



## WEEK FOUR

# GOD'S PERFECT WILL A PEACEABLE KINGDOM



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## The Golden Age must Return.

By Revd. Basil Wrighton

*This article was first printed in 1965, in England where the author, a Roman Catholic priest, lived.*

Man, as he emerges from the prehistoric age, is a savage much more "red in tooth and claw" than the rest of nature. He is at war with the animal species, hunting them for his food and clothing; and as often as not he is also at war with his human neighbours.



But there is evidence in the oldest human traditions that this is a state of decline, the result of some great

Catastrophe. The primitive legends of many races speak of a past Golden Age, when there was neither war nor bloodshed and man lived in friendly companionship with the other denizens of the earth. Then something terrible happened. Scientists call it the Ice Age, or a succession of ice ages. Christians call it a fall from divine grace. Whatever it was, it was a great disaster both for man and for his animal neighbours.

To take the most familiar of these earliest memories of our race: the first chapters of the Book of Genesis tell of man's primeval happiness. The Creator made him last of all as the culminating point of the created world, and placed him in charge. (Genesis (1:28).

Then God said "*Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.*" (Gen. 1:29, 30. RSV) The Creator's original plan, then, was that both man and the animals should be vegetarians.

Then came the Fall from grace and the story of the Flood. This fall from grace seems to have brought about a drastic alteration in his relations with the lower creatures. He now ruled them by fear and preyed on them for his food. We are not given any explanation of the altered relations of the animals among themselves, who no longer subsisted exclusively on the "green plants" and preyed on one another...

The actual course of events is lost in prehistoric darkness and can only be conjectured. It is likely enough that migrations and climatic changes contributed to man's change of diet, from the natural to the unnatural. Flesh-eating became an acquired taste, a perversion, and man has not yet returned to what is normal, sober and sane.

The Biblical account, then, is a significant allegory of what must have been

the historical sequence: first, an age of peace and happiness under natural conditions; then the entry of crime and violence, with the disruption of natural conditions, and the change to a savage diet.

Similarly, the Greek poet Hesiod (circa 1000 B.C. contemporary with Genesis) speaks of five ages of man, the first or Golden Age being the best, and the fifth or Iron Age, in which writing, the worst. The fruits of the earth he says, spontaneously supplied all the wants of the golden generation, and it was only in the third or Brazen Age that flesh-eating and war began.

After describing the wickedness of the present age, the poet foretells that Aides and Nemesis (Compassion and Justice) will finally gather their white robes about them and depart from earth to heaven, leaving men to their well-merited fate....

The Bible goes further and adumbrates the return to natural and ideal conditions of life in some future age. We need only recall Isaiah's prophecy that *"the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox ..... they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"* And St Paul's prophecy in the epistle to the Romans says that all creation will eventually be liberated from its *"bondage to decay"* and its *"groaning and travail."*

Once more, the allegory has a deep truth and significance. If we did not share this confident expectation of a return to better things in the future, we should have to despair of man's destiny.

There is an essential and intimate connection between the carnivorous diet and the age of violence in which we live. This age of violence has continued for thousands of years, and nobody knows how much longer it will continue. And we know that as the technique of violence becomes more scientific and wholesale, the story of man's degradation could end in the extermination of the human race and of all other life on earth.

But to accept this prospect would be to despair. We are bound to look for means of averting it. The most radical means of curing man's addiction to violence would be the reform of his diet; and this is perhaps the only answer to the problem.

As things are in our society, man is conditioned to violence and bloodshed from his earliest years by the uncriticised belief that it is necessary for him to kill and eat animals in order to live. Being firm in this belief, he (or she) can look unmoved at the ghastly display of mangled limbs and bleeding carcasses in a butcher's shop. And he (or she) can see nothing but fun in the cruel massacres that are perpetrated in the name of "sport."

