, intimate relationship with itself.

Sarah Withrow King has a similar scriptural interpretation. She agrees with the idea that the fall of humanity is the cause of humanity's careless violence toward animals. This carelessness extends not only to the food industry but scientific experimentation. She sees the fall as affecting not only the condition of humanity but the entirety of creation. All animal predation, not just human predation, has its origins in the fall of humanity.

In her view the *imago Dei* into which we are created calls us to be the presence of God on earth by what we do and who we are, which is best modeled by the person of Jesus. We do this by respecting and loving what God has created, and nurturing all creatures to live to their greatest potential. To have "dominion" over creation or to be stewards of it does not mean that we can do with creatures what we will.⁹

She hears the writing of the prophets as the eschatological hope for a harmonious community among all animals. She sees the warnings the prophets make as directives to be the peaceable kingdom as described in Isaiah. She recognizes that Jesus was the person who was powerful over all and yet a servant to all. As such he was a model for all of us. To be a Christian follower is to be the one who seeks opportunities

⁹ Sarah Withrow King, *Animals Are Not Ours (No, Really, They're Not): An Evangelical Animal Liberation Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 297.

to serve others to lift them up and not use them for her or his own purposes. King believes that the “others” we should lift up includes animals.¹⁰

King addresses animal liberation from an anti-abortion, pro-life perspective that she has known and been an activist for since she was able to walk. As she grew, her advocacy for beings who cannot speak for themselves expanded to include non-human animals. She would argue that the neighbors spoken of in the parable of the Good Samaritan include animals. References throughout scripture to the weak and the vulnerable and the directive to care for them should encourage the Christian follower to realize that mutual nurture and comfort is a teleological goal for creation which is not restricted to human beings for human beings. The reference to “all flesh” that is used throughout the whole of scripture to describe the scope of God’s concern for his creation, means not just all of humanity, but all beings.

Stephen Webb in his *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* takes another tack. As a theologian he develops a theology of animals that has both “integrity and openness.” To do this he borrows a method that Paul Tillich calls “correlational theology” which correlates contemporary concerns with theological convictions. As Webb describes it, correlational theology learns from the political but also subjects it to a theological critique and transformation.¹¹

The correlation that Webb wants to make is between the experiences one has from being in relationship with an animal as a pet (i.e. the unmerited, overflowing love that one feels in that relationship) and the theological concept of grace. Grace is a condition that is usually applied to the relationship between God and humanity. But Webb feels strongly that the excesses of a dog’s emotions towards the dog’s human companion is a manifestation of what could exist among all human and non-human animals. Between these populations is an inchoate state of grace, not yet fully formed, but modeled for humanity by the person of Jesus Christ with the hope that followers of Jesus will engage in behaviors towards all living creatures that will encourage that condition of grace among *all flesh*.

The transformative part of Webb’s correlation comes to bear in his assertion that “the basic point of Christian theology is that the cross does not take away but instead reveals our sin, so that repentance, not celebration, is the only possible response. The cross says no to our amazing and infinite capacity to make violence meaningful. The implication for animals is enormous.”¹² His point is that the cross is the event that should make us realize our guilt in killing and eating animals with total lack of regard for the life we are taking. The cross is the symbolic equivalent of the prophet Nathan coming to our homes at dinnertime as we feast on animal flesh and saying, “You are the man!” (2 Sam 12:1-15). Our repentance should be no less intense and genuine than David’s repentant response to Nathan’s reproof and his accompanying remorse (Ps 51).

¹⁰ Ibid., 29-38.

¹¹ Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), location 283-88, Kindle.

¹² Ibid., location 2406.

Webb offers that one of the ways we can repent is through the way we think of the eucharist. He says that eating in memory of the sacrificed Jesus (“Do this in remembrance of me”) is to acknowledge our part in inflicting pain upon others (including animals) and calls us to stop participating in such cruelty in the future (“Go, and sin no more”). The vegetarian communion meal (bread and juice or wine) is a way to give thanks to God for allowing us to eat a meal in the presence of God and our brothers and sisters which is guilt-free. It is God’s way of pointing us toward a world of peace and harmony through the possibility of eating a meal without causing suffering. Celebrating communion gives humanity a glimpse of the world that God is bringing about.¹³

The abstention from consuming meat was a subject of debate in the early church. Even though vegetarianism is a word that was first used in the 19th century¹⁴, vegetarianism as a way of life existed as described in scripture (the excerpt from Daniel has already been mentioned) and in the early church. But abstention from eating meat was not a movement in itself. It was part of a general asceticism of the time which included abstention from sexual intercourse, abstention from drinking of wine, and fasting. Gnostics and Marcionites were adherents to the practice because it was consistent with their dualistic belief system. Maybe because of association with those heretical movements, vegetarianism became associated with social and spiritual deviancy, so much so that the church judged it a heresy by the second century.¹⁵

Arguments against vegetarianism came mainly from two objections. It was seen as a condemnation of marriage and procreation and a repudiation of the material creation of God. The link between the two stems from a belief that eating meat inflamed lusts in humans and thus was God’s way of inspiring procreation. Ireneaeus in his treatise *Against all Heresies*, writes that those who abstain from human intercourse engage in ingratitude towards God.¹⁶

Arguments for vegetarianism focused mainly on the individual’s health. Clement of Alexandria in his *Paedagogus* cited standard concepts from ancient medicine and ethics and pointed out the ill-effects of eating meat and drinking wine. He offered that the strongest, wisest, and healthiest people are those who eat the most frugally and avoid meat and wine because of its capacity to create an excess of passion and lust. Tertullian in his treatise *On Fasting* writes that while on the one hand “food either kills or wounds all discipline,” on the other hand the discipline of fasting and abstinence makes a friend of God.¹⁷ But mindful of the church’s view that not eating meat as a rule

¹³ Ibid., location 2563.

¹⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Vegetarianism," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vegetarianism&oldid=932723971> (accessed January 9, 2020).

¹⁵ Rachel Muers David Grumett, ed. *Eating and Believing*, Kindle ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), location 1897.

¹⁶ Ibid., location 1903.

¹⁷ Ibid., location 1985-92.

of life was heretical, the early church fathers who made the strongest case for it did not advocate the practice of vegetarianism for the long-term or for entire communities.¹⁸

Parallel to the development of vegetarianism as part of a personal discipline for religious reasons was a vegetarianism for humanitarian reasons. The first century philosopher Plutarch attempted to prove in his collection of treatises titled *Moralia* that animals had intelligence and had a right to receive fair and equitable treatment from humans. Thus it was immoral to kill animals and eat their flesh. Plutarch argued that not only was the predation upon animals detrimental to animals, it was harmful to humans also. His empathy for animals made him almost unique in the ancient world.¹⁹

As it was in Christianity, abstention from eating meat was counter-cultural in the Greco-Roman religious system. Animals were regularly offered as sacrifices to the gods. Adherents to vegetarianism were viewed with suspicion and a sense of betrayal.²⁰ It would take some time before the social mechanisms arrayed against vegetarianism would decay to the point that a full-blown movement of vegetarianism could take hold in Western culture.

Vegetarianism as a social movement in and of itself began to gain widespread acceptance in the West in the 19th century. Beginning in Britain, organizations like the Vegetarian Society, the Order of the Cross, the Order of the Danielites, and the Humanitarian League formed and espoused abstention from killing and eating animals. These organizations commonly originated from the church. They had clerical leadership and biblical underpinnings, sometimes with questionable scriptural interpretations. At the same time a movement of liberal Christianity was taking hold, embracing eastern spirituality where vegetarianism was commonplace, and perhaps giving cover to these western vegetarian groups. Presently multiple Christian traditions have denominational groups organized around the effort to bring the church to vegetarianism. They cite some of the scripture passages mentioned earlier in this chapter as the scriptural warrant for their efforts. The motivation they offer to potential followers are the same as in antiquity: the alleviation of suffering of animals and the person's own physical and spiritual well-being²¹

In spite of the efforts to establish animal welfare and vegetarian groups within church denominations, the matter of what humanity's relationship is or should be with animals has only started to be addressed in the last 40 years or so. Andrew Linzey in *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* says that the problem is not that the church has addressed the issue of animals and rendered an unsatisfactory answer, it is that the work in considering what animal's relationship should be to humanity with respect to the church has yet to be done.²²

¹⁸ Ibid., location 1862.

¹⁹ Ibid., location 2431-39.

²⁰ Ibid., location 2461-70.

²¹ Ibid., location 3186-421.

²² Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1987), 23.

As a result, Linzey has devoted himself to building a theological body of work to the end of creating an awareness of the place of animals in God's creation and what our response should be to that understanding. *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* addresses what God should be able to expect of humanity in its treatment of animals based on the realization that God created each being with an intentioned purpose. Then he gave dominion over animals to humanity. Linzey argues that dominion does not mean that humanity can do what it wills to all the other beings of the earth, or to the plant kingdom, or the inanimate portion of God's creation for that matter. Having dominion over the earth calls humanity to be mindful of the Creator's wishes for creation. With respect to animals, humanity's work is to discern the role of each being as it is ordained by God and to help that being achieve God's hoped-for end.

Linzey is sensitive to the objections that some have raised over the use of the word "rights." He recognizes that rights as they are commonly defined by human beings for the sake of human beings would seem to encroach upon God's sovereignty over his creation. This is not Linzey's usage of the word or his intention. He clarifies that the rights he is recognizing are "Theos-rights," God-given rights. They proceed from the understanding that God does not simply give animals to humanity. God gives humanity animals with some expectations. Animal rights are rights only because of the "God given-ness" of animals.

Speaking of rights naturally calls for an enumeration of ways the grantor of those rights should treat the grantee. Usually a right is granted in response to a mutually acknowledged "wrong." Linzey speaks to a number of these wrongs. He believes that animals should be free from wanton injury. Injury means pain, suffering, harm, distress, deprivation, and death. Wanton actions are those devoid of moral justification like 'need', 'defense', 'survival', or even benefit.²³ They should be free from institutionalized suffering. Institutionalized suffering includes intensive farming of animals for food production, painful experimentation, and fur-trapping.²⁴ They should be free from oppressive control which includes, keeping them in captivity, breeding pets for trade, pest control, and culling.²⁵

Linzey also says that an acknowledgement of animal rights alone does not adequately address the condition that should exist between animals and humanity. Rights language necessarily describes the minimums of treatment for the beings accorded those rights. Linzey believes that God hopes for a relationship between humanity and animals that is one of care and nurture. This is the subject of his book *Animal Theology*.

In *Animal Theology* Linzey puts theological views on various subjects concerning humanity's relationship with animals in conversation with each other. In addition to his own thoughts he uses those of Albert Schweitzer, Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Calvin, Peter Singer, Rene Descartes, and others. The subjects he

²³ Ibid., 105.

²⁴ Ibid., 110-28.

²⁵ Ibid., 129-41.

discusses are theological concepts related to animals that together form an animal theology.

In the book he recognizes God's call for a reverence for all life, and that humanity's role in creation is to be a caretaker of creation, not an exploiter of it. To get there, he expresses God's relationship to humanity in terms of a "Generosity Paradigm." He argues that humanity in its fallen-ness would continue to be a weak and frail creature if it weren't for Christ who chose to humble himself for the benefit of humanity. He uses the words of Barth to explain, "Without the condescension of God there would be no exaltation of man."²⁶ Linzey goes on to propose that, "if it is true that this paradigm of generous, costly service is at the heart of the Christian proclamation then it must also be the paradigm for the exercise of human dominion over the animal world."²⁷

Humans then, in Linzey's view, are the servant species. God has made them first of all in the world in terms of their abilities so that they may be servants of all. In the meantime, God suffers alongside the suffering of animals as he waits for humanity to take up the role of being caretaker priests, sacrificing their own lives for the welfare of the lives of other animals.

This understanding of the role of humanity in creation points us to a realization that the world as it currently is needs healing. The world is now full of suffering - a great deal of it at the hands of humanity. The "laws of nature" are a result of the fallen-ness of creation in general and humanity in particular. As such they are neither laws as God would have them nor natural.²⁸

Linzey then says that this understanding calls into question many of the ways humanity uses animals, including the practice of predating upon animals through the means of hunting and farming. The arguments of eating animal flesh out of necessity are losing their strength as vegetable-based diets are recognized as nutritionally adequate and more beneficial to health. The arguments that eating animals is "the natural way of things" is not biblically supported nor does it seem consistent with an understanding of God as giver of life.

Linzey is sensitive to the religious forces arrayed against his particular school of Christian thought about animals. He frequently mentions Thomas Aquinas' belief that animals are meant for human use. He argues that this instrumentalist view of animals has held the church's theology hostage to this day. In his collaboration with Dan Cohn-Sherbok *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* the two name the prevailing theology of the church *humanocentric*. This humanocentricity is made manifest in the way that the church worships in that non-human creatures hardly ever get mentioned in church liturgy.²⁹

²⁶ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, University of Illinois Press ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-83.

²⁹ Dan and Andrew Linzey Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (Herndon, Virginia: Mowbray, 1997), 109-10.

Karl Barth in particular is blamed for ignoring the references in scripture that would draw attention to the beings with whom humans share the earth. “An example of this problem (humanocentricity) from the standpoint of Christian theology may help. The instrumentalist tendency finds its classic Christian expression in the theology of Karl Barth. However much his thought is capable of reconstruction and development even in relation to animals, there are times when Barth is so crassly and grossly wrong as to make one rub one’s theological eyes; and one of these moments is when he defines without a blush creation *as* anthropology: ‘... in practice the doctrine of creation means anthropology – the doctrine of man.’ Notwithstanding all the marvelous and extraordinary things which Barth’s theology can offer an understanding of animals, in the end Barth cannot escape a naïve and direct anthropocentricity against which he originally protested.³⁰ Again, ‘...the Word of God does not contain any account of the cosmos...The Word of God is concerned with God and man.’³¹

Linzey and Sherbok point out the stories and scriptural interpretations in both the Christian and Judaic traditions that tug mightily at the humanocentric restraints. Linzey speaks of the early Christian mystics who were very much as concerned for the welfare of animals as they were for human beings. But their influence has proven no match for those who have chosen through the ages to believe that humanity and humanity’s relationship with God is of primary concern at the expense of what relationship God may want for humanity and the rest of the universe. Linzey and Sherbok see this conservative theology as being the product of hubris and human-centered idolatry on the part of the whole of humanity.³² In *After Noah* they call for a liberation of theology by removing the humanocentric bonds that have held it captive for hundreds of years.

In his book *Animal Gospel* Linzey makes comparisons to the cruel way animals are used for food, clothing and other materials, and experimentation to the treatment Jesus received upon the cross. He bases his analogy on the condition of innocence for each, their defenselessness against those who inflict the suffering, and the undeserved treatment the sufferers receive. Using the words of John Henry Newman, Linzey calls cruelty inflicted upon animals “intrinsically evil.”³³

If some will argue that what has been gained from acts such as animal experimentation serves as justification, Linzey has none of it. He labels such thinking as consequentialism. He says if acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular

³⁰ Linzey inserts a note here indicating that Barth rejects Luther’s statement in the Smaller Catechism which begins, “I believe that God has created me...” According to Barth, humans cannot posit such a “naïve and direct anthropocentricity” assuming that “man” is the center of the universe: *Church Dogmatics*, III/1: *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey and H. Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1960), n. p.21.

³¹ Cohn-Sherbok, 118.

³² *Ibid.*, 118-27.

³³ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 66.

circumstances cannot remove the evil. For Linzey there is no justification for cruel acts towards animals, which includes using them for food.³⁴

Repeatedly in his books Linzey laments the poverty of concern for animals in the current state of Christian theology. He blames anthropocentric tendencies in Western thought and also the lasting impact of the thinking of Descartes who believed that animals were little more than machines and Thomas Aquinas whose instrumentalist views on animals seem to have held the church in thrall for hundreds of years.

As if in response to Linzey's plaintive appeals, David Clough stepped into the breach left by Linzey to write *On Animals* volumes I and II. Like Linzey, Clough considers current church doctrine neglectful in terms of animals in particular and the non-human portion of creation in general. He sets out to correct this problem by adding to the church's theology without discarding thousands of years of collective thought on God, humanity, and the relationship between the two. Instead he characterizes his efforts as adding a "concentric circle" of moral concern to the church's theology using as an example Francis Bacon's moral analysis of three concentric circles where the innermost circle is self-interest, the next outlying circle is common interest within a group or nation, and the most extreme circle being concerns of the whole human race.³⁵ Clough wants to add a transcending and more inclusive theology that speaks to the relationship that animals may have with God and humanity.

