



WEEK TWO

DOES GOD LOVE ALL OF HIS CREATION ?



an IVU Member Society

Sponsored by : CHRISTIAN VEGETARIAN ASSOCIATION



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A Gospel for Every Creature

By Revd DrAndrew Linzey

I have been an advocate for the cause of animals for over twenty-five years. At first I did not believe that cruelty to animals, however important in itself, could ever become a big issue for Christians. An important but secondary matter, I once thought. Not now. In terms of pain, suffering and death, what we do to millions of animals constitutes, I believe, one of the major moral issues of all time. Moreover, I now see that it goes to the heart of the gospel that Christians profess. This is a gospel of the invincible, unconquerable love of God - not just for human beings but for all creatures.

The God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and especially of Jesus, loves all creatures. Christians have to find a new heart - a big enough heart to be open to two great gospel truths. The first is that animals are God's creatures: not human property, nor utilities, nor resources, nor commodities, but precious beings in God's sight. The second is the Christ-like suffering of animals. "Think then, my brethren", preached John Henry Newman at Oxford in 1842, "of your feelings at cruelty practised on brute animals, and you will gain one sort of feeling which the history of Christ's Cross and Passion ought to excite within you."

Christians whose eyes are fixed on the awfulness of crucifixion are in a special position to understand the awfulness of innocent suffering. The Cross of Christ is God's absolute identification with the weak, the powerless and the vulnerable, but most of all with unprotected, undefended, innocent suffering. I have spoken of how sensitivity to suffering should be a matter of obedience to the gospel. But, in truth, it is among Christians today that one will find the greatest betrayal of this gospel.

In Spain not one Roman Catholic authority can be found which opposes bullfighting. In Canada, Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops support seal hunting and fur trapping. In Norway clergy defend whaling. In Ireland, Roman Catholic priests go hare coursing. And in England the General Synod of the Church of England will not oppose hunting for sport on church-owned land. This betrayal has a long and unflattering history. From the ninth to the nineteenth century, thousands of animals were subject to criminal prosecution and sentenced to capital punishment by ecclesiastical courts, resulting in barbarous cruelty. As late as the middle of the nineteenth century, Pope Pius IX forbade the opening of an animal protection office in Rome on the grounds that animals have no intrinsic worth, and the idea that what we do to them need not be governed by fundamental moral considerations has become standard theology in Catholic countries.

A God who remains passionless in the face of innocent suffering simply cannot be the Christian God. No theology which desensitises us to suffering can be truly Christian theology. It cannot be stressed enough that the picture of God exclusively concerned with human salvation and indifferent to the suffering of the non-human creation has become a source of moral despair.

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If Christians today care so little for animals, it is because the God they seem to believe in cares even less. For myself, I believe that if God is good and just and holy, it must follow that there will be redemption for each and every creature that suffers. Nothing less than that would make God a truly just God.

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When Dr. Linzey was invited to speak in Madrid, the queen of Spain was so impressed that she asked to attend one of his talks and subsequently granted him an audience to talk further with him. Apparently she had not found anyone like him in the Spanish church, although we certainly need them.

God's Covenant with all Creatures

By Revd. J.R (Regina) Hyland

Both Ministers and scholars ignore God's covenantal relationship with animals.

From the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation, the bible accords animals an exalted place in Creation. It is the only sacred text of any major religion which proclaims that both animals and human beings are nefesh chaya: living souls. And just as the first book of the bible juxtaposes the appearance of humans and nonhumans at the dawn of creation, the last book unites them in heavenly places. The book of Revelation repeatedly places both human and nonhuman creatures around the throne of God, at a time when the Lord "*shall wipe away all tears.*" (Revelation 4:6-11; 5:6-14; 6:1-7)

And it is not only at the beginning and end of the bible that animals are given such pre-eminence. The scriptures also state that at the time of Noah, God entered into a sacred covenant with the animals as well as with human beings. This is an unavoidable biblical fact which generations of preachers and scholars have managed to overlook.

Endless sermons and countless Bible commentaries have explained the divine significance of Man's covenantal relationship with God. This bond has been extolled as a sure sign of the great love the Creator has for the human race-- of the sacred nature of the relationship between God and Man. But the fact that God also covenanted with the animals is ignored.