From this it is but a step - and an easy step - to accepting the dismemberment and massacre of one's fellow men in war as part of the order of things;





something which only fanatics and eccentrics would dream of abolishing. Even the bitter experience of war and its atrocities does not as a rule shake this attitude of blind acceptance. And while such an attitude prevails, there can be no hope of banishing war.

Our best hope, then, is to address the deeper level of man's psyche and recondition him in his attitude to the animals. If we can convince him of the

essential outrageousness of killing or injuring an animal, he will be far less disposed to kill or injure a fellow man.

Such a reconditioning of modern Western society may seem so wildly improbable as to be hopeless. But the thing has happened before, and it could happen again. The movements associated with Buddha and Pythagoras had a profound influence on the world in the direction of non-violence and respect for life.

True, they have been largely suppressed or diverted, but the influence still persists. The Christian gospel is a similar force, with its accent on love and compassion, though it has not yet succeeded in overcoming the violent tendencies of the unpromising society in which it has grown up, and Christians have signally failed to extend their charity to the whole animal world.

The Church has been too long divorced from the humanitarian movement. The seeds of humanitarianism are in the gospel, but they have not been allowed to grow to maturity. Christ's Sermon of the Mount is more honoured in the breach than in the observance, and those who should be preaching it day in and day out find it strangely embarrassing and are apt to explain it away as a "counsel of perfection" for the few rather than accept its plain implication of non-violence as a requirement for all who would follow Christ. And what we call "Christian civilisation" falls lamentably short of the humane standard of the gospel.

Humanitarians themselves are not always consistent. Some condemn blood-sports and turn a blind eye to vivisection, others vice versa. Some can denounce sundry cruelties while going about in fur coats obtained by extremely cruel means. Others are anti-this and anti-that, but still cling to their meat and fish diet as if there were no alternative.

Compassion cannot be rationed and confined in this way. The acceptance of one cruelty, under whatever pretext, predisposes men to accept and excuse any and every other cruelty, given suitable pretexts. The one case of cruelty to which most men refuse to extend their compassion is the case of slaughter for food. They will often salve their conscience by advocating this or that mitigation of the pitiful circumstances in which animals are slaughtered; but the crowning horror, the slaughter itself, they will not touch. That is necessary, they will plead, and

turn blind eyes to the ever-accumulating proofs that it is not necessary. The tacit acceptance of ~ cruelty, I think, is what conditions men to accept and tolerate the other cruelties-vivisection, hunting, trapping and so forth.

The irresistible conclusion, then, is that there is little hope of abolishing the manifold cruelties to animals which will disgrace our society until men give up the habit of eating flesh. While they think it is necessary, a matter of life or death to themselves, to prey on animals, the very suggestion that animals have rights and feelings similar to their own sets up a defensive reaction which effectively pushes those rights out of sight and masks any cruelty that may be involved. It is not seen as cruelty where self-preservation is thought to be at stake.

The majority of men do not yet give any thought to the suffering of the (animal) victims they prey upon. When men's eyes are opened to the fact that this violence is gratuitous, they will become open to many other facts, and cruelty of any kind will become intolerable and unthinkable. Then the Golden Age will indeed have returned.

## **Shooting Ourselves in the Foot The Sanitising of Violence in Our Society**

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Throughout the ages, we have accepted killing, violence, and violent behaviour as just being a part of life - it's time we change!

### **Covenant Breaking: God's Original Intent.**

We live in a world that is basically spiritual, a world in which most people believe in God or gods, or in other forms of spiritual involvement between us and deity. Every major religion believes in some form of perfect state of eternal existence, whether it be heaven or nirvana. As a Jewish-United Methodist pastor, I will approach this understanding from a Judeo-Christian perspective, and in particular look at God's "Original Creation Intent Covenant", and how we broke that covenant with God, which allowed violence and death to enter this world. We will also look at how we continue to break this covenant by promoting violence and death, and the way in which we ease our individual and societal conscience by sanitising this violence or by excusing it.