In doing so Clough realizes that his focus on animals also is guilty of ignoring a greater and more inclusive moral concern: that of all of creation as a whole ecological system. But Clough stands by his decision to focus on animals saying that to do so is not an argument against theological discussion of a broader ecological awareness. His choice in expanding the scope of theology to include animals and to go no further is what he calls a vital theological and moral task in itself. Clough says that to go straight to considering ecosystems without addressing animals separately would indicate that animals have significance only as part of the ecosystems to which they belong.³⁶ So Clough sets out to expand theological thought to animals in three areas, the Doctrine of Creation, the Doctrine of Reconciliation, and the Doctrine of Redemption.

With regard to the Doctrine of Creation Clough agrees with the standard doctrine that creation is important in that it is the platform for God's redemption of humanity. Calvin and Barth both make mention of creation as a "disposable stage" upon which humanity toils and works out its existence. But he suggests it is more than that. Creation is good in itself, as the scriptural witness in Genesis 1 indicates repeatedly. Creation is not merely a means to an end. It is included in the drama of redemption as a whole chorus of players of which humanity is only one.³⁷ According to Clough, the short shrift that the rest of creation receives in favor of human beings is not the result of an honest reading of the Genesis text, instead it comes from a slanted

³⁴ Ibid., 66-67.

³⁵ David L. Clough, *On Animals*, vol. 1, *Volume One - Systematic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012), location 215, Kindle.

³⁶ Ibid., location 189-215.

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

interpretation of scripture meant to make it congruent with a view of the place of humanity in creation derived from other sources such as Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* and the writings of Descartes.³⁸

If that is so, then animals, non-human as well as human, have a particular place before God. Humanity's relationship with God is born out of our *animal-ness*. To be sure we are human animals with a particular role to play in creation, but we are not separate from the portion of creation that is composed of all animals. We may be self-interested in giving particular theological attention to humanity's relationship with God, but that leaves unexplored the relationship that God has with the rest of his vast creation. This begs us to give similar attention to animals.³⁹

Then Clough turns his attention to what theologically sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. He focuses on the parts of Genesis that refer to humans being made in God's image (Gn 1:26-27, 9:6). If God is, according to the Doctrine of the Trinity, creator, redeemer, and sustainer of the world, then humanity, having been made in God's image, would be able to share the same hopes and dreams that God has for the world. Although humanity's capabilities are small and finite compared to the vast power of God, having dominion over the rest of the creaturely world means doing the work on the ground necessary to help in the divine project of redemption and sustenance. This role of being creation's caretaker is what distinguishes humanity from the rest of God's creatures.⁴⁰ This view is very much in line with Andrew Linzey's perceived role for humanity in creation.

As caretakers, humanity is called to attend to the ways that each species of animal is different. Clough calls this a responsibility and a joy, a responsibility because we are made with God's image, which means we are made to do this work; a joy because giving attention to the intricate detail of the lives of other animals is one way in which we may celebrate "the magnificently varied and mysterious creative work of God." Attending to the differences between our species and others, requires as full an understanding of those species as is possible so that we may understand what each species needs from us.⁴¹

Stanley Hauerwas and John Berkman view humanity's role similarly in their essay "The Chief End of All Flesh." In it they seek to emphasize the common creatureliness of humans and other animals with the only theological difference between the two groups being that God has given humans a unique purpose by virtue of being made in the image of God. They point out though that an appeal to care about animals on the basis of their rights as Linzey did in his first efforts to bring moral attention to animals is an impoverished approach. Much richer and more faithful to the gospel is a recognition of the call to regard animals with love and peace.⁴² This is the basis of the purpose given

³⁸ Ibid., 9.

³⁹ Ibid., 43-44.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁴¹ Ibid., 76.

⁴² Stanley Hauerwas and John Berkman, "The Chief End of All Flesh," *Theology Today* 49, no. 2 (1992): 201, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/004057369204900206>.

to humanity. We manifest God's glory when we learn to see animals as God sees animals, which is to say that animals are not on the earth for our use. Rather they are present among us for God's good pleasure of which we may partake as we find ways to live as God's deputies, caring for and nurturing our fellow animals.⁴³

Next Clough seeks to expand the view of the Doctrine of Reconciliation. His argument is that the New Testament witness places the significance of the incarnation of God in the fact that he became *flesh* and not merely a member of the species *Homo sapiens*. This should indicate to us that God's concern is not solely the reconciliation of humanity to him, but the reconciling of all creatures (all flesh). This reflects a consistency in the scope of concern for the doctrines of incarnation and creation.⁴⁴

Clough, like Linzey, also recognizes that his expanded view of theology puts him at odds with established formulations of Christian doctrine, namely those of Karl Barth. But while Clough believes that the bulk of Barth's work is humanocentric, he also lifts up some statements in *Church Dogmatics* that leave openings for new formulations. In Barth's Doctrine of Election concerning John 3:16, Clough sees such an opening:

"What takes place in this election is always that God is for us; for us, and therefore for the world which was created by Him, which is distinct from Him, but which is yet maintained by Him. The election is made with a view to the sending of His Son. And this means always that in Him and through Him God moves towards the world. It means not merely that He creates and sustains the world, but that He works on it and in it by (miracle of all miracles) giving Himself to it. It means that the will for fellowship, which is his very being and to which the world owes its existence, is actively demonstrated to the world in a way which surpasses anything that could be expected or claimed. If we describe this movement as election, then it is only because we would thereby emphasize that it is the active demonstration of His love. Would it be love – the love of the personal God, and as such real love – if it were not an electing? As electing love it can never be hatred or indifference, but always love. And the active demonstration of that love is this: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.'" (Jn 3:16)⁴⁵

Barth's emphasis on God's movement toward the *world* and loving the *world* has implications for God's election of non-human creatures according to Clough. Barth's focus on Jesus Christ as the elected and the hope of all humanity for being made elect, also brings hope to all creatures through the sharing of creaturely flesh. Barth's grand vision of a radically inclusive election through Jesus Christ makes a move to include other creatures alongside human creatures to be a comparatively small adaptation.⁴⁶

Therefore God's hope for wholesome, peaceful, and harmonious lives for those he creates is not limited to just humans. The eschatological peace described in Isaiah (Is

⁴³ Ibid., 204-05.

⁴⁴ Clough, 88.

⁴⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Vol. 2, the Doctrine of God. Part 1* (S.l.: T. & T. Clark., 1957), 25-26, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?BART;CD0201>.

⁴⁶ Clough, 97.

11:6-9, 65:25) and in Revelation (Rv 21:4) is for all of God's creatures. The present period of living at the expense of other creatures' lives inaugurated in Genesis 9 is in Clough's words "a concession by God to the human inability to live within the original constraints envisaged in Genesis 1 and 2."⁴⁷ God's great work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ is meant to call all of God's creatures, human and non-human, towards that eschatological peace and should not be understood as merely a hope for humanity only.

What does this mean for the scope of redemption? Clough simply believes that those theological accounts that have attempted to limit redemption's effects to humanity are ignoring a large portion of the biblical witness and are being neglectful of the other creatures that God had reason to make as part of his created order. Therefore we can discern that the hoped-for future of humanity is also meant to be the future for all animals.⁴⁸

Having put some flesh on the bones of a systematic theology on animals, Clough then turns to an ethics for animals in his second volume of *On Animals*. With regard to humans predating upon animals Clough states that viewing animals as fellow beneficiaries of God's grace in creation, reconciliation, and redemption, is incompatible with the practices of using them for food.⁴⁹ This calls into question the practices of raising them on intensive farms, hunting them, or even keeping them on traditional farms where quality of life is optimum but their fate is the same. Using them for food for any reason simply ignores the truth that animals are creatures of God that God has hopes and designs for.

Clough does allow that there are parts of the world where the land is not arable and hunting is the only means of sustenance. He also notes that many of the cultures that live in such areas approach the act of killing with regret. But in the remaining parts of the world where plant-based foods are able to be grown in abundance there is no need to raise animals for food. In fact it is a more efficient way of feeding the population. Clough cites a statistic that says less than 10% of feed calories or protein used to feed farmed animals ultimately becomes consumed meat, dairy, or egg calories. Whereas using the feed crops themselves to feed humans could increase caloric availability by 70 per cent.⁵⁰

For Christians the decision to kill animals for food exists in the tension between creation as we know it and the new creation that God will bring.⁵¹ Whenever we are able to procure food without killing we should do so. Whenever we are able to eat eggs and drink milk that is produced in a manner that allows the animals involved to flourish we should do so. Our failing to do so, as with all failings, force us to lean upon God's grace.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁹ David L. Clough, *On Animals: Theological Ethics*, vol. 2 (London: T&T Clark, 2019), location 1957, Kindle.

⁵⁰ Ibid., location 1844.

⁵¹ Ibid., location 2315-28.

Chapter Two

ARGUMENTS FOR HUMANS PREDATING ON ANIMALS

As a counter to the previous chapter, this chapter shall be dedicated to studying the possible scriptural warrants for allowing human predation on animals and then surveying the thoughts of several Christian theologians on the subject who have demonstrated a pro-predation belief. It should be noted that the theologians presented in this chapter do not agree on all fronts. Some lean on certain parts of scripture at the expense of other parts. To help the reader understand the organization of this chapter, the scriptural warrants are studied first. Then the theologians are presented simply in the order that they appear in history.

The first scriptural warrant for allowing humans to predate on animals is Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'" That this text is also used by those who see in it a prescription against human predation on animals speaks more to the hermeneutic employed than any ambiguity in the text. Meat-eaters read "dominion" to mean that humans can do with animals, and the rest of creation for that matter, as they will. As has been described in the previous chapter, people against meat eating, read special meaning into the act of making humankind in God's image. This implies that dominion is not tyranny so much as it is stewardship, being deputized caretakers of God's creation.

The next piece of scripture that warrants human predation on animals is Genesis 9:3, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." This piece of scripture clearly indicates a change in the instructions on what may be eaten. Whereas in Genesis 1:29 the only food given was green things, plants yielding seed, and trees with seed in its fruit, now everything, including animals may be eaten. The only exception is that no blood of any animal may be taken in as food. Blood is the essence of life and therefore belongs to God.

When the Israelites are wandering in the wilderness for forty years, God provides for them quails that they may kill and eat as well as manna. Later when they are given the food cleanliness codes, meat is still very much on the menu (Lv 11:1-23). Meat is even involved in the worship practice for God. When offerings of animals are made to God, Aaron and his sons are given the meat of the offerings (Nm 18:5-15).

Not all of slaughtering of animals has to be part of an act of worship though. God makes provision for the Israelites to use animals for food in a non-ceremonial context. Deuteronomy 12:15 allows the Israelites to slaughter and eat meat anywhere and there is no prohibition against those who are unclean in their ability to take part. Again, in Deuteronomy 12:20-22 meat is allowed to be eaten based on a person's desire to eat it. The language in the passage allows one to infer that it would be preferable

that the slaughtering of the animal be done as part of a sacrificial offering but if the distance from the authorized site of sacrifice makes such an effort not practical, then the slaughtering may be done with no religious significance and whenever one desires to eat meat.

The psalms contain several references to God's providence of food of the flesh of animals. In Psalm 104, the young lions seek their food from God. In Psalm 111, 136 and 145, God is the provider of food to those who fear him, and indeed to all creation, which one may assume includes animal flesh.

In Isaiah an eschatological vision has the Lord of hosts providing a feast with rich food, filled with marrow (Is 25:6-8). Marrow is the soft, fatty substance within bones that produces blood cells. Although there are medical procedures today which allow the extraction of marrow without slaughtering an animal, such would not have been possible in the time of Isaiah's writings. Extracting marrow would have required breaking, crushing, or cutting bones of such size to make the effort worthwhile. Marrow is high in fat and protein with a rich, slightly sweet flavor. That this food is included in a festive meal meant to be part of a celebration at the end of all things would seem to call into question the interpretation of the eschatological vision in Isaiah 11 and 65 which is often read as reason to refrain from the violent slaughtering of animals.

Ezekiel has a vision of God showing him water emanating from the south end of the temple. The water was one thousand cubits wide and so deep that it could not be crossed. The water of the great river gives life to trees and every living creature that swarms. It will fill the Dead Sea and make its waters fresh. Fish will be in the river in abundance and the fish will be of many kinds, just like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. People will stand fishing beside the Dead Sea and cast nets (Ez 47:8-10). Once again here is an eschatological vision where the taking of animals (in this case fish) for consumption is part of the hoped-for future for the people of God.

The stories of Jesus seem to indicate that he was no vegetarian. Jesus' call for a loosening of the food cleanliness laws by saying that nothing (including, presumably, animal flesh) going into a person can defile, it is what comes out (the bad things people can say) that defiles (Mt 15:10-11). Jesus feeds the five thousand by multiplying loaves and fish (Mt 14:13-21). Jesus celebrates the traditional Passover meal, which includes lamb (Mk 14:12-16). Killing the fatted calf is Jesus' way of describing proper celebration of the return of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-24). When Jesus appears to the disciples after his crucifixion he eats broiled fish (Lk 24:36-43).

When God arranges a meeting between Peter and Cornelius, he prepares Peter by showing him a vision. God reveals to Peter a sheet descending from heaven with all kinds of animals on it. God urges Peter to kill and eat the animals. Peter objects on the premise that he has never eaten anything unclean. God's responds, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." In other words, all animals are clean for eating (Acts 10:9-16).

Paul in his correspondence with the Romans (Rom 14:1-4, 16-23) and the Corinthians (1 Cor 8:4-7, 10:27-32) deals with the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols. He goes to great lengths to say that eating it is not a problem to the strong in

faith, but may be injurious to those who are weak in faith and observe those who do eat meat of that nature. Paul's instruction is more of an etiquette lesson on matters of the spirit and never objects to the act of eating animals. He even goes so far to say that the weak (of faith) eat only vegetables.

Similarly, the writer of Hebrews declares that it is wrong to be carried away by "all kinds of strange teachings" about food. Far better is it to be strengthened by the knowledge of God's grace and to eat what one pleases. This apparently is another repudiation of the Jewish food cleanliness codes, thus allowing the consumption of all types of meat (Heb 13:7-14).

From scriptural warrants we now turn to a sampling of theologians who believe that human predation on animals is part of God's intent for his creation. In his *Summa Theologica* Thomas Aquinas invokes the thoughts of Augustine of Hippo and Aristotle to buttress his own belief about human predation on non-human animals. From Augustine he states that the prohibition against killing is given in the context of what humans are not allowed to do vis a vis other human beings. Never was it intended for the sixth commandment to extend to living things other than humans. That is because in Augustine's view humans are not in league with other living things. They stand alone by virtue of their ability for rational thought. Therefore, the commandment against killing refers implicitly to the killing of human beings.¹

From Aristotle, Aquinas takes the argument that among living beings there exists a hierarchy of perfection, each species taking a place in the hierarchy. Humanity sits atop the hierarchy as the most perfect of beings. Each being below humanity in the hierarchy is, by nature, for the use of humanity. And for each species, the species below them are for the use of that species. Each being's purpose is to serve the use of the beings above them in the hierarchy. Aquinas states that living beings cannot use other living beings without depriving them of life. Cows cannot use the grass that they eat unless the life of that grass is ended. Likewise, a human cannot use the meat of that cow unless that cow is slaughtered. In each case while losing its particular life, each being is fulfilling its purpose. Aquinas declares that there is no sin in using a thing for its purpose. Therefore predation is not only allowed, but encouraged.²

Karl Barth speaks to the issue of human predation upon animals in a portion of his multi-volume *Church Dogmatics* that he calls "Respect for Life." In part, he writes this to rebut Albert Schweitzer's assertion in his *Kultur und Ethik* in which Schweitzer states that above all, life must be respected. Barth disputes this by exploring systematically what life is.

Barth begins by stating that a man's life is not his own.³ It is in fact given to him by God on loan. And so man is dependent upon God for his life. Man's existence is that of a living soul within a body. God knows each individual person as the individuals that

¹ Thomas Aquinas and Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Part Iii (Tertia Pars) : From the Complete American Edition (S.l.: s.n.)*, 2412, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19950>.