This is not an easy thing to do. The same passages of scripture which tell of the God/human covenant also tell of the God/animal covenant. In fact, the report of this divine bond is repeated five times in the ninth chapter of Genesis. Such repetition would seem to insure that a chauvinistic human race would be forced to face the fact that God exalted the animals-- as well as human beings-- by covenanting with them. But this is not the case. In spite of the repetition, and in spite of the plain language used to describe what took place, God's sacred bond with the animals is disregarded.

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For those who are not familiar with the uncomplicated and easily understood wording of the post-Flood covenant, the text follows.

1. *"Then God said to Noah.. I now establish My covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you-- the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you-- with every living creature on earth."* (Genesis 9:8-10)

2. *"This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature... a covenant for all generations to come."* (Genesis 9:11-13)

3. *"Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds I will see it and I will remember My covenant between Me and you and all living creatures of every kind."* (Genesis 9:14,15)

4. *"Whenever the rainbow appears I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."* (Genesis 9:16)

5. *"So God said to Noah, this is the sign of the covenant I have established between Me and all life on earth."* (Genesis 9:17)

What theological implications have millennia of scholars deduced from these passages of scripture that equate humans and animals in their sacred bond with the Creator? None. A student can graduate from Seminary, go on to post-graduate work and never read or hear any comment on this startling revelation.

How often do ministers remind their congregations of the bond the Lord has initiated with animals as well as with human beings? Never. A church member can sit through a lifetime of sermons and never hear a preacher warn those who torment and kill animals, that Almighty God has entered into a covenantal relationship with these creatures.

But in spite of this silence on the part of religious leaders, the biblical record remains: God covenanted with both animals and people. And in spite of the attempt to denigrate non human beings to the status of "things" the bible reminds us that they, like humans, are "living souls".

The fact that they are of a different species than homosapiens is not a justification for their slaughter and torment any more than racial, ethnic, or gender differences justify the torment and slaughter of human beings.

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Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal.

Ecclesiastes 3:19

Love without Limit

By Revd. James Thompson

Almost two thousand years ago, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. He accused the pious people of his time of limiting God's love and compassion to those who believed and behaved as they did. They considered all others to be outside the circle of God's love and compassion -- to be accursed.



I am convinced that if Jesus were alive today, the modern counterparts of the Scribes and Pharisees--the pontiffs, prelates and priests -- would be the first to try and get rid of him. And for the same reason: they also try to limit the mercy, love, and compassion of Almighty God.

As a priest of the world wide Anglican communion, I accuse each of its branches of falsely portraying the love, mercy, and compassion of God by making it far too small. And to the leaders of every church I say: "You take the God of the Bible and by your theology shrink Him and His love, claiming it only embraces humanity.

The God of my Bible made room for the animals within the ark, but you exclude them from your ark of salvation. My God is concerned about the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, whereas you have limited His love and all embracing compassion to your own species.

Some day I will be called upon to give an account of my stewardship: what will I be able to say to One who called Himself the Good Shepherd? And how much longer are Christians going to shirk their responsibility of being a mouthpiece for the defenceless of God's creation?

Excerpt from "Retreat from Responsibility"

For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts, even one thing befalls them; as the one dies, so dies the other. Yes, they all have one breath and spirit, so that a man has no pre-eminence over a beast.

Ecclesiastes 3:19



Life after Death

By Revd. J.R (Regina) Hyland

Biblical quotations in the following article are from the The Jerusalem Bible. The Greek word which is translated as "beast" in the King James version has a negative connotation in modern usage. The JB version uses the word "animal" which is truer to the biblical intent.



With the advent of modern technology, people who at one time would have been left for dead have been resuscitated. And many of them have reported experiences in which they found themselves in another dimension of existence. A place filled with love and light. A heavenly place.

Of course there are those who reject such reports calling them fabrications, delusions, or chemical aberrations. But others accept them as a validation of what they have always believed-- or known.

And people of faith, as well as non believers, assume that Christian churches and their spokesmen are delighted to have these life-after-death experiences receive so much attention. But not all feel that way.