Let's begin by looking at Genesis 1 and 2. In these two chapters, we see a perfect state of existence for humans, non-humans, and the environment. There is no violence or death. Plant food is the entire diet for all (Genesis 1:29-30). In Genesis 1, God says that everything He created is "*good*", and in verse 31 He says that it is "*very good*". This "*good*" and perfect work of God in creating this earth and all it contains was given to us as a free gift if we would only care for it (Genesis 1:26-28). The terms "*dominion*" and "*rule*" when read in context mean to manage, protect, and care for the creation in a loving and peaceful manner. The



term "*subdue*" really means to protect from anything or anyone who might bring harm, in essence to subdue evil, should such condition arise. And in this context evil means the misuse of that which God intended for good.

Adam failed to subdue the evil intent of the serpent, and the weakness of Eve and himself, and thus broke the covenant with God. And we continue to break this covenant with God every time we misuse or abuse the good that God created. And every time we do this we give greater power to the forces of evil. But God desires to restore this covenant with us. Even though we live among much evil and suffering and death, we don't have to contribute to it. The Bible points us to a better way of life. We are encouraged to come and reason with God about our sinful condition, that we might change (Isaiah 1:18). Isaiah further paints us a picture of even the animals not killing each other, and that one day in the future, "*They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea*" (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Why would Jesus tell us that we are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48) if such a state were not possible? I believe His message is a commandment for us to press on toward that goal.

Why did Jesus teach us to pray, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10), if such were not possible to some extent? If we pray for the perfection of heaven, a place in which there is no longer any death or pain or suffering (Revelation 21:4), then shouldn't we also do our best not to contribute to pain and suffering and death? I believe we should, for such obviously seems to be the will of God and part of His covenant for us. Eden was an example of heaven on earth. It is God's way of showing us His Original Intent, and when He Covenanted with Adam to manage this creation, it was also intended for us, too.

Let's look at an example of a very simple covenant. If our grandmother gives us her best set of china dish ware, and tells us to protect it and some day give it to our grandchildren, and we agree, we are entering into a covenant with her. Then one day we become careless and end up breaking one of the plates. In essence, we have broken our covenant; but that doesn't mean that we can then proceed to break all the other china pieces, too. The covenant is still in place to protect the rest of the set, and to pass it on to our grandchildren. We probably should even try to find a replacement piece in an antique shop to complete the set again, so that a complete set can then be passed on to our grandchildren's grandchildren, and so on. This is restoring the covenant that was broken.

But this is not what we are doing upon this earth. We are exploiting the earth and all it contains. We exploit and abuse and cause our fellow humans to suffer

and die. We do the same to the animals. We are continuing to break the Original Creation Intent Covenant, and those other covenants (Law, Prophetic, etc.) that were given to us, and those to restore the first one (Law, Prophetic and Heavenly). We try to excuse our actions by saying that God gave us everything to use in any way we choose, when Scripture clearly shows us that the opposite is really true. We continue to shoot ourselves in the foot by sanitising violence in our society. Its time we stop these violent and destructive acts and begin to restore God's Original Covenant.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessings. To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention your name. Praise be You , my Lord, with all your creatures... Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits and coloured flowers and herbs... Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

*St Francis*

## **I have a Dream**

By Don Gwillim

Martin Luther King's speech "I have a Dream" will be remembered as one of the greatest speeches of the Twentieth Century. It inspired a Christian nation to re-evaluate its attitude towards those whose skin was other than white. Martin Luther King was a dreamer, not one who indulges in fantasy but one who had a vision; a new world. At the end of his speech he coupled his vision to that of another dreamer Isaiah "*I still have a dream today that one day the lamb & the lion will lie down together*" his new world embraced not just man but all of God's creation.



