



WEEK THREE

GOD'S IMAGE



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Thoughts on God's Image.

By Steve Kaufman.



I think it is reasonable to approach the stories as metaphorically true, even if historically suspect. In ancient times, stories were told in order to illustrate deep truths about human existence. They were not meant to be historically accurate account of things long past, which could be neither verified or refuted. In addition, the stories can be interpreted many ways, and there is no way to prove that any given interpretation is correct. So, I think that it is inappropriate to base an entire ideology on a particular interpretation of a single story-- you need to look for themes. In my opinion, God's compassion is a central biblical theme. To my reading, the Bible's authors increasingly came to understand God as one who cares about righteousness and is concerned about victims. In the real world, there are victims, but that doesn't mean that God delights in victimisation. As I understand it, the Abraham-Isaac-ram story is mainly about total devotion to God, not about how God really wants sacrifices. Abraham lived in an age when sacrifices were a staple of all religions, and, believing that God wanted some kind of sacrifice, could only understand that God did not want Isaac sacrificed if a substitute were found. I can't prove that this interpretation is a correct understanding of divine will. I think it is consistent with other biblical stories and traditions.

I am reminded of Rabbi Kushner's comment, when thinking about God's role in his son's sickness and early death. Kushner has argued that God simply can not stop all evil and is not responsible for all human tragedies. If God were responsible for all, and had chosen to make Kushner's son suffer and die, then, Kushner says, he would not worship this God. I can relate to that. If God really wanted animals to suffer and die for God's own pleasure, then I might fear such a God (and engage in rituals out of terror), but I would not love such a God. When I read the Bible, I find an emerging image of God as one who wants "mercy and not sacrifice," articulated best by the words and actions of the later prophets and Jesus.

The world presently contains three times as many farm animals as humans and 38 per cent of its grain is fed to livestock.

John Michael

Companions On Earth And In Heaven.

By Revd J.R (Regina) Hyland

Those who understand that God's love and care extends to all creatures are often challenged by religious people who insist that the concern for animals is a secular issue.

Their insistence is easy to understand. Although the bible has a great deal to say about God's concern for animals, and the relationship between human and animal beings, this subject has been ignored. With very few exceptions, neither rabbis, ministers, theologians, nor biblical exegetes have braved the chauvinism of human bias. A bias which sees its own species as the centre - and the circumference - of God's concern.



This bias continues in spite of the fact that the Bible depicts the spiritual journey of animals just as surely as it describes the human journey. The scriptures trace their story from the time of creation, through their sojourn in a fallen world, to a millennial world they will share with their human companions. And in the book of Revelation, both wild and domestic animals are shown in heavenly places, praising God for their redemption.

It is the creation narrative that gives the reason for this animal presence in heaven - for their immortality. The book of Genesis tells us that animals, like humans, were created as "nefesh chaya" - living souls. (Genesis 1:29,30; 2:7,19) But unless you understand the Hebrew language, there is no way to know this. Those who translate the Bible have obscured the fact that animals, like men, have been endowed by their Creator with a soul.

Scholars have done this by translating the same Hebrew expression differently, depending on whether it refers to a human or an animal being. Genesis 2:7 reads "*The Lord God formed the man of the dust of the ground... and man became a living soul*". But when the Hebrew uses the exact same term in referring to animals, it is translated differently. Thus Genesis 2:19 becomes: "*The Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air and brought them unto Adam..... and whatever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.*" (Emphases added.)

Even the context of the above verse of scripture shows the depth of relatedness between Adam and the animals - an inner relatedness. In the verse that immediately precedes the text that says animals embody a soul - nefesh chaya - the Bible tells us they were expressly created by God as companions for Adam.

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Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not say that it was Eve who was created to be a helpmate for Adam. It says that God created the animals for this purpose. *"And the Lord God said 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.' And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast.."* (Gen. 2:18,19)

The scriptures also show that Adam's encounter with animals was a very personal one. *"Adam gave names to all (the animals) but for Adam, there was not found a help meet for him."* (Gen. 2:20) Here, again, the Hebrew language shows the depth of relatedness between the man and these other living souls. The word "shem" is used to describe the process whereby Adam "gave names" to the animals.

By definition, "shem" denotes individuality; the same kind of individuality that a person's name connotes. Adam's naming of other creatures was not an impersonal classification of species or genus. It was a personal encounter with individual entities. But in spite of the companionship these other beings provided for him, none could provide an intimate enough relationship. *"But for Adam, there was not found an help meet for him."*

Ultimately it was only Eve, the female counterpart of the male, who could alleviate Adams' loneliness. But the animals continued to be the beloved companions they were created to be - until the Fall.