There are religious people and their leaders who reject reports of these experiences because they conflict with church doctrine or personal bias. And among the reasons given for this rejection is the fact that some survivors have reported encounters with animals in heavenly places. This is totally unacceptable to those who believe there is life after death for them, but not for other creatures.

The refusal to believe that animal, as well as human beings, will enjoy the eternal love and presence of their Creator has marked Christianity for centuries. It is the same kind of prejudice that caused religious people to consign to hell-or oblivion-those whose doctrines, creeds, or skin colour, differed from their own.

The attempt to exclude non-human beings from heaven has endured even though the last book of the bible, the book of Revelation, gives a picture of eternal life in which all kinds of creatures, and many different species, join together in praising God.

The fourth chapter of Revelation begins with the Apostle John describing his visionary experience of heaven. He describes the scene before him. *"I saw a throne standing in heaven, and the One who was sitting on the throne.... Round the throne in a circle I saw twenty-four elders sitting... In the centre, grouped round the throne itself, were four animals... The first animal was like a lion, the second like an ox, the third animal had a human face and the fourth animal was like a flying eagle... and day and night they never stopped singing: Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty. Every time the animals glorified and honoured and gave thanks to the One sitting on the throne, the twenty-four elders*

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prostrated themselves before him to worship the One... "(Rev. 4:2-9)

About a hundred years after the book of Revelation was written Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, took it upon himself to refute what scripture had revealed about human and animal togetherness in heaven. The Bishop decided that John certainly could not have meant that animals were grouped around God's throne, so he decided these creatures must really be men. In disguise.

But who could they be? Because there were four of them, and there were also four Evangelists, Irenaeus decided that the men-disguised-as-animals were actually Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And this man-made attempt to exclude animals from John's heavenly vision continues to be popular among chauvinistic humans.

This bigotry continues in spite of the fact that more knowledgeable scholars have pointed out that the four animals represent the variety of God's creatures to be found in heavenly places. In *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, E.W.Bullinger writes that the four represent "the heads of animate creation; the lion of wild beast; the ox of tame beasts; the eagle of birds; the man of all [mankind]."

Bullinger's understanding-- and that of other competent scholars-- is in accord with St. Paul's statement that "*all creation*" awaits redemption; a redemption which the Apostle discusses in the book of Romans. "*The creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, until now.*" (Romans 8:21,22)

The biblical passages in the book of Revelation that place non human beings in heaven is the fulfilment of that longing for redemption which marks the "*whole creation.*" And Revelation has numerous references to their heavenly presence.

In the sixth chapter, animals are described as giving orders from heaven, regarding what will take place on earth. (Rev 6:1-8) And in the seventh chapter, animals, humans, and angels are again pictured worshipping together. "*All the angels who were standing in a circle round the throne, surrounding the elders and the four animals, prostrated themselves before the throne and touched the ground with their foreheads, worshipping God.*" (Rev.7:9-11)

Descriptions of the presence of animals in heaven continue in chapters 14, 15, and 19. These chapters describe God's redemption of all creatures - human and animal. But in spite of what the scriptures say, there are those who insist that only humans are worthy of the Creator's eternal love.



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This insistence serves a hidden agenda. If God does not care enough for animals to bless them with the solace and goodness of life-after-death, then men feel justified in ignoring their suffering and pain in this life. It is the same rationale that was used to justify slavery. Many religious people claimed that slaves were sub-human, therefore, they did not have an immortal soul. And since they did not have an immortal soul, they were obviously of little value in the sight of God. Consequently, they could be bought and sold, abused and killed, with no fear of eternal consequences.

It is this kind of rationale that makes the question of animal immortality a crucial issue in a "God-fearing" country. Just as the civil laws that once validated slavery borrowed their "morality" from a profane interpretation of the scriptures so, today, animals are tormented and killed by those who claim scriptural validation for their ungodly treatment of God's creatures.

This claim of divine sanction for the evil that men do is refuted by the Bible which proclaims the eternal value of all beings, and by the testimony of Christ, who revealed a loving God concerned for all creatures -- even a sparrow.