² Ibid.

³ Barth uses the masculine representation of humanity throughout his *Church Dogmatics*. For ease of discussing his work, I will use the same representations.

they are. God created man as a temporal creature, a being that travails through time in a linear fashion. The word of God as it is spoken to man constitutes man's knowledge of himself. In that knowledge man is the free subject of his life. Man's life gravitates towards his Creator. Man clings to God's word and naturally wants to be obedient.⁴ The life of a man puts man in solidarity with other men.⁵ Man is made to be in fellowship with others of his kind. But the word of God does not address a fellowship between man and other creatures or other plants.⁶

Barth then raises the possibility that if God is disposed to command a man to live, could he not also call upon a man to die? The freedom for life that man is summoned by God to have is the freedom to treat as a loan the life of all men with his own and his own life with that of all men. Man cannot create this existence himself, a life as an individual and life in community with others of his kind. Nor can he maintain these relationships. These must be provided and nurtured by God.

This point seems to be in response to Schweitzer's belief that life is its own absolute, a truth that man must reckon with and respect. But Barth places the origin and thus the dependency of human life upon God. The word of God which brings human life into being and nurtures it is the true absolute. With man at the center of his attention, Barth then speaks to the scope of God's concern:

"God is obviously not interested in the totality of things and beings created by Him, nor in specific beings within this totality, but in man, in this being, who in his distinctive unity of soul and body is in his own time alive through his spirit, in his individuality and freedom and with his orientation on God and solidarity with his kind."⁷

God's chief concern is the eternal life of man according to Barth. All the other non-human things of creation are in essence scenery that serve to assist with the central cosmic drama of the redemption of humanity. This attention that God pays to man should in turn cause man to learn a respect for life and a fealty to God. So Barth in essence replaces Schweitzer's reverence for life with a reverence for God. Respect for life must have "regard for the free will of the One who has given life as a loan."⁸

Therefore, given the centrality of man in the cosmic drama, Barth says this about other living beings in creation: "The close connection between man and beasts at any rate is a fact, and although our real understanding is so small, and cannot derive from a common center, the relationship is so unmistakable that at the boundary of our present concern for the command of respect for life, the question at least arises whether there is a corresponding command in relation to animal life, and at a rather greater distance vegetative life, outside the human sphere. We must refuse to build either ethics as a

⁴ Barth is speaking of the life of man before the fall. After the fall man finds obedience a difficult thing.

⁵ Here Barth is careful to say the solidarity is only among humans, not other creatures.

⁶ Although Barth allows that these relationships may exist, they are only a by-product of being fellow creatures in creation.

⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Vol. 3, the Doctrine of Creation. Part 4* (S.I.: T. & T. Clark,, 1961), 337, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?BART;CD0304>.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 342.

whole or this particular part of ethics on the view and concept of a life which embraces man, beast and plant.”⁹

Barth’s view is that animals and plants should only receive man’s care and concern in that they help man to exist on the earth. Man is the one to whom dominion over animals has been given. This allows man a certain level of liberty with how he deals with animals.

But with regard to killing animals, Barth does say this: “[Man] must not murder an animal. He can only kill it, knowing that it does not belong to him but to God, and that in killing it he surrenders it to God in order to receive it back from Him as something he needs and desires. The killing of animals in obedience is possible only as a deeply reverential act of repentance, gratitude and praise on the part of the forgiven sinner in face of the One who is the Creator and Lord of man and beast. The killing of animals, when performed with the permission of God and by His command, is a priestly act of eschatological character. It can be accomplished with a good conscience only as we glance backward to creation and forward to the consummation as the boundaries of the sphere in which alone there can be any question of its necessity.”¹⁰

Barth is not supportive to the human effort to live without killing animals for food. He suggests that vegetarianism is a “wanton anticipation” of what has been described in Isaiah 11 and Romans 8 as a new era for which we hope, but God will bring in God’s own time.¹¹

And yet, Barth is hard to pin down on this point. Barth sees the killing of animals as separate from the harvesting of plants. To harvest a plant does not end the possibility of renewal of the plant’s life through its seed or through the host plant which may continue to live. Whereas with regard to an individual animal being killed, it is total annihilation. The act of killing animals requires that the peace of creation be threatened. Its continued practice constitutes a continuing threat to that peace. Barth says that when man kills an animal he does something that is very similar to homicide. In his subtext he too accepts that the allowance to eat meat in Genesis 9 is a caveat that only temporarily modifies the circumstances meant to preserve the peace of creation described in Genesis 1 and 2. This temporary time exists between the events of creation and consummation mentioned above and which encompasses our present existence. In this time man is allowed the freedom to kill animals but must do so with the greatest of reverence.¹²

From the last half of the 20th century to the present, academia worldwide has shown an increased sensitivity to the earth, the skies, the oceans, and the non-human creatures that fill those spaces. The multi-disciplinary field of environmental science became an active field of scientific investigation in the 1960s and 70s as a result of the acknowledged presence of environmental problems and subsequent laws enacted to

⁹ Ibid., 348-49.

¹⁰ Ibid., 355.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 352-54.

relieve those problems.¹³ Knowledge of life (biology) in both human and non-human species has grown by orders of magnitude since the study of nature became a science.¹⁴ This growth of scientific knowledge has had the effect of infiltrating theological thought. Christopher Southgate recognized that one scientific understanding in particular has implications for the theological task, particularly evolutionary theodicy or the vindication of divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of suffering due to natural selection and predation. *The Groaning of Creation* juxtaposes the widely accepted theory of evolution against the understanding that God created the world and made it, as we are told in Genesis, to be good.

Southgate recognizes that if the world was set in motion with the idea that evolution would be the *de facto* arbiter of success for a species, where success is defined as survival or dominance, then evolution as a divinely ordained regime in the world must somehow account for the suffering among creatures due to predation and parasitism. For the individual creature who is killed and eaten by a predator, creation would seem anything but good. For an entire species that goes extinct because of the mutation of a virus, or the adaptation of a predator, creation seems inhospitable and hostile.

In order to solve this problem Southgate explores a number of explanations previously offered, none of which he considers satisfactory. First, he mentions that Augustine saw the suffering of animals as part of a whole scheme for the world which reveals a transcendent beauty. A beauty that human beings are only barely able to perceive. Southgate's response is that since the time of Augustine much has been learned about the natural world. Because of this, humanity is far more able to recognize the beauty of creation and its orderliness. However, the problem of suffering has yet to be explained.¹⁵

The next explanation he contends with is that animals have only a subset of the mental abilities of humanity and thus do not sense or recognize the higher-order understandings of dread, despair, and hopelessness. This notion too Southgate dismisses in that the simple experience of pain which animals do comprehend is enough to confirm that animals do suffer.¹⁶

The third explanation is that suffering, pain, waste, and extinction in the nonhuman world are just facts of nature. Human beings overlay a moral character to these truths, that is neither necessary nor reflective of reality. Southgate's response is that the "that's the way things are" argument simply ignores God's intentions in creating the world. If God made the world then God reveals that he has a purpose in

¹³ Wikipedia contributors, "Environmental science," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Environmental_science&oldid=1022863417 (accessed July 17, 2021).

¹⁴ Ernst Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought : Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1982), 856-57.

¹⁵ Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

mind for the world. If He attends to that world with nurturing care, then one may safely surmise that when beings suffer as a result of existing in that world there is a theological problem.¹⁷

Southgate imagines the millions of species that were never allowed to flourish and live on the earth and the individual creatures who never were able to live into their particular creatureliness and makes the assessment that creation is not all that it is meant to be. This would seem to indicate that the creation that God made good has fallen, which agrees with those like Sarah Withrow King, who says that the fall of humanity as Genesis describes was not limited to humans. The fall affected the whole of creation. The problem with that belief according to Southgate is that scientific knowledge forces us to realize that evolution, and the requisite predation and parasitism that actuates it, pre-existed the existence of man. This calls into question what impact the fall actually had. Rather than humanity and all of creation becoming distorted with the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, it seems that the fall was a human-initiated and human-centered event with little effect on the rest of creation. The idea that humans are responsible for predation and parasitism is untenable.¹⁸ The suffering of creation must be understood to have a separate cause and reason.

What Southgate recognizes is that aside from the suffering involved, the product of evolution is a refinement of creatureliness. The animals that survive predation are better than their predecessors. They run faster. Their heightened intelligence is better suited to evading danger. Their appearance better matches their surroundings so that they are less detectable.

And in turn, among predators there are attributes that were naturally selected to adapt to the adaptations of their prey. These predator adaptations beget other adaptations in prey, and so on. There are myriads of attributes among the species which are born out of the competition to survive. Excellence among species naturally comes about because God designed predation and parasitism into the natural order. There is, in Southgate's words, a richness of living among the species that could not have been realized on its own unless predation and parasitism encouraged a natural "cascade" of adaptations.¹⁹

This understanding causes Southgate to look at suffering due to predation and parasitism in a different way. He is in agreement with Holmes Rolston, III when Rolston regards life not just as a drama, but a passion play, not unlike the passion play of Christ. He admits suffering takes place, but for a sublime purpose which somehow explains away the sting of the suffering. The grand purpose of creation is to produce a better version of the creatures of the earth. The suffering is a mere by-product as a result of this good process which God made part of his grand design of the world at its beginning.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

²⁰ Ibid., 46.

What matters then, according to Southgate, is not whether a creature suffers. What truly matters is whether that creature is able to be fulfilled in its creatureliness. What comprises a fulfilled state is a creature who is allowed to be utterly itself, "in an environment in which it flourishes (including an appropriate network of relationships with other organisms), with access to the appropriate energy sources and reproductive opportunities."²¹ In the moral domain a fulfilled life more than makes up for the end of that life. In those circumstances, death can be viewed as the natural outcome of life, free of any characterization of evil. The fact that individual creatures, as they live their lives in pursuit of fulfillment do so at the expense of other creatures does not diminish the beauty of that creaturely existence, or the composite beauty of all creation.^{22 23}

Moreover, Southgate recognizes that, beyond fulfillment, a creature may attain a condition of self-transcendence. This self-transcendence is recognizable in a creature becoming a more capable version of itself through some new pattern of behavior by a mutation or a "chance exploration of a new possibility of relating to its own or another species."²⁴ It is growth by means that comes from outside of the individual creature.

As an example, Southgate uses God's ultimate self-giving in Christ which "makes possible a self-transcendence in humans that evolution of itself would not make possible."²⁵ The atoning work of Christ transforms the hearts and spirits of those who recognize his sacrifice for love of the world and sets creation on what Southgate calls its final phase "in which the evolutionary process will be transformed and healed."²⁶ This event that points to a brighter future for creation is all important to Southgate's views on evolutionary theodicy. In his view, the only way to justify animal suffering (human and non-human) in the present is that all animals will participate in a redeemed state in the future. Humans, ants, dinosaurs, and amoebas will all have a place in heaven.²⁷

On earth though, human beings, having been redeemed, are called to a special role. They are to be the co-redeemers of the rest of creation. They shall be priests of God's creation, working to transform it. Their work shall be an outgrowth of their love of the non-human world. But that love must be laced with discipline and discernment, not a mere sentiment. Other creatures and their potentially destructive behaviors must be controlled. This could mean using pesticides to control the population of cicadas, so crops are protected. It could mean hunting of particular animals to control their population. It could mean taking an antibiotic to treat a bacterial infection. But in every instance where humanity exerts such control the existence of these beings must be viewed with a sense of wonder and a desire to coexist, so that, in turn, each creature

²¹ Ibid., 64.

²² Ibid., 65-68.

²³ It should be said that this viewpoint ignores or attempts to de-emphasize the truth that the suffering experienced by individuals, be they human or non-human, is of chief concern in the eschatological passages in Isaiah 11 and Revelation 21.

²⁴ Ibid., 64.

²⁵ Ibid., 76.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 79.

has the possibility of a fulfilled existence and the opportunity for its own self-transcendence.²⁸

Southgate acknowledges that there are limits to humanity's ability to restrict the violent and destructive behaviors of other species. So it would seem that humanity is rather a junior partner in the role of co-redeemer of the world alongside Christ. But there are things that humans can do to enrich the lives of other species. Principally, Southgate lifts up the elimination of human behaviors that would lead to the extinction of other species.

However, Southgate does not advocate for a hard and fast prohibition against the killing of other species. According to him, there is latitude for humanity in their servant-relationship to other animals to take the life of other animals for food. That is simply one aspect of the relationship that they are called to be in with other animals.²⁹ If one were to engage in vegetarianism, there would be a diminishment of that relationship, a loss of community between predator and prey.³⁰ Again the suffering of prey is of secondary concern when compared to the richness of that relationship.

One of the theologians that Southgate uses to support his arguments is Keith Ward. Ward's thoughts on the existence of evil while not directly addressing the issue of human-on-animal predation does provide a theological pathway toward supporting predation with only a minimal amount of imagination. Ward begins by saying that evil consists of pain, frustration, opposition or anything that hinders or obstructs the flourishing of sentient creatures. Using human beings as an example, Ward states that the pursuit of happiness and a worthwhile existence by necessity entails the experience of a good deal of pain, discouragement and frustration.³¹

Then Ward discusses the impact of humanity's free will. He says that human beings cannot be said to have free will if they were only allowed to choose courses for their lives within certain limits. Therefore, free will necessarily means that human beings may choose a course which will impede the courses of other beings and bring harm or suffering to them. He says the condition of beings striving gives to the universe something that God could not. God's existence does not require struggle. God is harmonious within God's self and is capable of choosing a course that does not exact a cost on other beings. Humans in their freedom can choose to live an everlasting life that is responsive to God's love, or they can choose a destructive life which could ultimately lead to self-annihilation.³²

This means that some evils are necessary conditions of the existence of a world created with the parameters such as we have. Ward refers to this kind of evil as "natural evil." God being naturally good, the world that God has created then is something wholly "other" to God's self. It is set in motion by God and will reflect the values that God has imbued upon it to a certain extent. But it is free to deviate and

²⁸ Ibid., 103.

²⁹ Ibid., 119.

³⁰ Ibid., 121.

³¹ Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (New York Pilgrim Press, 1982), 189-90.

³² Ibid., 190-91.

become an *enfant terrible*. This makes possible another kind of evil which is not necessary.³³

From this discussion of evil it is easy to see the implications for human predation upon other animals. For much of human history survival depended upon the killing of animals for food. This kind of predation is a necessary, natural evil based on the definition Ward lays out. But there is also unnecessary killing of animals by humans that comes about from the freedom of human beings. This is an evil that deviates from the values that God sought to inculcate in the world when he created it.

Up to this point this chapter has discussed human predation on animals with the understanding that human predation is defined as any circumstance in which humans kill other species for the purpose of producing food. This definition would include the farming of animals up to and including industrial farms on a large scale and also the practice of hunting animals in the wild. It is to hunting animals in particular that Holmes Rolston concerns himself in his book *Environmental Ethics*.

Rolston seems to tacitly accept that animal on animal predation is part of the created order, ordained by God. Rolston's concern is whether or not human participation in the phenomenon of hunting in the wild is ethical. He says some argue that hunting should be allowed because it is a cultural practice in various parts of the world and those practices should be preserved for the benefit of the respective cultures. Hunters profess to feel a connection to nature when they hunt. Also, they feel that they are contributing to the survival of a species by culling those individuals who are not adept at avoiding hunters. Letting the fittest survive and killing the weak selects the attributes of those individuals that are most likely to make for a successful species.³⁴

That leads Rolston to the conclusion that to spare animals from being prey or to rescue them from some natural predicament like falling through the ice of a frozen pond is tantamount to weakening the species. The welfare of a species "lies under the rigors of natural selection."³⁵ In that sense, compassionate feelings that make one want to limit the suffering of an animal is misplaced. Other animals are not people. They live under a different set of conditions. As such, they require of us a different mode of interaction where predation is not only allowed but indeed necessary.³⁶

Therefore there is an apparent value to death in the maintenance of creation. It is something that can be inferred from studying the natural world and is reflected in scripture. When God gives Job a talking-to and enumerates the predatory actions of lions and birds in his creation (Jb 38:39-41) it gives one the understanding that death is woven into the very fabric of creation. Through death and decay, space and resources are provided for new life. This is powerfully modeled in the self-emptying of God in Jesus Christ who suffered and died for the life of his creatures. Life from death is indeed a theme in God's creation which is repeated over and over and does not reflect a

³³ Ibid., 191-205.