After sin entered the picture, not only did the relationship between human beings become destructive, men also became violent towards the other creatures with whom they shared the earth. The animals reacted to this cruelty by becoming antagonistic to men, and to each other. The Bible places the blame for their degeneration on mankind, reporting that it was because of the sins of men that the rest of creation fell. (Romans 8:19-22)

The violence that eventually characterised life on earth was horrific, and is best described by a passage from the Bible. *"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on earth had become, and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, all the time... So the lord said: I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth-men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air - for I am grieved that I made them."* (Gen. 6:5,7 NIV)

It was this degeneration of all creation that led to the Great Flood. But even as Noah was warned about the catastrophe that was to come, he was told that in order to survive he would have to provide a way of escape for the animals.

Man had been given dominion - responsibility for the animals - at the time of creation. And though he had failed miserably in his stewardship, he was still responsible for the other creatures with whom he shared the earth, If he did not provide for their safety and well-being, there would be no safety for him or his family. If Noah did not help them survive, he and his family would not survive.

The Bible continues this story of God's equal concern for human and non human beings as it tells the story of the post-Flood world. The Eighth chapter of Genesis begins: *"And God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and*

livestock that were with him in the ark... and the waters receded."

The animals were not a postscript to God's concern for the survivors of the Flood: their condition was as important to their Creator as the man's. As the narrative goes on, this emphasis on the Lord's equal concern for all creatures, continues. And the story of the covenant that God enters into with the animals confirms their ultimate value.



Theologians make much of the fact that the Bible says God has a covenantal relationship with men. They have endlessly discussed the exalted nature of this relationship, emphasising their belief that it shows the ultimate value God places on mankind.

The idea of covenanting with God is an exalted concept. The only problem is that theologians do not discuss the fact that God also covenanted with the animals. The refusal to acknowledge this fact is just one more way in which human beings deliberately obscure the great value that God places on non human beings.

It is not easy for scholars to overlook God's covenant with the animals, because it is repeated five times in one paragraph. (Gen. 9:8-17). And each of the repetitions states this as plainly, as does the following quotation. "*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-every living creature on earth.*" (Gen. 9:8-10)

In spite of the biblical record, men continually try to relegate non human beings to the category of "things." In order to continue their use and abuse of animals, a fallen human race does everything it can to obscure their value in the sight of God.

But in spite of these attempts, prophets like Isaiah clearly state that in a millennial world, human beings will necessarily live in peace with God's other creatures. Only when men stop their violence and abuse of the animals, and of each other, will they be free from the sorrow and suffering that results from their hatred and greed.

"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:4)

"The wolf will live with the lamb... the calf and the lion, and the yearling together and a little child will lead them. The infant will play near the cobra and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:6-9)

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In these passages of scripture, Isaiah describes a time when all creatures will live in peace because men will acknowledge the teachings of God, and stop the destructive behaviour they have indulged for so long. And the prophet Jeremiah also relates the suffering of all creation to the sinfulness of men. "*How long will the land lie parched and*

the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished." (Jer. 12:4)

The New Testament makes the restoration of the world contingent upon the redemption of men.

"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice.... the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time." (Romans 8:19-22 NIV)

The restoration of all creation is also a theme in the book of Ephesians. "*In all his wisdom and insight God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.*" (Ephesians 8-10 TEV)

This promise of "all creation" being restored by Christ is treated as an accomplished fact in the book of Revelation. Animal and human beings are shown rejoicing together, praising their Creator in heaven, while on earth, a new world order is established. It is the millennial world foretold by Isaiah. The world in which all beings are restored to fellowship with their God, and with each other. It is the world of Paradise restored.

"God himself shall be with them And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying neither shall there be any more pain: For the former things are passed away."

(Rev 21:4)

All things of creation are children of the Father and thus brothers of man... God wants us to help animals, if they need help. Every creature in distress has the same right to be protected.

St Francis of Assisi

God's Ambassadors

Are we reflecting God's image?

By Don Gwillim

Whenever I challenge fellow Christians on their attitude towards man's cruelty to animals and his destruction of the natural world, they invariably go on the defensive. They declare that man is the only creature "created in God's image" (Gen.1v27), he is therefore above all other creatures and very special in God's sight. I believe this statement to be true, but how does it justify Christianity's indifference to man's neglect of God's wonderful creation.



What do we mean by God's image; why did He create us in His image; what is His image; does His love embrace all of His creation? These are the questions I will be endeavouring to answer in this article.

What do we mean by God's Image.

