DOMINION IN THE IMAGE OF GOD:
HOW OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANIMALS REPRESENT GOD’S REIGN

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We may pretend to what religion we please, but cruelty is atheism. We may make our boast of Christianity; but cruelty is infidelity. We may trust to our orthodoxy; but cruelty is the worst of heresies.

~ Rev. Humphrey Primatt.

A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals (1776)
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INTRODUCTION

He expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry.
Isaiah 5:7

“He let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness . . .” (Gen. 1:26). A good deal of attention has been paid through the years to what it might mean to be created in the image of God. It has been called foundational to our understanding of who we are as human beings and how we relate to God. Early theologians considering this phrase were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy – in particular, Aristotle’s idea of a natural hierarchy with the lesser creatures existing for the use of the greater – with the result that most often, theological reflection on what it means to be created in the image of God has centered on how human beings are unique in creation, distinguished from and superior to the animals.  

The second half of the same verse continues, “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.” Thus, these two ideas, image of God and dominion over the animals, are intimately related. Considerably less thought has been given to how our dominion over animals is rightly exercised, however, and because traditional thinking about our creation in the image of God has focused on our superiority over animals, this second aspect of our creation, to the extent it has been considered at all, has been interpreted as bestowing on humans the right to use the animals in any way we please.

Recent Old Testament scholarship calls this claim of privilege into question, however. In contrast to early church thinking, which considered our creation in God’s image apart from its

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1 All Biblical quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.
2 The word “animals” covers a wide range of creatures, including human beings. I use it in this paper to mean, generally, all non-human animals, including mammals, fish, birds, and insects. Where appropriate to distinguish among these categories of creatures, I will do so in the text.
scriptural context and drew from a Greek world view, modern Old Testament scholars have looked at the first half of Genesis 1:26 both within the context of the creation stories and in the context of the ancient cultures in which the Hebrew Scriptures were written. There is now a near consensus among Old Testament scholars that being created in the image of God has to do not with status, but with our function in the world, and that function is to represent God to the rest of creation. This means that our dominion over the animals is a conveyance of responsibility, not privilege. It tells us that we are to treat the animals as God would treat them. Animals appear in many places in scripture and God’s care and concern for their well-being is evident. Putting the *imago Dei* in the context of the scriptures as whole, then, we can see that our commission, as creatures in the image of God, is not to use animals as may be convenient for us, but to care for them as God cares for us.

Underscoring the essential connection between the image of God and loving dominion, the connection between how we treat animals and our essential character is a theme that runs quietly and unobtrusively through much of Scripture. Moses was selected by God in part because he was a good shepherd; Rachel was identified as the proper wife for Isaac because she watered the camels; Proverbs tells us that a righteous man cares for his animals; and the gospel teaches that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. When we open our eyes to the presence of animals in Scripture, and when we understand the connection inherent in our creation in God’s image and our exercise of dominion, we see our obligations for the right use of *power* (a constant scriptural theme) extend not just to our fellow humans, but to all our fellow creatures of God; indeed the right use of power is the very essence of the gift of dominion.

This becomes even clearer when we consider the perfect image of God: Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). As Paul teaches, Christ, who is in every way superior to humans, became
human for human benefit, disregarding his status so that we who are “lower” than God might live abundantly (Phil. 2:5-8). This is the image in which we are created and this is the image we are called to reflect to the world. Self-offering for the benefit of the lesser is the “mind . . . that was in Christ Jesus,” and “same mind” we are called to have within ourselves (Phil. 2:5). Thus, Christ shows us that the God in whose image we are created is one who uses power compassionately, for the benefit of the lesser.

This is a fundamentally different understanding of our relationship with animals than has dominated Church tradition, and it is fundamentally different from the understanding that permeates virtually every aspect of our modern culture, which, household pets aside, generally considers some animals merely as means to human ends and others as obstacles to human objectives who must be removed. Cruelty to animals has, sadly, always been an element of human society, but in our modern world, the scale of cruelty simply in terms of the numbers of animals affected is unprecedented, and our modern “factory farms,” testing laboratories, puppy mills, canned hunts, fur farms, and other settings result in cruelties undreamed of by previous generations.

It was at one time widely believed (and by some people still is) that animals had no capacity to reason or to understand what was happening to them, so they had no capacity to suffer in any meaningful way, or if they did, their suffering had no moral relevance. They were “only” animals. Today, even as our cruelty to our fellow creatures increases, we have no such excuse. Modern science has revealed that physiologically and psychologically, animals have the same capacity for suffering that humans do. They have the same neural pathways to convey pain. They know fear, boredom, frustration, and loneliness; they have the capacity for joy and form meaningful relationships both with members of their own species and other species. We can no
longer explain away our amusement or convenience at their expense with the idea that they do not suffer, or that if they do, it somehow does not matter.