³⁴ Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics* (Temple University Press, 2012), 68-71.

³⁵ Ibid., 73.

³⁶ Ibid.

perversion or distortion of the created order. Death is part of the way that all living creatures, both predator and prey, participate in God's design.³⁷ For those who may protest that God's eschatological vision for the cosmos excludes death, pain and sadness, Rolston would counter that pain and death are the necessary consequences of improved life, with less pain and longer life, for subsequent generations. Since the process for attaining a better life is already built into the world, there is no need for God to redeem the world. Creation, as it is, reflects the suffering of Christ on the cross, bringing itself to a better existence. Creation is cruciform.³⁸ The parts of scripture that point to a fallen-ness of creation that is needful of redemption are explained away as mere "poetry."³⁹

³⁷ Keith B Miller, "Theological Implications of an Evolving Creation," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 45 (1993): 150-60.

³⁸ Holmes Rolston III, "Does Nature Need to Be Redeemed?," *Zygon*® 29, no. 2 (1994): 221.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

Chapter Three

GOD'S HOPE FOR HUMANITY

This chapter will take into account the arguments in the previous two chapters and will propose a third way that reconciles the two positions and their readings of scripture. To do this the author will offer a re-reading of the creation narrative which will portray it as the inaugural event for humanity's journey of growth toward an existence that comports with God's hopes for us. This chapter will also take into account what humanity has learned of the world through science. It will argue that the acquisition of scientific knowledge of the natural world is itself a divine revelation and represents a facet of humanity's growth with respect to God's hopes. This multifaceted growth in the spiritual and scientific realm will eventually lead us to what our relationship with God is called to be and thus what our role in the created order should be. One of the realizations of this journey is that the lives of animals should be preserved wherever and whenever possible because they are individuals as God sees them.

When considering the scriptural basis used by each side of this issue, it seems that those who believe that human predation on animals is an accommodation of the fallenness of creation are focused on "what was." In other words, they put a whole lot of emphasis on the condition of creation before the fall. Humanity's distortion of itself when the first man and woman ate of the tree of knowledge was a cosmic event that affected all living things, and thus was utterly catastrophic. The only recourse for humanity and the rest of creation was to seek redemption, which in their view can be achieved, at least partially, by refraining from killing and eating animals.

Those who feel that there is nothing wrong with human predation on animals are more concerned about "what is." They believe the instruction to Noah after he leaves the ark regarding what may be eaten, the Mosaic laws about food, and the vision given to Peter as to what is clean settles the matter for the present. Animals can be used as food.

This side also embraces scientific knowledge as a basis for their belief. If the fallen-ness of the cosmos is evidenced by the condition of animal on animal predation, evolution puts in question the idea of a fall with cosmic consequences because humanity is known to be a late comer to the earthly stage as the drama of creation is unfolding. By this time predation is very much a part of life on earth. So, more than just a *de facto* condition, predation is recognized as part of what God intends by this side. Humanity's participation in predation is simply a human expression of what already is. Furthermore, it is what links humanity to the rest of creation. Predation is behavior that expresses humanity's "animal-ness."

What both sides of the issue seem to recognize is that there is a *telos* for the world revealed in scripture that is different from the present circumstances. This teleological end indicates that predation will become a thing of the past. The peaceable

kingdom sections of the writings of Isaiah as well as the new Jerusalem portions of Revelation tell us what creation will look like in the future. Their common emphasis on passages that describe “what will be” reveals an agreement between the sides that the world will someday become a place where all species are able to flourish and live in harmony, be it a return to what the world was or a revolutionary, new world.

Even if there is some agreement between the two sides, the glaring difference between them is that those who are against human predation on other animals feel strongly that humanity’s part in preparing for the end times includes refraining from killing animals for food now. The reality of a world without human predation on animals is only as far away as our conviction to abandon the practice of killing animals for food. The call to this new reality exists. Permission has been given. What remains to be realized is a consensus among human beings to refrain from eating animals.

Those who believe that predation is acceptable in the present but will no longer be necessary at some time in the future expect a reality that God in Christ will bring about when he returns. For humans to try to effect a premature condition of the end times before that time has come is a “wanton anticipation” as Barth suggests. For the present, there is no call to refrain from eating animals. With regard to permission, the permission given Noah by God is all that humanity needs for justification for eating the flesh of other animals.

Furthermore, each sides’ respective emphases on “what was” and “what is” threaten to make scripture appear at odds with itself. If we care only about what was, we ignore God’s activity in bringing about the present condition of our world. If we care only about what is, we ignore God’s hopes for creation, and lapse into a passive role - waiting for God to redeem the world without our cooperation. Determining whether human predation on animals is an accommodation of creation’s fallenness or is God’s intention will, I believe, need to reconcile the two views I have described in Chapters one and two.

Perhaps in working to reconcile the theology of these two sides it would be good to start at what scripture tells us is the beginning of all things – God’s act of creation. Those who are against human predation on animals say that things all went amiss when the first man and woman disobeyed God and ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:15-3:24). This story is generally understood to represent the time the first man and woman succumbed to temptation, disobeyed God, lost their innocence, and were thus expelled from paradise. But there are some details in the story that suggest that there may be an alternate narrative.

First consider the placement of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Scripture indicates that the tree is at the center of the garden. No fence or guard of angels surround it. Why would God have this tree in the garden at all, let alone have it in the center of the garden, if he knew that it would be a danger to the harmony that God had established?

Also, why is the serpent in the garden? The serpent not only tempts the woman but calls God a liar for saying that the man and woman would die if they ate the fruit. As it happens the serpent was telling a half-truth. Death is not the immediate

consequence of eating the fruit, but dying is a condition that attends human life from that moment on. At the same time knowledge of good and evil is an immediate consequence. Adam continued to live until the age of 930 (Gn 5:5) but the consequences of his action in the garden did catch up with him.

A possible explanation is that God is trying to confront the man and woman with a choice. They can choose obedience while they are enjoying life at ease in the garden, or they can learn obedience by having experienced the consequences of disobedience. Of course, we know that the man and the woman chose the latter. The result being that humanity began our sojourn of toil. In our struggle to live, we make mistakes, learn, and, hopefully, grow.

Irenaeus describes this sojourn as man “passing through all things.” The aftermath of the fall is that humanity acquires a moral discipline. Then when the promise of eternal life is revealed, humanity responds by living in a state of gratitude to the Lord. Learning through Jesus to what extent we have been forgiven, we love the Lord even more than we might have otherwise. Out of that love comes the desire to be more and more Christlike. And our lives take on a trajectory where we look “forward to the time when [we] shall become like Him who died for [us].”¹

The garden seems to be conceived with the notion that God wants the man and woman to use their own judgement. Why? Because God is wanting the man and woman to grow into beings who trust their own perceptions and judgements and function in His creation with competence.

If one accepts this interpretation, then the “fall” is not a fall at all. It is a graduation to independence orchestrated by God. It is a veiled invitation to learn about God’s creation and how humanity may relate to it. Knowledge of good and evil calls upon people, both individually and corporately, to make informed, value-based decisions to guide their actions. It requires knowing enough about the world to anticipate the effects of one’s actions. That God did not overtly teach this lesson as a teacher to a pupil points to God’s subtle pedagogy. A lesson on free will is best learned by discovery. The environment for this discovery was set up by God. The serpent was merely the catalyst for the lesson doing naturally what a serpent in God’s garden would do.

What we may take from this episode is that it is God’s hope that humanity should grow. That growth comes from gathering knowledge about the world so that we may make informed judgements on what is good and evil, or what is consistent with God’s wishes and what goes against them. Humanity’s gathering of knowledge about the world then can be seen as one continuous revelation by God, starting when the woman ate the fruit and continuing to the present human enterprises of science. This has the effect of joining the two sides of the predation argument. If the fall is not a fall but a graduation, then those who focus on “what was” must accept that “what is” is part of God’s design. Those who focus on “what is” must recognize that the present

¹ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, ed. Sr. Paul A. Boer (Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012), 276-77, Kindle.

condition of the world is largely determined by choices made by humanity and one cannot abdicate responsibility for the condition of the world and humanity's failure to conform to God's wishes for it.

Some may feel that the human pursuit of knowledge comes purely from human motivations and God is indifferent to such pursuits because not much is said about it in scripture. I would counter that while references in scripture that would support learning about the natural world are sparse, they are not non-existent.

In the second creation story, when God made the first man, he decided that it is not good that man should be alone. God resolved to provide man with a helper as a partner. He then proceeded to make all the animals and individually brought them to man to see what he would call them.

As such, Man is the name-giver. But name-giving is more than simply making up words to describe the referents. Names have special meaning in Hebrew culture. In Genesis, names are given that indicate a person's role or characteristic. For instance God changes the name of *Abram*, which means "father of height" or "exalted father" to *Abraham*, which means "father of many." This takes place after God has reiterated his promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the sands on the seashore. At the same time Abraham's wife also has her name changed from Sarai, meaning "my princess" to Sarah which means "princess" in a general meaning. Sarah is now princess to more than one person (Abraham). She is a princess to all (her descendants). (Gn 17:1-19) After Jacob has wrestled with a messenger from God at the Jabbok river his name is changed to Israel meaning "God's fight" (Gn 32:28). An ox is named *baqar* for its ability to plough. A camel is named *gamal* for its ability to carry. Therefore when God charges the first man to name all the beasts, it is fair to assume that he should do so by learning about them first so that their names communicate something of each animal's essence.

Learning about each creature on the earth has long been part of humanity's endeavors. Aristotle began classifying organisms in the 4th century BCE.² The classification of living things reached its zenith with Carl Linnaeus in the 18th century CE.³ In that span of time the study of physics, chemistry, and astronomy was becoming a modern scientific discipline. But biology as we know it today was yet to exist. That is because the study of animals was pursued mainly as a way of understanding God and his creative work. Natural history was actually considered "natural theology."⁴ Indeed Galileo believed that all science, not just the study of animals, was part of the religious pursuit.⁵

Ernst Mayer in his book *The Growth of Biological Thought* says that "no other development in Christianity was as important for biology as the world view of natural theology." The church fathers would compare nature to a book and put it alongside the

² Mayr, 88.

³ Ibid., 101.

⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

bible as a collection of God's revelations.⁶ Nature was considered a "general revelation" of God.

Scripture speaks of nature in this way. Psalm 19 says, "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." (Ps 19:1) The apostle Paul insists that all humanity, not just Jews and Christians, are guilty of disobedience in God's eyes because of the plainly apparent revelation of God through his creation. Even Gentiles who have not learned of God or Jesus are without excuse because, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made." (Rom 1:18-20)

So God's revelation of the world to humanity is calling humanity to an understanding of God and God's creation. In fact, it is through that understanding that humanity may be in obedient relationship with God. Psalm 8 proclaims, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Ps 8:3-4) The wonder in this passage continues as the psalmist realizes that humanity is only a little lower than God and has been given glory and honor by God.

In addition to being called to grow in understanding of the created order, humans have been given something that would ordinarily belong to the creator of the world: dominion. We see this first in the first creation story of Genesis when God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." (Gn 1:26) Such a responsibility calls humanity to be mindful of how God would exercise that dominion in his creation and to do likewise.

For some the concept of dominion connotes that humanity is able to do whatever it wants with the animals we live with. Truly industrialized practices for raising animal-based protein bear out that belief. Globally, meat production doubled between 1820 and 1920. It doubled again between 1920 and 1950. It doubled again between 1950 and 1965, and yet again between 1965 and 1975. It continues to increase at an exponential rate. This is a response to a population that has grown from approximately 1 billion in 1800 to 6.5 billion in 2002. To provide for the world's increasing hunger for meat, processes for production have become increasingly industrialized. More and more animals are raised in temperature-controlled spaces that are clogged with waste and only allow space for them to stand.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 91-92.

⁷ Matthew Scully, *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (Macmillan, 2002), 29-30.

The author of the book *Dominion*, Matthew Scully tells us we must consider how we exercise dominion more carefully.⁸ The words of Christ call us to the appropriate level of care that we should exercise as those who would have dominion. Humanity is God's steward of God's creation. He says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father." (Mt 10:29) God's example of his providence further instructs our conduct as those charged with dominion over God's creation. In Psalm 104, praises are given to God because he "make[s] springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches." The psalm continues saying that from God's lofty abode he waters the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his work. He causes the grass to grow for cattle. The trees are given to the birds to build their nests. The high mountains are for the wild goats and rabbits. God provides the lions their prey. The sea is given to the great whales for them to sport in (Ps 104:10-26). In other words, God's dominion is not represented by what he takes from the world, but by what he gives. God's providence is the way that God exercises dominion. Therefore, for humanity to be given dominion over God's creation is not a license to exploit creation for its resources but to honor what God has made and to provide for God's creatures as God has provided for them.

This way of exercising dominion requires an intimate understanding of each creature's needs. Humanity must know the environments in which each creature may thrive. They must know their bodily needs for sustenance. Humanity cannot be a faithful provider for God's creatures without this knowledge.

But providing does not stop at the bodily needs of each animal. There are needs for the animal's spiritual wellbeing as well. Balaam's donkey makes a verbal protest of his maltreatment using the language of Balaam, which the donkey has acquired by the Lord opening his mouth. The nature of the donkey's protest indicates not only the physical pain of being struck but also an offense of the donkey's sensibilities. The donkey reproves Balaam by saying, "Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of [ignoring your commands]?" (Nm 22:30). This amazing bit of scripture alludes to a reality that animals accept the hegemony of human beings, but not without the expectation that they will receive just treatment akin to what humans can expect from other humans. In addition to showing that God cares about animals and expects humans to do the same, God's act of giving the donkey the gift of speech is meant to impress Balaam and the hearers and readers of this story that the differences between human and animal are not so great, that animals can reflect on their lives and their treatment at the hands of human beings and know whether or not they suffer.

The study of the mental capabilities of animals is relatively new science. Compared to the efforts of Aristotle and Linnaeus to classify animals, studies on the abilities of animals to communicate with humans and to solve problems have only been

⁸ Ibid., Kindle location 187.

earnestly pursued since the late 20th century. Possibly this is because of the long-held assumptions about animal's abilities reduced them to biological machines. It was believed that there were no reflective abilities in animals. Therefore while they could feel pain, they did not suffer. There were no communicative abilities in animals, so while they may serve as mute companions to humans, there was no possibility of meaningful relationships. There were no problem solving abilities within animals, so their higher-order thinking skills were woefully inferior to human beings and posed no scientific interest beyond curiosity. Each of these assumptions are now being challenged on a variety of fronts with the effect that the species *homo sapiens* has some company among other species in some abilities, still has exalted status in some abilities, and lags behind other species in other abilities.

Maybe the first scientific study to achieve public notice and challenge the popular Cartesian assumptions about animals was conducted by Allen and Beatrix Gardner with the chimpanzee Washoe beginning in 1966. The Gardners were professors of psychology at the University of Nevada in Reno. Washoe came to live with the Gardners at the age of 10 months whereupon the Gardners trained her to use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate.⁹ Washoe was the first non-human to learn to communicate with humans. By the age of 22 years Washoe had learned approximately 176 signs and was still learning more.¹⁰ She also taught other chimps ASL. While the comparison of words to signs is not exactly one-to-one, a human child in the first grade often has a 6,000 word spoken vocabulary.¹¹ Later studies with apes and language reveal that while they are capable of communicating with humans, the average human's language skill is far superior to other primates.

An animal's hidden gift for language also extends to dogs. While dogs neither have the dexterity to sign or the ability to articulate verbally, it has been demonstrated that they can understand speech. A border collie named Chaser was trained over a three-year period to learn and retain proper noun names of 1022 objects. Chaser also was able to obey commands dealing with named objects.¹²

Speech is the tool of conveying meaning to others. It is a behavior designed to solve the problem of being understood by others. But speech itself requires the selection and assembly of vocalizations in the mind of the speaker before it is conveyed. So speaking is itself a problem-solving skill. Some birds have demonstrated the ability not only to speak but to use speech to communicate with human handlers. Parrots are possibly the most successful at doing this. After 26 months of training, an African Grey Parrot named Alex had acquired a vocabulary of 9 nouns, three color adjectives, two shape phrases ("triangle" and "square"), and use of the word "no." Alex used his vocabulary to identify, request, or refuse more than thirty objects. The fact that

⁹ Gardner and Gardner, 664.