Mankind is created in God's image (Ge 1:26-27; 5:1,3; 9:6; 1Co 11:7; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10; Jas 3:9). The image is not corporeal (of the body, material; tangible) but rational, spiritual, and social. The fall of man destroyed, but did not obliterate the image. Restoration of the image begins with "The new birth" the inner recreating of fallen human nature by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. It changes human disposition from godlessness, lawlessness, rebellion, self-seeking, and unbelief to a desire to love and serve God. (Compton's Interactive Bible).

Why did God create us in His Image.

This most important question had to be answered by a Theologian, so I sent the following question to a Theological College :

Did God create the world for the use & abuse of the human race, or did he create the human race to care & nurture His creation?

Answer from questions@csis.org.uk

"God certainly did not create the world for the human race to abuse it. Biblical doctrine, right back near the beginning of Genesis, says that men and women together are made in the image of God. Part of what this means is that they were intended to represent God to the creation, much like a king sets up statues (or images) of himself in the cities of his country to remind people what he looks like and to say something about his character. However, because men and women are no longer as God intended them to be (because sin has entered into the world), they can no longer 'image' God properly".

So the seed of God's image is in all of mankind but before we can begin to reflect that image, we must believe in Jesus Christ and accept the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit. It therefore follows that only Christians can begin to truly reflect the Image of God.

What is God's Image.

Ezekiel, who used strong imagery throughout his writing, developed the image of God as a shepherd with more detail than any other author in the Bible (Ezekiel 34:11-16). To people who herded sheep for a living, the simile had tremendous impact. The same comparison is used repeatedly throughout the Bible. One much-loved passage is Psalm 23, which begins, "*The LORD is my shepherd.*" Jesus called himself "*the good shepherd*" (John 10:11-16) and had compassion on crowds because they were like "*sheep without a shepherd*" (Mark 6:34).



The image of God as a shepherd begins with Jacob (Genesis 48:15) and ends with Revelation 7:17" (Compton's Interactive Bible).

Jesus was without sin and perfectly demonstrated God's image during His life on earth (John 5v19). Jesus describes himself "*I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep*" (John 10v11). It is generally acknowledged that in this instance Jesus was referring to His sacrifice on the cross to save man (His sheep) from their sin. Jesus was however, making a literal statement; a good shepherd (man) is expected to lay down his life for his sheep (those entrusted to his care) This theme; that the strong should look after the weak, permeates through the whole bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2v6).

God's image is not one of power and domination but Sacrificial Love.

Does God's love embrace all of His creation.

In past articles I have often used the word "anthropocentric" to describe Christian attitudes towards creation, it considers man as the central fact, or final aim, of the universe; conceiving of everything in the universe in terms of human values. This attitude places man's welfare first; that creation was made for man and can therefore be manipulated, dominated and even destroyed; cruelty to animals is acceptable and the environment expendable, provided it benefits mighty man. Should man make a mistake and get into trouble, he man, will have all the answers. Does all this sound familiar, it should do, for it is the way of this world.

"The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "*I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth*" (Gen.6v6,7).

Now if man was so important, why did God consider getting rid of him? Because man is only important to God when he reflects His image, when his CV fits God's job description before the fall:

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it

and take care of it" (Gen 2v15).

Before the fall the job was easy as sin had not entered the world, after the fall the job became much more difficult and can only be achieved by sacrificial love, the penultimate teaching of Christ who reflected God's perfect image while He was here on earth.

Before He created man, God's love embraced all of His creation:

"God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1v26).

Noah was the first animal welfarist, not only that, to be obedient to God, he had to put animals before people:

"Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive" (Gen 6v20).

I wonder how today's Christians would react to that command! However, Noah was chosen by God because he was righteous and walked with God and therefore reflected God's love for all of His creation.

God has given Christians (sons of God) a very important job; to demonstrate the sacrificial love of Jesus to a "*creation subjected to futility*", "*groaning in travail*", and "*waiting to be set free from it's bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God*" (Rom. 8v18-23). God has given us great privileges, these are given so that we may enhance and care for all of His creation, not mankind alone,

"Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required" (Luke 12v48).

We talk about the "Great Commission" as if it was an end in itself when it should only be the beginning. Man is saved so that he may work with God to care for all of His creation. It is surely blaspheme to claim superiority on the grounds that man is made in God's image, then to use this pretext to excuse his use and abuse of God's creation.

As in Noah's day the world is still enslaved to evil, and some Christians (due mainly to the writings of Augustine) consider flesh and matter as evil; that the fallen world of created matter cannot be redeemed. They then use this to justify man's abuse of creation. However; John 1v14 tells us "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us".