While there is virtually no area of human life where we may not say “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), in perhaps no arena is there greater ignorance of sin than in our relations with animals, to whom we rarely give a thought. Because large-scale animal suffering supports so many aspects of our lives, nearly all Christians (and non-Christians) participate in and support these abuses, even if unwittingly. While some suspect that, in at least some of these settings, something is gravely wrong, often we choose not to know because knowing would be costly. As we in the modern world move further and further away from any contact with most animals, it becomes increasingly easy to avert our eyes and to disregard our responsibilities for right dominion.

Humphrey Primatt said in 1776, “Cruelty is the worst of heresies.” When we understand the gift of our dominion over the animals as an obligation to reflect the image of God, and when we consider that image through the lens of Christ’s teachings of mercy and compassion always and everywhere extended to the helpless, to those in need, and those of little status, the truth of Primatt’s assertion hits home. When Christians are cruel to animals, or when we are silent in the face of cruelty, or when we hide our face to cruelty because we do not want to change our behavior, we stand in the shadow of the Cross and tell the world that God does not care about suffering. When we disregard the suffering of animals, we take our God-given dominion as a license to exploit the powerless. More than that, we do it in reliance on our claims of superior status before God. When we, as Christians, say that only humans matter because only humans

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are created in the image of God, we dare to stand at the foot of the Cross and claim that might makes right.

It is the job of the church to open our eyes, to help us conform our lives to the Lamb of God and to grow into the image of God so that we can rightly reflect God’s character to the rest of the world. If our creation in the image of God is foundational to who we are, and if the right exercise of power, including power over animals, is central to that image, then the church must take up the issue of animal welfare. “For the church is not permitted simply to repeat the ‘old truths.’ It must listen for and take a chance that from time to time the normative word is breaking through in new ways.”4 It is not enough to have an annual Blessing of the Animals service or even a stray sermon about animals, as welcome as those are. It is not enough to pray for the right use of “natural resources” or to appreciate nature. Environmentalism is not the same thing as animal welfare, although there are areas of overlap. We, as a theological community, must recognize animals as sentient individual beings worthy of our care, protection, and sustained theological attention. We must open our eyes to the ways we thoughtlessly harm their lives, and integrate our relationships with them into our theological understanding of who we are and how, as Christians, we are called to live. We must address animal welfare in the same way we address our obligations to the poor and the naked and the prisoner – by including them in our theological thinking and by teaching, by example, and by repetition; by supporting church ministries and equipping congregations with information and opportunities. It is not so much a matter of adding onto those things we are already trying to do as it is integrating animals into our existing modes of moral and theological thinking, teaching, and acting. If we do that, it will change the way we live.

When we understand that our creation in the image of God enables and requires us to function as God’s representatives to creation, and when we understand that our dominion over the animals is tied inextricably to that image, it becomes clear that we are to treat animals in such a way as to reflect the character of God to the world. When we open our eyes to the presence of animals in scripture, we cannot help but notice God’s abiding concern for them, nor fail to recognize that we are to share that concern. When we understand the connections between how we treat animals and our own character, we begin to understand the implications of our misuse of power and reliance on status to justify cruel treatment of those who are “beneath” us. When we consider our dependence on God’s compassion, we understand our obligation to reflect that compassion to the animals. There is no longer a theological case to be made that animals are not worth our notice, or that their suffering is somehow unimportant. Humans are unique in creation, yes, but with God, power and status bring responsibility, not privilege.

To address these issues, in this paper I will first consider what it means to be created in the image of God, assessing traditional understandings of the term and their debt to Greek philosophy, and then consider more recent work by Old Testament scholars. I will then address how these different understandings of the image of God have shaped, and might re-shape, our understanding of what it means to have dominion over the animals. Next I will look at scripture generally to see what it has to say about animals and their place in creation. This will place the obligations of dominion in a broader scriptural context so as to assess whether scripture beyond the creation stories supports the view that we have a duty to care for animals.

Next, I will address that portion of the Christian tradition that has stood in counterpoint to the traditional understanding of dominion. This minority voice has consistently pled for a more compassionate stance toward our fellow creatures, demonstrating that concern for animals is not
a theological innovation or novelty, but has deep roots in our Christian tradition and theology. I will take a close look at the emerging perspective of creation care, to assess whether our attention to our environmental responsibilities is sufficient to meet our obligations to the animals.