¹⁰ R. Allen Gardner, Beatrix T. Gardner, and Thomas E. Van Cantfort, *Teaching Sign Language to Chimpanzees* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 294.

¹¹ Jutta Segbers and Sascha Schroeder, "How Many Words Do Children Know? A Corpus-Based Estimation of Children's Total Vocabulary Size," *Language Testing* 34, no. 3 (2017): 297.

¹² J.W. Pilley, 184.

attributes of objects could differ somewhat from his learned examples did not confuse Alex. For instance, "paper" could be any size or shape.¹³

In addition to solving problems using speech, birds are able to solve other problems using other tools. Corvids (crows and ravens) reign supreme among birds as problem solvers. Crows that live on the island of New Caledonia modify sticks and leaves to reach larvae underneath a tree's bark. These toolmaking skills are passed from parent to child. A young crow will need many months to master these skills. In the meantime, the crow parents will feed their student until the young crow is able to be self-sustaining.¹⁴

If the fact that animals exhibit mental abilities once believed to be the sole province of human beings challenges the belief that animals are incapable of relating to a human world, then a study of the working memory of young chimpanzees should give pause to those who think that human superiority in the realm of cognition is still intact. In 2004, Ph.D. candidate Sana Inoue and Tetsuro Matsuzawa set up an experiment where three mother-child chimpanzee pairs were taught the correct sequence of the nine Arabic numeral digits by having the chimpanzees touch them on a computer screen. As part of the training the digits were randomly placed on the screen. Once the chimpanzee mastered the sequence of anywhere from 4 to 9 digits, a test of working memory, otherwise known as short-term or "scratchpad" memory commenced. The chimpanzee touched a white circle to begin the test. The random pattern of digits was displayed for one-of-three time intervals (650, 430, or 210 milliseconds). Then after the time interval elapsed, the numbers were replaced with white squares. The chimpanzee's task was to remember what digits were where and touch the white squares in the correct sequence. Then humans were given the same test. At the 650 millisecond interval adult humans and young chimpanzees both performed at 80% accuracy. The mother chimpanzee performed at approximately 55% accuracy. When the interval was shorter human and mother chimpanzee performance decreased significantly while the young chimpanzees stayed mostly unchanged. 210 milliseconds is shorter than the eye has time to scan the entire screen. This caused Inoue and Matsuzawa to suspect that young chimps have something akin to photographic memory. This skill has been demonstrated in normal human children but is known to diminish as the child acquires other cognitive skills.¹⁵

Given the sampling of empirical research gathered above regarding the mental abilities of animals versus that of human beings. A more accurate view of those abilities puts humanity on a continuum that is shared with other species which shows human beings to be superior in some respects and inferior in others. But there is a category of mental ability which needs no quantification because the merest evidence of this ability

¹³ Irene M. Pepperberg, "Functional Vocalizations by an African Grey Parrot (*Psittacus Erithacus*)," *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie* 55, no. 2 (1981): 148, <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1439-0310.1981.tb01265.x>.

¹⁴ Ackerman, 78-80.

¹⁵ Sana Inoue and Tetsuro Matsuzawa, "Working Memory of Numerals in Chimpanzees," *Current Biology* 17, no. 23 (2007): R1004-5.

puts animals in league with human beings. This category of mental abilities is that of having emotion.

Barbara King, a professor emerita of anthropology at William and Mary and a scholar of animal cognition and emotions, has spent her life studying responses to deaths in animal communities. In her book *How Animals Grieve* she describes behaviors that animals share after losing a companion to death. The surviving animal will sometimes try to revive the deceased companion. The animal may stand a vigil by the deceased companion and refuse to eat or groom itself. Mothers of dead infant macaques will often carry the body of the infant until it is decaying and reeking with bad odor. Elephants will return to the body of companion elephants long after the corpse is nothing but a pile of bones. Dogs, cats, horses, and rabbits will return to a favorite spot the two enjoyed together. The surviving animal will often endure a self-imposed isolation for a time. Some surviving animals will cause their own death by their refusal to eat or drink. This type of behavior is also seen among some bird species.

King classifies these behaviors as grieving behaviors. These behaviors will often have a correlation with the rise of the presence of stress hormones in the affected animal's feces. When exposed to other stressors these animals can appear to "give up" rather than struggle to survive. These behaviors can be observed among individuals who lost companions of the same species or of another species.

King allows that not all deaths in an animal community elicits these behaviors. There are some animals who die without notice in a community, much like some human deaths. This begs us to wonder what is different about the deaths of animals that result in grieving behaviors versus those deaths that go virtually unnoticed. King's explanation is as simple as it is intuitive. Each animal that grieved the death of another animal frequently had a close relationship with the deceased animal (including deceased humans). The grief observed frequently followed the end of a relationship where the animals played together, groomed each other, and shared in feeding activities. In other words, in as much as animals may be able to express the emotion and in as much as humans can understand the emotions that other species have, the grieving animal *loved* the deceased companion. As King puts it, "When we find animal grief, we are likely to find animal love, and vice versa."¹⁶

The effect of bringing a human to the awareness that animals understand the world similarly to the way human beings do changes a human's approach to dealing with animals. If we can see them being able to understand things similar to the way people do and respond to situations much as people do then we naturally come to regard animals more like people and less like objects. In less sophisticated understandings, the human individual enlists the animal individual into their human understanding of personhood. The human speaks to the animal as a human. The human assumes that the animal will gladly appropriate all the sensibilities a human has. Hence the desire to dress up pets with human clothing. The human will bring the animal with them to significant events in a human's life. Pets attend weddings and funerals

¹⁶ King, 10.

with their human companions. They accompany their human companions to picnics and parties. They go shopping with the human. They attend church.

Ethologists and others who study animal behavior will regard this type of human interaction with animals as *anthropomorphism*. In the pursuit of gathering data in their respective fields they are careful to avoid projection of human attributes upon animals. King is especially sensitive to this reaction with regard to her own research. But rather than avoiding a situation where she may be accused of anthropomorphism, King has sought to gather data about animal grief behavior so that with a growing pool of knowledge about such behavior a clearer view of what animal grief and suffering is, how it is manifested, and what causes it may emerge. She puts the thrust of her research this way: “*Who are we to say that grief is solely a human quality? What an incredibly arrogant starting point. If that’s the definition of anthropomorphism, we’ve claimed something and shut down the conversation right to begin with. What we need to be doing is not asking how animals are thinking, because we can’t know, but asking, ‘What do we see that is credible evidence for expression of this particular emotion?’*”¹⁷

The efforts of Dr. King and other scientists studying animal behavior are tugging at the way the whole of science regards non-human animals. Rather than trying to put the animal in the same category as human beings, the result of the work on animal grief, animal cognition, and all things-animal, calls science to recognize that animals are complex individuals in their own right. But it will likely take a long time for this new view of animals to take hold in the scientific community.

Those who are engaged in the theological task of understanding the proper relationship between humans and animals are not burdened by this inertia in the scientific community. We don’t need to gather behavioral data for every single species, analyze it, publish papers that must survive peer review and then allow the truth to settle into the minds of colleagues, who are in the end, human beings and as vulnerable to prejudices as we all are. The theological task concerns itself with only the last step of the process outlined above. We encounter truth as revelation by God and then form our lives and actions as a response to that truth. Of course, scripture is a reliable source to go to for God’s revelation. But unfortunately, when it comes to animals, we must be satisfied with a paucity of references to them. This is understandable in that scripture is an anthropocentric text. Its chief business is to provide humanity a gateway to relationship with God. But the parts of scripture that do mention animals seem to make reference to a subtext or undercurrent of truth - that there is an inchoate relationship waiting to be realized between humanity and animals.

In the second creation story God has made the world and made the man, but realizes that there is still something missing. Man needs a helper and a partner. So, he makes the animals. The man gives names to all the animals and they serve as his

¹⁷ Mark Moring, "About That "a-Word"," last modified Sep 9, 2019, accessed. <https://orbitermag.com/about-that-a-word-anthropomorphism/>.

partner in the world.¹⁸ The presence of animals among humans is meant to provide companionship. That God first chose to provide man with animal companionship rather than just make another man shows us that animals have always been meant to be part of our community in an intimate way. Animals from the very beginning were God's answer to our aloneness. To this day animals have served as partners in humanity's sojourn through life. Although they are plainly not the same as human beings, they have often served as "relatable others," those who have kinship with us even as we are different.

An example of this was recently shown in a documentary film on Netflix called "My Octopus Teacher." A filmmaker named Craig Foster spent over a year diving in a kelp forest off of Cape Town, South Africa. While trying to capture the things he saw during his dives a curious young female octopus would often accompany him. Craig decided to keep visiting this octopus and film her behaviors in her natural habitat. During that time an emotional bond formed between the octopus and Craig. The octopus' behavior from time to time defies explanation other than to be an overt expression of affection. The film documents the octopus playing with Craig, gently touching Craig on the face, and engaging in a final embrace with Craig shortly before she mates and gives the remainder of her life to producing young. Craig's description of the relationship he had with that octopus is laced with emotion. He is sad that the octopus is no longer in his life and at the same time grateful for his experiences with her. Could Craig be reading too much into the octopus' behaviors toward him? Is this another example of anthropomorphism? Possibly, but this story is among many in the long history of relationships between individual humans and individual animals that are in line with what scripture says God's intentions for animals are.¹⁹

As compelling as it may be to realize that animals share to some degree our abilities to communicate, solve problems, grieve, and participate in meaningful relationships, a faithful way of couching our concern for animals should come from another place. If we understand that God has made animals then we must believe that God has concern for them. And if he has concern for them then we too should have concern them. There should not be an expectation that in order for animals to enter our sphere of concern, they should have the capacity to be individuals with emotions, intellect and creativity much in the way that human beings have. Truly there are many animals that may be incapable of demonstrating these attributes. Some animals are by nature hostile to human beings and will never be able to elicit an emotional response from a human being. However, we can love animals as God loves them because we love God. That we discover that animals have capacities that will support a relationship is merely our threshold into a new way of thinking about animals. The effect of that discovery is often that animals with whom we have relationship seldom find their way

¹⁸ The story continues to explain that man still lacks a helper, which God remedies by producing a woman for the man. The animals are still allowed life in the garden. The woman serves as an additional serving of God's providence. The relationship between animals and humanity is not supplanted or diminished by the introduction of the woman. (Gn 2:18-23)

¹⁹ *My Octopus Teacher*, directed by James Reed Pippa Ehrlich (Netflix, 2020).

to our dinner plate. Conversely animals with whom we don't have a relationship are mere objects, resources to exploit. But even a meaningful relationship with a particular animal seldom generalizes into a personal conviction to protect all animals from predation and other forms of exploitation. For such a personal conviction to take hold, one must regard an animal as deserving of protection from predation just as human beings are, not because they are like human beings, but because they are individuals as God sees them. This is a transcendent perspective, the kind of perspective that God has towards all flesh. If our human journey is, as Irenaeus indicates, marked by progress toward being more like God our Creator, then our relationship with our fellow creatures is called to be one that is more Godlike

A scripture passage from the book of Jonah illustrates God's regard for animals is on par with his regard for humans. God sends Jonah to Nineveh to prophesy in order that they may repent. Jonah is unwilling but obeys. When Jonah walks through Nineveh proclaiming the city's doom the people of the city and the king are convinced by Jonah's words. Their repentance is so complete that they even involve their animals in their fast and wearing of sackcloth. When God sees what the Ninevites are doing he changes his mind and spares the Ninevites and their animals. The grudging prophet Jonah is not impressed though. He has had enough of prophesying to the Ninevites. He is tired and disgusted because God did what Jonah suspected he would do all along. God extends mercy to the Ninevites.

Knowing that God wants him to continue serving God as a prophet Jonah asks God to take his life. Instead, that night God gives Jonah a bush. The bush grows amazingly fast and gives Jonah relief from the sun. Jonah's relief is so complete that he starts feeling pretty good about life again. But the next night God takes the bush from Jonah. He sends a worm to attack the bush and causes it to wither. Then God sends a hot wind and a relentless sun to beat down upon Jonah. This upsets Jonah. He returns to the attitude that it is better for him to die than to be in the service of God ministering to people he cares nothing for. Then God asks Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" Jonah replies, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then God says, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jon 3-4)

One of the aspects of this story that is noteworthy in our context is that Jonah is the burned-out prophet who is past caring for anything or anybody. God, on the other hand, is the person who tirelessly loves, not only the Ninevites but the Ninevite's animals. The subtext in this story is that God does have concern for animals. In this collection of stories we call the bible, that are chiefly concerned with human beings and their relationship with God, God's underlying concern for the nonhuman beings he has created occasionally surfaces and makes itself known. Even if our focus is rightly to be on ourselves and our obedience to God's expectations of us, we would do well to notice

those times in scripture when God glories in the non-human species he has made and extend our reverence for God toward these other beings.

So, taking into account our understanding of when human beings first walked the earth in relation to the other species that pre-existed humanity and predated upon each other for millions of years, it is inaccurate to say that the fall of humanity caused the condition of non-human species to prey upon each other. Thus, predation of one animal species upon another animal species cannot be considered an accommodation by God for creation's fallenness.

Also, the events in Genesis that have been interpreted as a human "fall" from God's grace could be looked at another way. Those events started humanity on a trajectory of growth as beings made in God's image. We were given the ability to make choices based on our own experiences. We were immersed in a world where we had to toil to survive, which meant killing and eating animals for food. At the same time we were charged with learning about the other animals that God created, which has had the effect of calling us into another type of relationship with animals that is more akin to God's giving relationship with all animals, including humans. Eventually, it is the growth in our knowledge and abilities that will enable us to feed ourselves without the need of killing animals at all. Indeed, we have discovered that our diet does not depend on animal protein. But for now, the human predation upon animals continues as part of our practice for living as human beings. It is a practice that at times was necessary for human beings as they moved from areas where the produce of plant-based food was plentiful into areas where it was unknown or unavailable. As such it is an accommodation of humanity's condition, whether that condition be interpreted as a fall, or as a graduation towards God's hoped for end for humanity as described in the writings of Isaiah.

Therefore, it seems inappropriate to attach any sense of prohibition to the practice of humans predating on animals. As we grow as beings made in the image of God and progress on the trajectory that he put us on, our learning about animals and the rest of the world will naturally extinct behaviors such as the killing of animals for food. If there is any imperative to be gleaned from studying this question it is that God expects us to grow and learn.

From the beginning when we discovered that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was to be desired to make one wise, we have been set on a path to learn. We cannot return to the garden to our former state of ignorance and innocence. We cannot un-learn what we have learned, nor does God want us to, for after he drove out humanity, he placed cherubim and a flaming sword at the entrance of the garden to prevent our returning (Gn 3:24). There is only one way to go for us. We must go forward, to continue to grow and learn.

And then one day we shall arrive at the understanding that God has given us the world so that we may come to care for other creatures and the world in which we live as much as God does. On that day humanity will realize that dominion over the rest of creation is not meant to be despotism but stewardship, a degree of care where the goal is that every being God has made is able to be its fullest and most glorious expression of

itself so that God may be glorified in the dance of flamingoes, the singing of whales, and the tunneling of beetles. Humanity is meant to witness the beautiful life progression of God's creatures and take joy in being a fellow nurturer of what God has set in motion. Then humanity will have reached its full expression of its being. Then we will have grown into the fullness of the meaning of being made in God's image. Then we will know the joy that God knows and be in full community with him. This is the hoped-for end for humanity. We are first of all among the species of the world in the development of our abilities to think and communicate and manipulate our environment because we are called to be servants of all who dwell together with us in this world.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S HOPES IN THE LOCAL PARISH

If God's hoped for end for his creation is for all his creatures to be in community with one another with humanity as the steward, then the church is most likely meant to be the prototype for that community. The church has been, at times, a champion of social justice issues since its beginning. The church is a collection of people who already understand the importance of humans being in community. The generosity and hospitality that stems from that community has the effect of often wanting to include animals in its observances. Indeed, the church has a tradition of blessing animals that stems from the 3rd century CE when St. Anthony of Abad was celebrated as having animals as his only companions while he fasted and prayed in the desert. The Feast of St. Anthony, which falls in mid-January, is the traditional time when animals were brought to the church with the hope that those animals would be enfolded under the protection of God and be fertile. Since that time the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4th has overtaken the earlier saint's day as a traditional time to bless animals. Francis lived in the 12th and 13th centuries CE and is legendary for his animal liturgies, the first live nativities, and his prayers and blessings for animals. In the 20th century the practice has grown even more popular in the United States in various traditions.¹

The United Methodist Church focuses on how animals share in Christ's redemption of all God's creation. They make the suggestion that the service be held outdoors so that larger animals may participate. To avoid transporting animals, there can also be a service of prayer held in a family's home or wherever the animals live. The Roman Catholic church allows for such a family prayer service and suggests that it be held on the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. The leader of the service can be the head of the family and does not have to be trained clergy. The Episcopal tradition makes use of singing and responsive reading designed to make the human counterparts of the animals-present celebrate the gifts of animals in addition to having the animals blessed. In most instances the service is considered to be a worshipping opportunity outside of normal worship on the Lord's Day. The liturgy is typically shorter and makes the blessing, rather than communion, or a sermon the focal point of the service.