Many years ago I had a dream; I was by the side of a railway track, dirty black steam engines were rushing past belching soot & smoke. On the other side of the track was a tall hoarding covered with advertisements. Next, I was on top of the hoarding looking down into a beautiful world, there was an overwhelming feeling of love & peace, I desired to enter but could not, I turned away exhilarated and on waking, knew that one day I might be allowed to enter & experience it's wonders. Imagine my surprise & delight when many years later my wife Audrie, having no knowledge of my dream, told of a similar dream.

I believe that God has planted in all of us a hope that embraces His dream for

creation. A time of peace, without pain, fear, disease or death. Isaiah assures us that one day these dreams will come true. The book of Isaiah goes on to describe a new beginning, a time of final triumph & peace. In that day, there will be no need for tears, wild animals will lie down together, the sun & moon will fade, overwhelmed by the brightness of God's glory. Revelation also ends on a note of great triumph, good news emerges - spectacular Good News. To those who believe, Revelation becomes a book not of fear but of hope. God will prevail. All will be made new. Peace will reign not only between God & man but between God & all of His creation. The kingdom comes out into the open. The city of God flings wide its gates.

So why does the local church refuse to share this dream, is there any biblical basis to support their statement that "*animals do not have eternal lives because they do not have a soul*". I do not believe that there is, in fact quite the contrary. When referring to the new heaven & new earth, God states "*I am making everything new*" (Rev 21 v 5). Commenting on this verse, a Church of England Working Group report on Man & Nature concludes "*To speak thus of the restoration of all things involves the whole of creation & not just mankind alone. On any interpretation of the classical Christian teaching about the resurrection of the body, it is difficult to see how man's bodily life can enter into eternity ---- without in some sense involving that world in which we have rejoiced & of which the human body is part. Nothing which God has made will ultimately be lost. All the splendour of the natural world & the creative achievements of man, however transitory & easily destructible they may appear, have eternal significance*". So what does the bible say about this subject?

**1. Do animals have a soul?** On looking up The Bible, Bible Commentaries and Systematic Theology, I have come to the conclusion that nobody really knows. The use of the word soul in the Old Testament is quite different from its use in the New Testament. In the OT it is simply an animated being. In the NT the word is the Greek psyche, the non material source of a body's life, personality, what makes you, you. In the NT it is quite often interchanged with the Greek pneuma (spirit) & both words sometimes appear to mean exactly the same, while at other times there appears to be a clear distinction. Psyche is the quality of life while pneuma is the principle of life in all created things. So what



is the difference between man & beast, it is not that man alone has a soul or spirit but that man is created in the image of God, whereas the beast is not.

**2. Will there be animals in heaven?**

Your answer will depend on how you interpret the bible. Let us consider Rev. 4 v 6-11; Awesome creatures encircle a lofty throne, praising God. Four of the creatures in Heaven (v7) symbolise the

most impressive examples of all creation, the lion, ox, man & the eagle. To the anthropocentric Christian they represent men, the four apostles who wrote the gospels!!!! Again if we look at Ecclesiastes 3 v 21 *“Who Knows if the spirit of man rises upward & if the spirit of an animal goes down into the earth?”* This verse is often quoted by anthropocentric Christians as a fact, when it is obviously a question.

So why does the traditional teaching of the church imply that God loves man alone. Surely this arrogant attitude diminishes God’s love by implying that God created animals; to experience the holocaust of human greed, cruelty & intolerance; to spend lives full of anguish, fear & pain, only to end up on the eternal scrap heap, while the perpetrators of such heinous crimes are not only forgiven but exulted. Is it little wonder that many of those who care for animals & the environment often consider that the church is its worst enemy.

I believe that God’s creation is not complete but waiting for us, the body of Christ, to demonstrate that through Jesus we can first set ourselves free from this fallen world and then to be instrumental in freeing the rest of creation, in preparation for God’s new heaven and earth *“because creation itself will be set free from it’s bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God”* (Romans 8 v 21).