People of Faith must be willing to challenge those who claim God's blessing on their violence and cruelty. In so doing, they will be following the example of Jesus who confronted the hatred and violence of the men of his time and said because he "*had spoken to them*" of God's goodness and love, they would "*have no [religious] cloak for their sin.*" (John 15:22)

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Questions

Do you accept the following statements? Excerpt from "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" (Evangelical Environmental Network - See page 9). Please explain to the group which statement you cannot except, if any, and why.

As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures, and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.

1. Because we worship and honour the creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation.

2. Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the creator's work.

3. Because in Christ, God has healed our alienation from God and extended to us the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, we commit ourselves to working in the power of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Christ in word and deed, to work for the reconciliation of all people in Christ, and to extend Christ's healing to suffering creation.

4. Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be

restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honour and glory of the creator - whom we know dimly through creation, but meet fully through scripture and in Christ.

Declaration approved by: **The John Ray Initiative**

A charity dedicated to promoting responsible environmental stewardship in accordance with Christian principles and wise use of science and technology.

Patrons: The Archbishop of Canterbury, Professor Calvin DeWitt, Sir Ghillian Prance, FRS and the Revd John Stott. The Chairman Sir John Houghton, FRS.

Spiritual Pioneers

By Revd. J.R (Regina) Hyland

Like most of us who have come to understand the sinfulness involved in our treatment of non human creatures, the writer did not learn this in her church, or through her association with other Christians. She learned it through direct experience, and a willingness to accept what that experience was trying to teach her.

But not everyone is as open as she was to this inner prompting. Not everyone is willing to make the changes that such insights require. As with any area of spiritual evolution, those who first respond, do so on an individual basis.

This puts those of us who understand where God's Spirit is trying to lead, in the position of being spiritual pioneers. We are walking a road less travelled and, as with any pioneering effort, it is often a difficult and discouraging journey. So it is important to remember that in the very act of committing ourselves to this path, the ill-defined road becomes better marked and easier to travel. As we journey on, and our numbers increase, the road less travelled becomes more visible and more accessible. The few become many; the many become a multitude. And when this comes to pass, neither the churches nor the general public will be able to dismiss the issue of animal rights and welfare as a matter of concern only to special interest or fringe groups.

What was a pioneering effort will become a highly visible issue within the larger society. And when it does-- as it surely will-- it will be understood that the need to extend God's concern and compassion to all creatures is crucial for the well- being of human beings, as well as for the animals. Man, himself, will never have the blessings of a millennial world until he stops his abuse of other human beings, and of all other creatures.

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THE LORD HAS DONE THIS

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?

In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:7-10

I am the voice of the voiceless
Through me the dumb will speak,
Till the deaf world's ear be made to hear
The wrongs of the wordless weak

From Street, from cage and from kennel,
From stable and zoo, the wail
Of my tortured kin proclaim the sin
Of the mighty against the frail.

Oh, shame on the mothers of mortals
Who have not stopped to teach
Of the sorrow that lies in dear, dumb eyes
The sorrow that has no speech.

The same force formed the sparrow
That fashioned man the king;
The God of the whole gave a spark of soul
To furred and to feathered thing.

And I am my brother's keeper,
And I will fight his fight,
And speak the word for beast and bird,
Till the world shall set things right.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Prayer
ALPHA AND OMEGA

Prayer written by May Tripp, the founder of Animal Christian Concern.

Christ Jesus

You are the beginning and the end.
In you all things were created
and in you all things are redeemed

Take now to your open arms
our grief for your creation,
for your wildlife, struggling against extinction;
for the hunted and the trapped;
for the abandoned and the homeless;
for your animals, unnaturally imprisoned,
transported and slaughtered in terror;
for your animals cruelly used
as laboratory tools.

Christ Jesus

In us you live as Risen Lord.
Our hearts plead with you now to carry the pain
of your suffering creatures,
even to the least of these.
The darkness of this world binds them
as it binds us, O Lord
and only your love can free us to live in your light.



Songs of Fellowship No. 596

Kingsway Music ISBN 0 85476 771 1

When I Survey The Wondrous Cross

By Isaac Watts

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!



Edited by Don Gwillim

Constructive comments welcome, contact Veg4Lent (see front page)