But even though there is an increase in the practice of blessing animals in worship over the centuries, there seems to be a disconnect between that practice and the practice of having meat dishes in the fellowship hall. It seems that the urge to have some animals blessed does not generalize to a desire to spare other animals the fate of being slaughtered for human consumption.

The animals that we wish to have blessed are thought of differently from the animals we have no compunction against eating. Those that are blessed enjoy a special

¹ Amelie A. Wilmer, "In the Sanctuary of Animals: Honoring God's Creatures through Ritual and Relationship," *Interpretation* 73, no. 3 (2019): 274-79, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0020964319838805>.

relationship with us. They are in essence pets, even if they are of a species that is normally devoted to human consumption. Consider the story of Bubba and Mary Kiger.

Mary has from childhood been around farm animals. Her family raises beef cattle. Mary took part in the 4-H program in her area and elected to raise an Angus steer for her project one year. Ordinarily a student in 4-H gets to choose the animal that she raises for her project, but Mary believes the opposite happened.

The year that she was going to choose a calf to raise for 4-H, a cow was having a particularly difficult birth. The calf was so big that the effort to birth him broke the mother cow's pelvis. When the calf was born, he weighed 110 pounds. The average Angus calf weighs 70 pounds at birth. The mother cow died two days after giving birth. Mary bottle fed the calf every four hours for almost 5 months. This is nothing out of the ordinary for people who raise cattle. Mother cows will sometimes become incapacitated for a time after giving birth, much like human mothers. Some mother cows do not allow the calf to nurse. Some calves require special attention and need to be fed by hand. Mary Braswell had experience with calves that needed bottle feeding before. But this calf, whom she decided to name Bubba, was different. In Mary's words, "Bubba didn't look at other cows as his 'people.' He looked at people as his people." Conversely, Mary looked at Bubba as her child. This gives one reason to wonder how much of this relationship between Mary and Bubba is perceived by Mary and not actually reciprocated by Bubba. Could Mary be victim of the farm girl's version of anthropomorphism?

In talking to Mary, she said she was aware of that possibility but counters that many bottle-fed calves after they are able to feed themselves gradually lose their attachment to their human bottle feeders. Bubba never did. Five years hence Bubba has had to endure months-long separations from Mary as she attends college. But by Mary's account, Bubba is just as excited to see her now as when she was spending time with him every day.

Mary says Bubba is different in other ways. He craves human attention, not just Mary's. He is gentle around children and will allow them to climb on him and crawl under him, whereas most cows don't particularly care for children.

Bubba currently weighs 2500 pounds and has eaten almost three times his worth at market. He is expected to live 18 to 20 years. The Kigers understand that Bubba is a pet, if an expensive one. Mary is confident that Bubba is different from other cows to the degree that were he to be ever sold for beef he would not respond as other cows do when they are sent to a processing plant. Cows are bred to follow other cows down a chute to be slaughtered. Bubba follows human beings. He doesn't follow other cows. He would clog the chute and hold up progress to the point that he and possibly other cows from the Kiger's farm would be considered unusable.

When Mary was asked how she feels about eating beef in light of her relationship with Bubba. She says that she has no problems eating beef. In fact, she says that if it were a choice between starving and eating Bubba, she would slaughter Bubba and eat him, although she would do so with tears in her eyes. Her explanation is that she believes God put cattle on the earth to be food for humans. That is their

default role on the earth. Bubba was an exception to that belief, an exception that does not challenge the belief because, in her skilled and experienced eyes, Bubba was obviously a special case.

Mary comes at this special relationship with Bubba from the perspective that all creatures on this earth have roles. We make pets out of cats, dogs, and sometimes cows and that is their role. Also, she accepts the reality that some cultures eat cats and dogs and that animal's roles are not universally agreed upon. She does not arrive at this perspective out of ignorance. She is clear-eyed about the animals she helps raise and because of that, has no problem with industrialized farm techniques being employed to provide the world with beef.

In churches based in rural communities one is likely to have several members of the congregation who feel as Mary does. No relationship, even one as intense as the one between Mary and Bubba, will shake those people's convictions. They are able to compartmentalize the Bubbas of their world from the rest of the cows, pigs, or turkeys they take to market because they know animals and their normal tendencies and behaviors. With that knowledge they are able to identify one animal that is different, and thus justify treating that one animal differently.

It is most likely that any direct challenge to these or similar convictions will meet with utter failure. These people have a relationship with animal flesh as food that is based on traditions of the family and their community and is not easily overturned. In particular, it is not likely that people who are in the business of farming animals for food will take too kindly to a preacher's teaching that threatens their livelihood. For this reason, any approach to offering a theological reason for abstaining from the consumption of animal flesh should be offered as a possible avenue for spiritual growth, an option that may provide a means to closer relationship with God and God's creation. There is a biblical basis for opting for a particularly strenuous religious practice that separates one from the average follower of God.

In the book of Numbers there is defined a special class of person called a nazirite. Nazirites were to separate themselves from wine and strong drink. They were not to cut their hair. They were to be extra vigilant with the cleanliness codes and to not go near a corpse. (Nm 6:1-21) The type of nazirite defined in the bible is a role of a temporary nature. Once people completed their time as a nazirite they could resume their normal observances once they made a special set of sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. But Jewish tradition holds that there were nazirites that kept their vows for the remainder of their lives. When speaking of ending the practice of eating meat one can treat it as another form of being a nazirite. It is in effect a quest for holiness by respecting the life of every living thing. It is important to stress that such a life change is not necessarily for everybody.

The challenge now for a local congregation is to make room for both lifestyles in their lives together. What follows is a proposed sequence of events in a congregation that will prepare willing congregants for a vegetarian practice and prepare the church to adopt policies and a liturgy that is inclusive of vegetarian members.

Make the proposal to church leadership

This will assume that the church's polity follows a Presbyterian model. Some episcopal and congregational church systems may afford minister(s) some autonomy in this area and this step may be omitted or diminished in some way. The fact remains though that discussing what people choose to eat as a matter of faith is much more intrusive than most church members have experienced. Because of this, whatever a local church's system of governance, the powers that be should be consulted before initiating anything like this.

In the Presbyterian Church (USA) *Book of Order* the session of elders (the local church's governing body) has responsibility and power to: (1) provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard, (2) provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received, and (3) nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ. These responsibilities and powers require a minister to first make a proposal to the session regarding making a change to the way the Word of God may be preached and heard and the way the covenant community is nurtured. Weighty matters that go before the session should, if at all possible be presented to the session members before the meeting when they will be acting on the matter. This allows each member of session to consider the matter and pray about it. A letter or email should suffice for this purpose. A sample is provided below:

Dear session of First Presbyterian Church,

I am writing to you about a possibility for our ministry together that has been slowly emerging to me as a result of my studies on the relationships that humanity has with the rest of God's creation. In particular it seems that there is an imminent crisis regarding the consumption of animal-based proteins (meats of beef, poultry, and pork) on this earth. 80% of the world's agricultural lands are being used to support the production of animal-based protein. Intensive farming practices put chickens, turkeys, pigs, and fish in inhumane environments. As our world population continues to grow the world's fresh water supply is being taxed to the breaking point by those same practices. At the same time vegetarian options for meals are becoming mainstream and the portion of the U.S. population that is interested in these options is growing. In view of these situations, I began to wonder if scripture has some guidance for us. I have come to believe that it does. As part of our call to grow as followers of Jesus Christ I believe we are called to be more sensitive to our role as stewards of non-human animals. I believe we are called to look hard at the way we eat and the impact it has on the lives of the creatures we share this earth with and indeed, the earth itself. I believe that there are some people within our congregation who would like to explore the possibility of being vegetarians or vegans because they too are concerned about the sustainability of producing animal-based meats. I believe we are called to explore our relationships with non-human animals in view of our

relationship with God and a fresh reading of scripture. To that end I would like to involve you, the Worship Committee, and the Fellowship Committee in a two hour bible study that focuses on some selected parts of scripture that I believe point us toward a new relationship with animals. The bible study will be on (date). Attached is an outline which gives the structure of the class and lists the scripture passages I want to lift up. Please look it over and let me know of your intentions to attend.

Sincerely,

Your pastor

(The syllabus mentioned in the communication above is available as Appendix 1.)

Praying in Worship for Animals

After the bible study, if the governing body of the church agrees to explore new ways of being sensitive to animals, propose the following. Begin including concerns for animals in the section of the worship service that includes prayer concerns from the congregation. In the Presbyterian tradition, this part of the service is often called the “Prayers of the People.” In this prayer there are concerns lifted up for the church, the world, the local community, and for people we love. This is sometimes followed by a prayer of thanks for the lives of the departed. Then there is a collect and the Lord’s Prayer. Animal concerns in general can be included in the part of the prayer concerned with community. An example of that portion may be:

We lift up to you O Lord those animals who suffer from poor living conditions because of intensive farming, for those who are doomed to lives of pain for medical research, and for those who are kept alone in cages that do not allow them to experience the joys of community or have a life that allows them to live as God made them to live.

The mingling of these concerns with the other common concerns of the church should be announced ahead of time on the Sunday they are introduced and be given time to become part of the normal rhythm of worship before going to the next phase.

Fellowship Meals with Animal Protein As Options

One of the focal points in a church’s life is the fellowship meal. These can be breakfasts, or lunches on Sundays or suppers on the weekdays. They can be prepared on-site or as pot-luck dinners. Gathering for a meal in church is becoming a complex thing with people eating gluten-free diets and vegetarian/vegan diets. If a local church

has a food service ministry, it is likely that the person planning meals is familiar with foods that they can serve in either or both categories. But possibly the best approach to providing options is to serve vegetable dishes as a default with animal-based protein and foods with gluten offered as options. The DefaultVeg (<https://defaultveg.org>) movement suggests that vegetable dishes be offered first in buffet lines with meats at the end. This is an inclusive way of providing meals to a congregation while gently nudging people toward leading a meat-free lifestyle. For pot-luck style meals encourage people to bring vegetable dishes or dishes made with meat substitutes and announce that the church will provide animal protein options of braised chicken, pork, or beef. Also, sometime in the near future, synthetic meats will be available. These are meats that are substantively equivalent to what can be harvested from an animal but are actually grown from cultures.

The prayer for before the meal should be one of thanks. It should give thanks for...

- The providence of God through the hearts and hands that prepared the meal.
- The lives of the animals that were used to give us sustenance.
- The earth that gives us all that we have needed through the ages.
- The ways the earth receives what we do not need and changes it into soil and food for the other living things of the earth.

Prayers at Mealtime in the Home

The congregation should be encouraged to be intentionally sensitive to the lives of animals during their meal times at home, particularly when meat is being served. Examples of such prayers should be shared with the congregation to facilitate what may be a novel form of prayer for families. Below are examples:

- a) Creator God, we give thanks for the food we are about to eat. We thank you for the hands that prepared it, for the lives of the animals sacrificed for our nourishment, and your loving providence that gives to us all that we need to thrive. Amen.*
- b) Lord Jesus, when you gathered with your disciples, food was always at hand. When thousands gathered around you who were hungry for your word, you gave them bread and fish to eat. We are thankful that your word has fed our spirits and that the works of your Father's hand feeds our bodies. Bless the animals whose lives are dedicated to our sustenance that they may know fullness of life and a death that honors the truth that all living beings are yours. Amen.*

- c) *Holy Father, we turn to you in thanks for the meal that we are about to share, for all things proceed from you. Keep us mindful of what other beings have given up so that we may sit here today and be nourished. Let the strength we receive from this food empower us to do good in your sight and be loving to all that you have made. Amen.*

Children's Messages during Worship

As an increased sensitivity to animals is becoming the norm in the congregation it may be appropriate to include from time to time a children's message during the worship service that talks about the lives of animals and what our relationship with animals may be. An example of such a message is below.

Scripture passage for the day: Genesis 2:18-24 (Year B – Season after Pentecost – Proper 22)

Hello boys and girls! Did you hear in the story what God wanted the man to do with the animals he made? What did he want man to do? (Answer: He wanted man to give each animal a name.)

(Show a picture of a camel to the children.) What is the name of this animal? (Give the children a moment to answer.) That's right a camel. The word "camel" comes from the Hebrew word "gamal" which means "to bear" or "carry." What do camels carry? (Stuff, people) Did the man do a good job of naming a camel? (Yes!)

(Show a picture of Washoe the chimpanzee that knew sign language) This animal is a chimpanzee. Her name was Washoe. She was raised by two scientists named Beatrix and Allan. Beatrix and Allan taught Washoe how to use sign language to talk to people. She was named Washoe because she lived in Washoe County, Nevada. Washoe could tell people who knew sign language what her favorite toys were, the things she liked to eat, what she wanted to do, and many other things.

(Show a picture of Alex the Gray African Parrot) What kind of animal is this? (Answer: parrot) Yes. He is a parrot. His name is Alex. Alex was the friend of another scientist named Irene. Irene taught Alex how to say words just like we do. Alex could say things like, "want some water" or "walk on chain." Alex could count objects. He could say which object was a certain color or a certain shape. He was a smart parrot. One day Alex had to leave Irene. Alex died. But Alex was able to tell Irene the night he died, "Be good. I love you."

The lesson that I want to leave you with is that we all have names, even animals, God made sure of that. God wants every living thing to have a name because God wants us to care about other people and other animals. And sometimes animals get to tell us that they care about us too. Sometimes they can say it. Sometimes they can rub up against us or lick our faces. Those are the times that we can say "I love you" or stroke them and make them feel cared for too. When God sees that, I am sure that makes God

very happy. Let's pray together. Dear God, we thank you for animals. We know you care for them. Help us to care for them too. Amen.

A Class Offering about Animals

As talk of animals begins to be more and more prevalent in the corporate life of the congregation, there will likely be some who want to know more or even “push back” on what seems to be going on. For these people an opportunity needs to be provided for questions and discussion. Not long after animal concerns find their way into Children’s Messages during worship, a class should be offered to allow adults to work out in their own minds what the proper course for their life is with regard to human-on-animal predation. The length of the class should depend upon what the teacher perceives as the intended audience’s appetite. It’s quite possible that an “airing of grievances” will require a single class meeting, while those who earnestly are searching for a direction will want to know more. For purposes of allowing for both types in an audience, an offering with four class meetings is proposed. The first class should deal with what scripture says about animals. The teacher may want to re-use the lecture outline for the class intended for church leadership in section 1 of this chapter. Those who feel strongly against taking up a vegetarian / vegan lifestyle will likely want to argue their case based on scripture passages that support their viewpoint. Setting those scripture passages out at the beginning of the first class will help create a solid basis for discussion. Two points that every attendee should come away with after the first class is that 1) the choice to be a vegetarian / vegan is a matter of conscience and 2) no one except God should be Lord of a person’s conscience. The purpose of the class is to raise awareness and show that vegetarianism / veganism is not something dreamed up by a bunch of idealists. It has a biblical basis. The bible points us toward a future that God is bringing about. God has hopes that human beings will be partners in making that future a reality. Part of that future seems to be life without violence - violence of any kind, which includes violence toward animals.