How could Jesus become flesh if it was evil? Ray Simpson in his book "Exploring Celtic Spirituality" writes "Such people overlooked the significance of Christ's incarnation; for if the Son of God had taken human flesh, then surely the flesh is to be honoured, not rejected". He also writes "The moment God entered into the material creation He declared it holy in His own body. The atonement of God is the at-one-ment with the whole of creation in the person of Jesus".





Paul also prays in Ephesians 3v17,18 "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ".

Let us not limit God's love by preaching a very narrow selective love reserved for man alone. God's love is indivisible. Jesus told His disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16v15).

My Final Thoughts.

Never in the whole of history has man been in such a powerful position, his technology and knowledge are escalating beyond his wildest dreams. The temptation to reject God and rely on his own power, is rife. If however, you care to look under the veneer of today's society there is an inherent insidious evil that is well on the way to destroying the very world in which we live. Human self interest and greed have gone on the rampage, and nobody seems to care, they prefer to close their eyes and enjoy all that technology can provide. The Earth, however, is being over exploited and is nearing the point of no return, it is dying, and nature has no reset button. The world can survive without man, but man cannot survive without the world.

As in Noah's time the world is on the brink of destruction, this time God will allow us to destroy ourselves. God will not intervene, it is up to man to either accept or reject what God has promised him.

I believe God is looking for a people who have an undivided love and compassion for all of his creation. A people who will be able to oversee His New Earth, having learnt the lessons of this world; who having known good and evil, have recognised and turned away from the evil of this world. A people who will use the skills God has given them, to care for and nurture His new creation, rejecting forever selfishness and greed.

How therefore should we as Christians respond to a world system that is destroying God's creation to satisfy it's own extravagant selfish desires. Are we going to be complacent and continue to enjoy the fruits of it's destruction, supporting by our silence the cruelty of factory farming and vivisection, the wholesale extinction of other life forms and the pollution of the only world we have, for a quick fix today.

When are we as Christians going to finally reflect God's image, and be prepared to sacrifice our over inflated needs to preserve the diversity of God's creation for future generations. To walk with God and demonstrate to this fallen world our willingness to make the necessary sacrifices in our life style, in order to preserve and care for His creation. To be a people worthy of His new heaven and new earth.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7v14).

Questions

1. Does God's Love embrace all that He has created?
2. Do animals have souls?
3. Was the world created to glorify man or God?
4. Which Christian attributes reflect God's image?
5. Will there be animals in the New Heaven & New Earth?
6. Discuss with the group, any passages in the last three studies that influenced your answers to the above questions.

Prayer

By Revd Dr Andrew Linzey "Animal Rites" ISBN 0 334 02760 8



Eternal Father
we thank you
for these creatures
who live along side us
as our companions and friends;
for their loyalty, love
and trust which enrich
our lives and give us joy;
teach us
the value of kindness
the power of mercy
the strength of gentleness;
and create in us
a new spirit of humility
in the face of your creatures
within whose covenant
they live and die;
we ask these prayers
through your son Jesus Christ
whose new covenant
of love
gives life
to us all.
Amen



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The God who set the stars in space

By Timothy Dudley-Smith

Suggested Tune ELLACOMBE or KINGSFOLD.

The God who set the stars in space
and gave the planets birth
created for our dwelling place
a green and fruitful earth;
A world with wealth and beauty crowned
of sky and sea and land,
Where life should flourish and abound
beneath its Makers hand.

A world of order and delight
God gave for us to tend,
to hold as precious in his sight,
to nurture and defend;
but yet on ocean, earth and air
the marks of sin are seen,
with all that God created fair
polluted and unclean.

O God, by whose redeeming grace
the lost may be restored,
who stooped to save our fallen race
in Christ, creation's Lord,

through him whose cross is life and peace
to cleanse a heart defiled
may human greed and conflict cease
and all be reconciled.

Renew the wastes of earth again,
redeem, restore, repair;
with us, your children, still maintain
your covenant of care.
May we, who move from dust to dust
and on your grace depend,
no longer, Lord, betray our trust
but prove creation's friend.

Our God, who set the Stars in space
and gave the planets birth,
look down from heaven, your dwelling place,
and heal the wounds of earth;
till pain, decay and bondage done,
when death itself has died,
creation's songs shall rise as one
and God be glorified!

Timothy Dudley-Smith is one of the leading hymn-writers of the present generation. He retired in 1992 after twelve years as Bishop of Thetford in the Anglican Diocese of Norwich, England. He has served as President of the Evangelical Alliance and of the Church of England Evangelical Council, and is the author of the definitive biography of John Stott.



Edited by Don Gwillim

Constructive comments welcome, contact Veg4Lent (see front page)