The problems related to the destruction of the environment are severe, yet we as Christians do not seem to care, even though we were commissioned by God to be good stewards. We have refused to separate ourselves from a world that is driven by selfishness & greed, a world that is raping God’s creation to the detriment of future generations. We now know who the destroyers of the earth are and what will happen to them *“The time has come ... for destroying those who destroy the earth ”*(Revelations 11v18).

To fulfil the dream we need to proclaim to the world that Jesus has the answer; sacrificial love. Surely as Christians we should be prepared to demonstrate that love by reducing the destructive elements in our own lifestyles; rejecting all forms of cruelty and violence; raising our voices in support of all who wish to divert this generation from a destructive economic system; support & encourage those who want to use the creative powers of God to sustain and enhance His creation. God’s dream is a perfect world where *“they will neither harm or destroy on all my holy mountain”* (Isaiah 11 v 9), should we not as Christians endeavour to reflect that dream in our own lives.

Let no one regard as light the burden of his responsibility. While so much ill-treatment of animals goes on, while the moans of thirsty animals in railway trucks sound unheard, while so much brutality prevails in our slaughterhouses... we all bear guilt. Everything that lives has value as a living thing, as one of the manifestations of the mystery that is life.

*Albert Schweitzer*

## Questions

1. Do you believe in everlasting life and a resurrected body?
2. If yes, what is the basis of your belief?  
(Biblical, a dream, religious experience, all of these.)
3. Describe what it will be like in God's New Heaven and Earth.  
(Will it be free from cruelty / violence and embrace a vegetarian lifestyle?)
4. Will resurrected man have responsibilities in the New Heaven and Earth, and what in your opinion, will they be?
5. Discuss with the group, any passages in the last four studies that influenced your answers to the above questions.

## Poem

By Ann Wills

Spare a thought for the battery hen  
Imprisoned in a tiny cage by the greed of men.  
She has no room to walk or open her wings  
Because her confinement more profit brings.

Jesus told us we must care for the weak  
And animals have no voice to speak  
Although over animals humans may rule  
God meant us to treat them well and never be cruel.

So say a prayer for every exploited little life  
In cramped conditions or in any form of strife  
They spend their lives hidden from public view -  
But remember - these are God's creatures too.

Pray for help, write a letter, see what you can do  
Buy free-range if you can afford to,  
Use products which are cruelty-free,  
Let's make a start with you and me!

## Prayer

Extract from “Animal Rites” Andrew Linzey ISBN 0 334 02760 8

Lord of all life  
your creation groans in travail  
awaiting the glorious liberty  
of the children of God;  
by your spirit help us  
to free creation  
from its bondage,  
to heal its pain  
and obtain that liberty  
which is your gift to all creatures  
Amen

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The steam of meat meals darkens the spirit. One can hardly have virtue if one enjoys meat meals and feasts. In the earthly paradise there was no wine, no one sacrificed animals, and no one ate meat.

*St Basil*

How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering.

Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things. Be not afraid, O wild animals, for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches.

Joel 1 v 18, 2 v 21-22

**Songs of Fellowship No. 645**

Kingway Music ISBN 0 85476 771 1

**All Creatures of our God and King**

St Francis of Assisi

All creatures of our God and king,  
Lift up your voice and with us sing:  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Thou burning sun with golden beam,  
Thou silver moon with with softer gleam:

*O praise Him, O praise Him,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!*

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,  
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,  
O praise Him, hallelujah!  
Thou rising Morn, in praise rejoice,  
Ye lights of evening, find a voice:

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,  
Make music for thy Lord to hear,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Thou fire so masterful and bright,  
That givest man both warmth and light:

And all ye men of tender heart,  
Forgive others, take your part,  
O sing ye, hallelujah!  
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,  
Praise God and on Him cast your care:

Let all things their Creator bless,  
And worship Him in humbleness,  
O praise Him, hallelujah!  
Praise, praise the father, praise the Son,  
And praise the Spirit, Three-in-one:

Edited by Don Gwillim

Constructive comments welcome, contact Veg4Lent ( see front page)