The second class meeting should deal with scientific revelations about the abilities of animals. It could include some of the primate research begun on apes using sign language. It could include bird studies on parrots with language or corvids and their problem solving skills. It could include studies on dogs and their ability to process language. But lastly, as a way of driving the point home, this class should explore some of the research on animal grief behaviors. All of these fields are making discoveries monthly and constantly expanding our understanding of the cognitive and emotional abilities of a variety of species.

A fair hearing of this material should include some of the criticism of this research. Do animals actually have abilities to do the higher-order thinking that puts them on par with human beings, or are they merely responding to stimuli in the ways that they have been conditioned to respond? Do animals truly have the ability to grieve and love? Are the researchers anthropomorphizing?

The third class should be a historical review of the Animal Rights / Animal Welfare movement. This should include material on the RSPCA, the ASPCA, the Humane Society, PETA, the World Wildlife Fund, and other non-government organizations. This class should include a survey of the work of Peter Singer, utilitarianism and the idea that the boundary between humans and animals is purely arbitrary. It should also lift up the work of Tom Regan and Mary Midgley and their views on animal rights. It should be noted in this class that these people were philosophers and none of them were particularly religious. This represented a departure in the Animal Rights / Animal Welfare movement from its beginnings in the RSPCA, the leaders of which were mainly affiliated with the church.

The last class should examine the theological arguments for and against the eating of animal flesh. On the “against” side, the works of Andrew Linzey, Stephen Webb, David Clough should be discussed. On the “for” side the works of Christopher Southgate, Rolston Holmes, Karl Barth, Renee Descartes, and Thomas Aquinas. What should be noted is that most of these theologians acknowledge that there will someday be a “Peaceable Kingdom,” as Isaiah foretells, a future where there will be no more killing of human beings or animals. The question is what is humanity’s part in bringing this about? It can be pointed out that this church is already doing some things to make this prophecy a reality. The fellowship meals are providing vegetarians options. Our worship services are urging us toward a future without killing animals. Also, science is taking us to a time when true meat will be cultured rather than produced by raising animals for slaughter. Other materials that we harvest from animals will be produced synthetically. And scientists in medical research are finding ways to do their work without involving animals. There truly may be a time when the use of animals for food, materials, or science will be disadvantageous compared to the technologies that are currently being developed. Then the question of how we treat animals will be unfettered by the practicalities of the present age. What do the class members think about that? Will they embrace the new possibilities? Or will they continue to live as they always have lived?

[A Service on the Lord’s Day about Animals](#)

Eventually, as people become acclimated to putting animal concerns alongside the other concerns that our Christian faith calls us to be about, a church service that is especially devoted to animals may be offered. This should be a service about animals for humans, not a service for humans and animals. A service devoted to the blessing of animals could be on the same day, but in the afternoon on a day when the climate is mild. The service in the morning would be for the purpose of reminding human beings why animals are important in our lives and what our role is in being stewards of the rest of creation.

That the worship service about animals is the phase reserved for last is for reasons that a service of the Lord’s Day, at its best, should be an expression of

unanimity. We come to worship God because God made us and God wants us to grow in relationship with him. We come hopeful to hear the Word of God proclaimed and, if we are committed, allow that Word to transform us. If someone comes to worship grudgingly knowing that what he or she is about to hear is not something he or she agrees with, then that person will not be able to sing the hymns, pray the prayers, or take the eucharist in good faith. In that event the community of worship will be damaged and will compromise everyone's experience through the lack of communal spirit. Hopefully the phases outlined in this chapter that are leading up to the worship service will have prepared everyone to be at least open-minded about thinking of animals, all animals, as individuals deserving of care.

(A proposed Order of Worship is available as Appendix 2)

To approach a congregation with a change in lifestyle as personal and as intimate as what one eats is a risky proposition, even for pastors who otherwise have a rock-solid relationship with their congregation. If a pastor feels he or she is bending his relationship to the breaking point, he or she may be wise to relent and stay at a phase for an extended length of time, or maybe even return to an earlier phase.

At the same time if one is to approach the pastoral teaching role faithfully one must recognize that encountering the Word of God is at times wounding and at other times healing. A life of discipleship has demands. We come to Christ with the knowledge that we are not all that we should be. So the transformative aspect of the gospel should be given a chance to make its claims upon those who have the nerve follow.

The danger of having a portion of a congregation become vegetarian / vegan on theological grounds and the other portion continue to eat meat is that there may be some unhealthy judgement going on by each against the other. Part of the pedagogical approach of this teaching should be to constantly remind the congregation that eating meat or abstaining from it is a matter of conscience. To judge someone as more or less righteous based on what they eat is an abuse of community. Jesus is the only judge that matters - and grace abides.

CONCLUSION

In chapter three the two sides of the argument as to whether it is appropriate in the eyes of God to eat meat were roughly categorized as those which were chiefly concerned about “what was” and “what is.” The side that is concerned about what was believed that, in addition to humanity needing redemption, indeed, the whole world needed redeeming. This belief came from the understanding that all killing of any species by any species was a tragic by-product of the fall of humanity when the first man and woman ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. This argument was disputed by Christopher Southgate and Holmes Rolston who pointed out that humanity as a species did not arrive until long after other species had been preying upon each other for sustenance.

It seems odd to “sully” theological thought with scientific fact. We are in a period where theology and science each seemingly have their own disjoint spheres in which they operate. That science would be used to disprove a theological belief seems inappropriate in some way. It would seem to relegate theology to a subordinate role with science as the absolute arbiter of truth.

But this would only be so because theology had already ventured into areas of knowledge where science must be recognized as the authoritative witness. In this case those theologians who believe that the fall was an event with cosmic implications must have as a premise that humanity was created first. This premise is compromised by the fact that there are two different attestations in scripture on the order of when humanity was created. The first creation story has the animals created first and then human beings. Whereas the second creation story has humans first and then animals. To lean on one story and to discount the other reveals a fallacy.

Also, because of the two differing accounts in scripture, one may wonder how important the order of creation of humanity vs. animals actually is theologically. Karl Barth, in a letter to his grandniece in 1965 said,

The creation story deals only with the becoming of all things, and therefore with the revelation of God, which is inaccessible to science as such. The theory of evolution deals with what has become, as it appears to human observation and research and as it invites human interpretation. Thus, one’s attitude to the creation story and the theory of evolution can take the form of an either/or only if one shuts oneself off completely from faith in God’s revelation or from the mind (or opportunity) for scientific understanding.¹

It may be added at the risk of oversimplifying that science has as its basic quest the search for the answer to the question “how,” while the question that theology seeks to answer is “why.” When one field gets into the other’s territory the conclusions that are made should be viewed with an extra measure of scrutiny.

¹ K. Barth et al., *Karl Barth Letters 1961-1968* (Eerdmans, 1981), 184.

Still, pointing to the garden in scripture's primordial history as a time when humanity enjoyed harmony with all other creatures and had no need to kill animals for sustenance makes one aware that at one time humanity had an existence which in some ways was qualitatively superior to the current experience. The choice to leave that existence whether out of God's subtle urging or our own sinfulness, was a choice nonetheless, the consequences with which humanity has had to labor and God has had to accommodate. The yearning to return to better and simpler times is a natural response and is well documented in scripture. The Israelites wandering in the wilderness pined away for the time "when we sat by fleshpots and ate our fill of bread." (Ex 16:3) When one reads the peaceable kingdom writings of Isaiah (Is 11:1-10) and the prophecy of the new Jerusalem in Revelation (Rv 21:1-4) one can see the similarities between the old garden and the new paradise but the difference will be what humanity has become in the meantime.

Humanity left the garden with knowledge of what is good and what is evil. The way to re-entering the garden was forever barred to humans. The only way to go was further away from the garden. With innocence lost and ignorance being replaced with knowledge of the consequences of our actions, we began to grow. Life became a metaphorical journey. Paul speaks of the progress towards a goal that each of us, who are disciples, are endeavoring to make. (Phil 3:1-16)

The peaceable kingdom and the new Jerusalem are goals that humanity may experience if they choose. This in no way indicates that God is not an active part of this hoped-for end. Humanity will not create these circumstances by virtue of their own choices apart from God. We will in fact be receiving what God has already made by his conceiving it.

Those who are chiefly concerned with "what is" rightly refer to the allowances made in scripture for human on animal predation. If these allowances are accommodations of humanity's fallen-ness then it makes little difference to them, they are allowances nonetheless. As such human on animal predation can be seen as God's intended plan by this side, because they cannot foresee any action on the part of humanity that will change their circumstances. This reveals a lack of understanding of what the implications of the expulsion from the garden were.

These "what is" people see a new creation arriving, a new kingdom coming. They acknowledge what will be in the prophetic texts that point to the peaceable kingdom and the new Jerusalem. Where this side goes wrong is in their belief that there is no human participation involved in bringing these hoped-for ends about. God provides the kingdom but humanity is obliged to receive it. God's accommodation of human on animal predation is extended while God waits for humanity to make a faithful response to his revelations. The discovery of what community can be when animals are invited to be full partners (something that is dawning on the conscience of humanity) and the ability to make protein in ways that don't require killing (something we already know how to do) are some of the mileposts towards a destination that will eventually call on humanity to embrace the new world that God is holding out to us. If we accept

that call, we will enter into the joy of our master. If we don't, we shall have to rely on our master's grace to bring us into that promised land.

So it seems that both sides are aware of the promise of a harmonious existence between humans and animals. The difference is that those who are against eating the meat of animals recognize humanity's role in making that future a reality. What this thesis has hopefully shown is that the way to recognizing that role is to take part in the journey of learning about the other beings around us. By doing that, we become aware of animals more intimately. We learn that we are kindred beings in many ways. Then, as we learn, we grow into stewards of our fellow creatures, we learn to provide for them as God provides. We grow into our image of God and become partner caretakers of the world with God. It is then that we realize the fullness of our humanity. It is then that we realize the joy of having a creation to care for that God has known from the beginning.

Appendix 1 – Animals in the Bible bible study outline

- I. Introduction
 - a. There is a growing sensitivity to the living conditions of animals with whom we have regular contact, and indeed, for animals in general. (RSPCA, ASPCA, Humane Society, PETA, WWF, etc.)
 - b. The vegetarian and vegan movement is growing in numbers of adherents. Vegetarian/Vegan options are becoming more prevalent in grocery stores and restaurant menus.
 - c. What we eat is a personal matter, but seldom would we think of it as an act of conscience.
 - i. We give thanks to God for his providence, but hardly give a thought to the processes employed to get food to grocery stores, restaurants, or our plates.
 - ii. Intensive farming practices have reduced the cost of food but do so at the expense of a quality of life for the animals slaughtered.
 - d. It wasn't always this way. At one time the person who ate animal flesh was often involved in the killing and slaughtering of that animal.
 - i. Even if there was no ceremony attached to the killing (i.e. sacrifice as described in the Mosaic law) there was a mindfulness of the killing of that animal in order to provide food for a person or family.
 - e. The purpose of this presentation is to re-involve our consciences in the act of eating.
 - i. Since we believe that God should be the Lord of our conscience, we shall look at what the bible says about eating animal flesh, both pro and con.
 - ii. People of good conscience may differ. There is no particular way to respond after this presentation. God has set out for us ways to live our lives and we shall all have to rely on God's grace for our failings to live up to the way he hopes for us to live.
- II. Passages that seem to speak in favor of eating animal flesh (Note: It may be helpful to display each passage in a PowerPoint/Keynote presentation.)
 - a. Gn 1:26-28
 - i. Concept: Dominion as subduing the earth and all the living things that move upon the earth
 - b. Gn 9:3
 - i. Concept: Noah is told that every moving thing shall be food for him. This is in contravention of Genesis 1:29 that prescribed only the fruit of the trees and green things for eating.
 - c. Lv 11:1-23

- i. Concept: The cleanliness laws describe the types of animals that may be eaten and what may not be eaten. The assumption is that these animals are easier to prepare for eating without endangering the health of the people who prepare or consume them. By clarifying what is safe to eat God is affirming that animals may be eaten.
- d. Nm 18:5-15
 - i. Concept: The meat from sacrifices are reserved for Aaron and his descendants. They hold no property themselves and thus are dependent on the sacrifices for their livelihood. God could have prescribed sacrifices of vegetables to the Aaronites but he overtly affirms meat as what is due to them, along with wine, oil, and grain.
- e. Dt 12:15, 20-22
 - i. Concept: Domesticated animals like bulls and oxen may be slaughtered for the use of lay people without need of a ceremonial sacrifice. This is deemed equivalent to meat procured by hunting gazelle or deer. There is no need to share a portion with the priesthood class.
- f. Jb 38:39-41
 - i. Concept: God ultimately is the provider of meats to sustain the animals of the earth (not Job / humanity). Again, this affirms the appropriateness of eating meat because God sees fit to provide it.
- g. Ps 104
 - i. Concept: When the beasts of the earth hunger it is to God whom they call out to for food. God is providing animal flesh to those who look to it for food. Another affirmation.
- h. Is 25:6-8
 - i. Concept: Marrow is a delicacy that can only be procured by the killing of animals. Another affirmation.
- i. Ez 47:8-10
 - i. Concept: As part of the promised future for the people of Israel, the Dead Sea will be filled with fresh water. It will once again support marine life. Those who live along the waters will be able to fish just like other great seas.
- j. Mt 14:13-21
 - i. Concept: Jesus not only multiplies the bread but the fish as well, indicating that the job of feeding the 5000 requires providing animal protein.
- k. Mt 15:10-11
 - i. Concept: Jesus proclaims that no food is able to defile a person. Animal flesh, vegetables, grains, etc. are equally acceptable for consumption.

- l. Mk 14:12-16
 - i. Concept: Jesus aids the work of the disciples in preparing for the Passover meal. This meal is always celebrated by eating, among other things, lamb. Jesus is an eater of mammal protein, not just fish.
 - m. Lk 15:11-24
 - i. Concept: Jesus lifts up the practice of killing a fatted calf as a proper way of celebrating the return of the prodigal son.
 - n. Lk 24:36-43
 - i. Concept: Jesus appears to the disciples after his crucifixion and requests something to eat, whereupon he is given some broiled fish, which he did eat. Jesus is demonstrating that his resurrected self is human by eating. But he once again demonstrates that eating fish is an acceptable form of sustenance.
 - o. Acts 10:9-16
 - i. Concept: Peter has a vision that lifts the prohibition on eating meat from animals once deemed unclean. Apparently all meat from all animals is now acceptable.
 - p. Rom 14:1-4, 16-23, 1 Cor 8:4-7, 10:27-32
 - i. Concept: Paul explains to the Roman church that all meat is acceptable for consumption, even if it has been sacrificed to idols. The exception is if eating meat sacrificed to idols causes an observer to lose faith and thus become lost.
 - q. Heb 13:7-14
 - i. Concept: These Hebrews are wrestling with whether or not they should adhere to the cleanliness codes. The writer is telling these Christians to live as if they are strengthened by the grace of God, rather than by following the codes described in the Mosaic law. Therefore eating any kind of animal flesh is permitted.
- III. 5 minute break
- IV. Passages that seem to speak against eating animal flesh
- a. Gn 1:29-30
 - i. Concept: The first diet for us was a vegan diet, purely vegetable-based.
 - b. 1 Kgs 17:7-16
 - i. Concept: Bread was the default form of food for the widow, her son, and Elijah, not animal protein. Presumably there were wild animals available to her that she could kill and eat rather than starve. But this was not an option considered by the woman or Elijah when he performed his miracle.
 - c. 1 Kgs 19:1-9

- i. Concept: When Elijah is starving the angel of the Lord provides a cake of meal and some water. The angel could have prepared a meal with animal protein but did not.
 - d. 2 Kgs 19:29-31
 - i. Concept: While the eating of animal protein must have been practiced, the ideal described is eating plant-based foods.
 - e. Is 11:6-9, 65:25
 - i. Concept: These passages, part of Isaiah’s vision of the “Peaceable Kingdom” point to a time when animals that were once prey and predator are now living together in harmony.
 - f. Is 66:3-4
 - i. Concept: Violence against animals is abhorrent to God even in the practice of sacrifice that is prescribed by Mosaic Law. This reflects a change in direction for how the people of God are to worship.
 - g. Dn 1:3-13
 - i. Concept: Daniel demonstrates to the Chaldeans that a vegetable-based diet is superior to the rations given by the king. This episode makes reference to a vegetarian practice among Israelites at the time of Babylonian exile, not out of necessity, but by choice.
 - h. Rv 21:4
 - i. Concept: A similar theme to the “Peaceable Kingdom.” There will be no cause for sadness because there will be peace in the new Jerusalem.
- V. Some more passages to consider
 - a. Gn 2:15-3:24
 - i. Concept: The fall is not a fall but a graduation of humanity to having choice and making choices based on the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. As we grow in knowledge, we become more aware of humanity’s choices and how they impact the world and the other beings that live in this world, a process that is still unfolding.
 - b. Gn 2:19, 17:1-19, 32:28
 - i. Concept: This passage is lifted out of the passage already covered to talk about the significance of giving living creatures names. Names were an outgrowth of the qualities that are noticed in a being. Abram became Abraham because God promised that he would be a father of many. A camel, *gamal* in Hebrew, is so named because of its ability to carry things. Naming a being requires learning about that being. Therefore naming of animals is the beginning of the natural theology / philosophy movement which grows to become the science of biology.

- c. Gn 7:2
 - i. Concept: The concept of “clean” animals is anachronistic because the law of Moses had not yet been presented to the people of God. This would lead one to believe that Genesis was written later after an understanding of “clean” and “unclean” foods was already established. This dovetails into a prevailing vegetarian practice among Israelites that seems evident in the passages covered before in that it recognizes the necessity to use animal-based protein when circumstances warrant it, i.e. when traveling and there is no opportunity to settle and farm. Cleanliness codes could be viewed as, if you must eat meat, these are the animals that you can safely slaughter without fear of contamination or disease. This would be helpful to a populace who is not skilled in the practice of killing and butchering animals for food because of a prevailing vegetarian culture.
- d. Nm 22:16-30
 - i. Concept: This passage gives voice to a donkey who is being abused by his master. What may be taken from this is just because animals cannot talk does not mean that they don’t suffer when they receive poor treatment.
- e. Ps 8:3-8
 - i. Concept: Being given dominion by God over other creatures is awesome. It is not to be considered lightly, nor does dominion come without responsibilities.
- f. Ps 19:1
 - i. Concept: To watch and learn the way the natural world works is in fact one of the ways that God reveals himself to us. The more we know about the world, the better we discern our role as stewards of it.
- g. Ps 104:10-26
 - i. Concept: God models what dominion should mean for us in showing what he gives to the creatures of the world (not what he takes) so that they may live full expressions of their own lives.
- h. Jon 3-4
 - i. Concept: Jonah is compelled by God to preach repentance to the Ninevites. Jonah cares nothing for the Ninevites and tires of his work to the degree that he wants to die. God, on the other hand, is very interested in the lives of all beings in Nineveh, even the animals.
- i. Mt 10:29
 - i. Concept: More evidence of God’s concern for the animals on the earth.
- j. Lk 17:20-21

- i. Concept: The kingdom of God's arrival will not be marked by things that can be seen. The kingdom of God is something that unfolds within each person based on how receptive they are to it and how they will allow their lives to be formed around it. Therefore, the kingdom of God is only as far away as our will to live it. If a vegetarian world seems far off or a fantasy to some then it will likely not be realized in our lifetime. It is up to us how real it becomes.
- k. Rom 1:18-20
 - i. Concept: God is sending us messages, not just through scripture, but through the things he has made. We are called to respond to what we observe of the world.

VI. Questions

VII. Closing prayer

- a. Heavenly Creator, when we tune our hearts to your world we come to realize that you are telling us your hopes and dreams for this planet and the beings you have created to live upon it. And yet we must reconcile this with the world that we live in today and the choices that we have already made. We know that our growth is your delight. Give us courage to take a step out of what is familiar, what is comfortable, to a new place that is not familiar and may be frightening to us. And have mercy upon us for seeing what is ahead but living with doubt that we can affect any change. We offer this our prayer to you as we discern what it is you are telling us. Amen.

Appendix 2 – An Order of Worship that Calls Us to Community with Animals

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: This is the day that the Lord has made.

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

One: The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'

All: So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

OPENING PRAYER

One: Creator God, you give us animals to help us. We understand the importance of pets for companionship. We understand that animals have been used until this day for the service of humanity, to feed humanity, and to provide scientific knowledge. We ask that you send your Spirit to us so that we may be encouraged to claim the new relationship we are called to have with animals. We ask you to inspire in us a hunger for new community with animals, one that is respectful and loving so that all your creation may thrive.

All: Amen.

HYMN

All Things Bright and Beautiful

CALL TO CONFESSION

(Worship leader: The difficulty of doing the right thing in the eyes of God is that the more we look at ourselves and the world, the more we find that it is not right and needs healing. This may try our patience, it may send us into a hopeless tailspin, but the work of reconciliation still remains. The good news is that the person who judges us is God in Jesus Christ who has already shown us forbearance and love, though we did nothing to deserve it. Trusting in Jesus to forgive us, let us confess our sin together.)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, you were there in the beginning when you made the world and all the creatures. Your creative actions reveal to us your powerful love for us and for all that you have made. We have been given stewardship of this world, but we do not love it the same way you do. We squander its resources and treat the lives of other living beings as if they are ours for the taking. Help us to learn a new way. Help us know

that every life is an opportunity to include another being in the great community you call us to be. Help us see your vision for the world. The vision you had when you created it. Amen.

(A time of silence is observed so that we may consider the ways we have hurt other beings and hurt God.)

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

(Worship leader: Hear the good news! Even though we are guilty of heaping insult and injury upon creation our judge is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ died for us. Jesus Christ rose for us. Jesus Christ reigns in power for us. And Jesus Christ prays for us. The life of yesterday is gone. A new day has begun. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace.

A SHARING OF PEACE

One: Since we are forgiven by our Lord Jesus Christ, let us celebrate, because we no longer need fear the wages of our sin. Moreover, let us forgive each other and extend to our brothers and sisters the same love and grace shown to us. Peace be with you!

All: And also with you!

(The congregation is encouraged to share the sign of peace with each other.)

GLORIA PATRI

(This may be omitted if it is not part of the normal worship order.)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

(Reader of the first reading: Let us pray – God our Father, as the scripture is read and your Word is revealed let us heed what you are telling us and let it transform us from who we are to who you want us to be. Amen. The first reading is from the writings of the prophet Isaiah, chapter eleven, verses one through 10. Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church.)

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING

Isaiah 11:1-10 (NRSV)

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,

and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING (Read by the preacher)

Luke 17:20-21

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you.'

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE (see the Children's Message in chapter 4, segment 5)

SERMON

(Our first scripture passage for today speaks of a world that is not like the world we know now. It speaks of a time of peace so complete that not even the natural phenomena of predators killing and eating prey will happen. Wolves shall live with lambs instead of hunting them. Leopards shall rest on the ground with goats instead of killing them and eating them. Cows and bears shall be side by side as they both eat grass and their cubs and calves will sleep together. And lions will eat straw and not animal flesh. Human children will be so safe that they can play near snakes and their parents needn't worry. No being will be hurt. No being will be destroyed. This will be the law of the world because all will know the Lord.

It's hard to imagine this ever being a reality. Even if every human being agreed to stop killing animals for food or for other reasons, carnivorous animals are going to kill other animals for food, it's instinctive, it's in their nature. Or is it?

I want to tell you a story. A young family moved into their dream home out in the country with some acreage. They looked forward to raising a big garden, chickens for eggs, and letting their dog roam their property without having to keep her on a leash. They introduced themselves to the older gentleman across the road who had some chickens of his own and a garden. Within a few weeks they discovered that it was not a good thing to let their dog loose because she had roamed into the man's property and killed some of his chickens. The family apologized and paid for the chickens. The dog had to be confined to a fenced-in area just as she had been when the family lived in a residential neighborhood.

Then a new puppy was brought into the family. It was understood that the three children of the family, who were teenage boys, would take care of the puppy. It was not long before the oldest boy went to visit the neighbor across the road and mentioned that they had a new dog. The boy expressed the hope that the new dog would be better with chickens. It was then that the old man shared some wisdom with the boy. He said, "if you want your dog to not kill chickens you need to raise him around chickens from a pup. If he spends time with chickens and gets to know chickens as a puppy, he'll never bother them."

The boy took his new-found knowledge back home and told his parents that they needed to get some chickens. Since this was already part of the family's plans, two hens, a rooster and eight chicks were bought the next day and kept in a large pen. The puppy was put in the pen with the chickens and allowed to spend hours there with them while the boys did their outside chores. The puppy was immediately curious about the chickens. But the grown chickens wanted nothing to do with the puppy. The chicks on the other hand had no fear of the puppy. The puppy would stand over the chicks and watch them as they would cheep and peck at the ground looking for bugs. The hens would eventually take a station next to their chicks and would fly at the puppy and peck his face to try to discourage the puppy from being so close. But the puppy would not be convinced to move off. He was fascinated with the chickens. As he grew into a mature dog, he would always spend time in the family's barnyard and sit and watch the chickens and later, ducks and a horse.

The old neighbor knew the way to raise a dog to respect the life of creatures that the dog would otherwise think of as food. A puppy can learn that there is a relationship to be had with chickens. A puppy can see chickens as companions even if chickens don't look like him, behave like him, or eat the same things.

And what about we humans? Can we learn to live without eating animals? I read that 80% of arable land worldwide is devoted to providing feed for animals that will be slaughtered and eaten. Huge amounts of fresh water are being pumped out of aquifers in the western United States to satisfy our appetite for beef. Geologists say that it is only a matter of time before those aquifers are completely depleted. Animal protein is being consumed in greater and greater amounts worldwide as a growing middle class has enough discretionary income to afford to buy meats at markets and grocery stores. The rich and the middle class are eating well, not just in the U.S. but in other parts of the world like India and China. An article on the Brookings website dated

September 27, 2018, indicated that roughly half of the world's population is middle class or rich. The other half is poor or vulnerable to being poor. If the richer half is using 80% of the world's agricultural land, where are the poor and vulnerable getting their food? On the 20% remaining? Pressure is being put on the food industry to produce cheap sources of protein for a growing middle and upper class, but there is only so much of the world's resources to spare for it. Eventually we will need to learn how to produce edible protein without involving animals. It will save land, save fresh water, save on pollution from all the manure and unused portions of the animals, and save on medications used to keep chickens and pigs relatively disease-free as they are coaxed through their growing period while being crammed cheek to jowl in enclosures.

Thankfully, there is technology being developed that will allow the meats that we eat from cows, pigs, and chickens to be grown without needing to raise and then kill an animal. There are already vegetable-based products that taste very much like varieties of meats. This will help curb the extensive use of land and water for raising animals for food. We are moving in that direction and maybe we will be able to avoid the imminent collision with our planet's limits. Instead of asking if we can live without killing and eating animals the better question to ask is, can we survive if we keep on killing and eating animals. Will we continue to eat more and more meat until the poorer half of our world population begins starving to death from lack of fresh water and arable land? If the trends I outlined a moment before are to be believed, then it would seem that the answer is no.

But as the resident theologian amongst us I need to do my job and remind us all that just surviving is not our concern as followers of Jesus Christ. God didn't make this world just for his creatures to merely survive. He wants us to thrive. He wants us to be beautiful in our own expression of what beauty can be so that the whole world may be one great, big, beautiful community of beautiful beings.

For we humans beauty is achieved in the most divine sense when we grow in our understanding of what God calls us to be individually and as a species. Out of all the creatures God created we are the only ones who contain God's image within us. As individuals, we can think of that image as the seed of who we may become if we approach our lives as a journey of growing closer and closer in relationship with God. As a species we can look at that journey as growth toward a role in God's creation.

When God made us he made us perfectly and put us in a perfect place. But when we decided that we knew better than God and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil our perfection became distorted. Ever since then we have been trying to reclaim our perfection and return to that perfect place. But the way backwards is barred from us by angels with flaming swords. The only way for us is forward. As a species, how we live in this world is based on the beliefs and customs of our cultural groupings. These are often based on experiences gathered by generations who lived centuries before us. But as we learn more about the world around us those ways of life get challenged.

When scientists taught chimpanzees American Sign Language we discovered that we can have relationships with chimpanzees. We can talk with them as companions and

learn their joys, hopes and fears. As we reach out and study other animals we learn their cognitive abilities, we learn about their emotional lives. Bit by bit, as we learn more about other species, the notion that we are a species unto ourselves without anything in common with other beings is looking less and less true. At some point, maybe someday soon, what we know about our world will reach a tipping point and we as a society will begin treating the welfare of other animals with at least as much seriousness as we do our own. All it takes is a decision to heed what is being revealed to us. If a puppy can do this, certainly we can too.

So you see the peaceable kingdom that is described in our first scripture passage is a world that we can help bring about if we just decide to look at the other animals in the world a different way. If we look at them as more than food, then they will be more than food. If we look at them as beings that can be objects of our care then we will care for them. The limits to what our relationship with other animals can be are only as far off as our love and care for God's creation will take us. As Jesus says in our second reading, the kingdom is not something to wait for like a fireworks show or a parade that passes by. We each have a part in bringing the kingdom about because, in fact, the kingdom is within us. Let us each do our part to bring the kingdom to the light of day. Let us take it out of the recesses of our mind where doubts and fears reside and stake a claim for it in our world. Let us be partners with God in bringing about the world that God hoped for when he made the world and still hopes for today. Amen.)

HYMN

Let There Be Peace on Earth

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

(Apostles Creed)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Gracious God,
because we are not strong enough
to pray as we should,
you provide Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit
to intercede for us in power.
In this confidence we ask you
to accept our prayers.
God of mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

One: Let us pray for the church.
(Silent prayer.)
Faithful God,
you formed your church from sinful people
and showed them mercy,
that they might proclaim your salvation to all.

Strengthen those whom you choose today,
that they may faithfully endure all trials
by which you conform your church to the cross of Christ.
God of mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

One: Let us pray for the world.

(Silent prayer.)

Sovereign God,

you hold both the history of nations
and the humble life of villages in your care.

Preserve the people of every nation from tyrants,
heal them of disease,

and protect them in time of upheaval and disaster,
that all may enter the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

God of mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

One: Let us pray for creation.

(Silent prayer.)

Creator of all,

you entrusted the earth to the human race,
yet we disrupt its peace with violence
and corrupt its purity with our greed.

Prevent your people from ravaging creation,
that coming generations
may inherit lands brimming with life.

God of mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

One: Let us pray for this community.

(Silent prayer.)

Merciful God,

since Jesus longed to protect Jerusalem

as a hen gathers her young under her wings,

we ask you to guard and strengthen all who live and work here.

Deliver your people from jealousy and contempt
that they may show mercy to all their neighbors.

We lift up to you O Lord those animals who suffer from poor living conditions

because of intensive farming, for those who are doomed to lives of pain for
medical research, and for those who are kept alone in cages that do not allow
them to experience the joys of community or have a life that allows them to live
as God made them to live.

God of mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

One: Let us pray for all people we love

(Silent prayer.)

Holy God,

You call us to be one great family in your name.

Strengthen parents to be responsible and loving
that their children may know security and joy.

Lead children to honor parents
by compassion and forgiveness.

May all people discover your parental care

by the respect and love given them by others.

God of mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

One: Let us give thanks for the lives of the departed
who now have rest in God.

(Silent prayer.)

Eternal God,

your love is stronger than death,

and your passion more fierce than the grave.

We rejoice in the lives of those

whom you have drawn into your eternal embrace.

Keep us in joyful communion with them

until we join the saints of every people and nation,

gathered before your throne in ceaseless praise.

God of glory,

you see how all creation groans in labor

as it awaits redemption.

As we work for and await your new creation,

we trust that you will answer our prayers with grace,

and fulfill your promise

that all things work together for good

for those who love you;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray – Our Father....

LORD'S PRAYER

INVITATION TO GIVE

(This week all the loose offerings will be devoted to the [local animal shelter].)

DOXOLOGY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

(Let us pray - Blessed are you, God of all creation; through your goodness we
have these gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the
service of your kingdom.)

HYMN

We Wait the Peaceful Kingdom

CHARGE

(Let us each do our part to bring the peaceable kingdom to this world by lifting up and caring for the creatures who share this world with us in the hopes that together we shall be the community that God hoped for when he made the world.)

BLESSING

One: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: Alleluia! Amen.

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