Finally, with this theological foundation, I will address modern animal science and the findings of biologists and ethologists regarding the physical, emotional, and intellectual aspects of animal suffering and happiness. When we understand more deeply the complex nature of animals’ lives, we can appreciate more fully the reality of the cruelties we impose on them. In conclusion, I confront those cruelties, for unless we make an honest assessment of the ways in which we use animals and the alternatives available, we cannot make appropriate changes to our thinking and behavior. I close with some suggestions for how church communities can address these issues.
I. IN THE BEGINNING: DOMINION AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

*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.”*

~ Genesis 1:26

The first two chapters in Genesis set forth the creation stories and set the stage for all that is to come. Bruce Birch has explained that the “central vision of world history in the Bible is that all creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well being of every other creature.’ . . . [I]t should be clear” that this interrelated joy “extends to nonhuman creation as well as the human.”5 In the creation accounts, this central vision is born out in the close connection between the creation of humans and the creation of other animals. Both are created on the same day as described in Genesis 1:24-17 and they are brought together for companionship and naming (which implies responsibility) in Genesis 2:18-20. Both are given only the plants to eat (Gen. 1:29, 2:16). Indeed, the same phrase – nephesh chayah – is used for both. When used in connection with humans (Gen. 2:7), the phrase is usually translated as “living soul” or “living being” and when used in connection with animals (Gen. 1:21, 24; 2:19), it is usually translated “living creature.”6

Notwithstanding this close scriptural connection, theologians across the millennia have spent significantly more energy considering the ways we are different from, and superior to, animals than the ways we are alike, and the intended harmony of creation has been distorted into a human commission to exploit the rest of the creation. This has led Lynn White and others to

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lay responsibility for modern environmental problems at the feet of the Christian religion, and animal behaviorist Jonathan Balcombe to contend that the idea that humans are the crown of creation, with animals created for human use, is “enshrined in the widespread religious doctrine that man is created in the image of God.” How has the harmonious world vision expressed by Birch come to be understood as the cause of so much destruction? The answer lies in the evolving human understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God and to be given authority over the animals.

A. The Image of God

The phrase “image of God” is used only rarely in scripture, but it has been the subject of considerable theological reflection, and has had a profound impact on our self-understanding as Christians. Douglas John Hall argues that it is through interpretation of imago Dei that “historic Christianity attempted to explain what it believes to be the essence of human being and human vocation.” Likewise, Bruce K. Waltke asserts that “[o]ur being and function come from God’s image.”

A number of theories about what this phrase might mean have been offered through the centuries. Because Scripture says that only humans are created in the image of God, most theories centered on those traits that were believed to set humans apart from animals, including our rationality, moral consciousness, capacity for relationship, sense of responsibility to (or

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ability to be in relationship with) God, and even our upright posture and facial expressiveness.\textsuperscript{12} In his book, \textit{The Liberating Image}, Richard Middleton has discussed some of the interpretations that have been proposed. He attributes the diversity of opinion on the subject to the infrequency with which the phrase appears in scripture and the fact that until quite recently, most interpreters have disregarded the context of the phrase as it appears in Genesis 1. He notes that “[a]s a result of this inattention to context, many interpreters turn to extrabiblical, usually philosophical, sources to interpret the image and end up reading contemporaneous conceptions of being human back into the Genesis text.”\textsuperscript{13} Thus, Middleton argues, the vast majority of interpreters look for metaphysical explanations, speculating about the ways in which humans are like God and unlike animals. Hall likewise points out that most traditional interpretations of \textit{imago Dei} are derived from Greek and Roman philosophy, subsequently modified by various philosophical and moral developments in European history (Hall, 20).

These interpretations look for something inherent in humans – something in the way we are made, something “built into \textit{anthropos}; they are aspects of human nature as such. They are ‘capacities,’ ‘qualities,’ ‘original excellences,’ or ‘endowments’ that inhere in our creaturely substance” (Hall, 89). Hall terms these “substantialistic” approaches. They center on finding something that sets humans apart from other animals and makes humans in some way better, higher, or more important (Hall, 90). This understanding of the image of God has been construed to confer upon humans status, abilities, and rights over the rest of creation.

Hall argues that, despite their diversity, these approaches focus on two central elements: rationality and freedom (92-98). David Cairn has observed that “in all the Christian writers up to

\textsuperscript{12} Wright, Christopher J.H. \textit{Old Testament Ethics For The People Of God} (Downers Grove: IVP Academic 2004), 119. Hereinafter by page number.

Aquinas we find the image of God conceived as man’s power of reason.” This includes the writings of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, and Augustine, each of whom was heavily influenced by Greek thought (Hall, 93). For example, Augustine and Aquinas both drew heavily on Aristotle’s understanding of a natural hierarchy, whereby plants were meant for the use of animals, and animals for humans. What set humans apart and placed them at the top of this hierarchy was human reason.

Andrew Linzey argues that this view was “largely taken over by St. Thomas Aquinas, whose influence within the Catholic tradition has been immense” (Linzey, Animal Suffering, 12). For Aquinas, “all animals are naturally subject to man,” and we are to “perceive a certain order of procession of the perfect from the imperfect . . . thus the imperfect are for the use of the perfect;” it is therefore “in keeping with the order of nature, that man should be the master of animals.” Aquinas, therefore drew a more distinct line between reason and revelation than his predecessors, but the result was the same: humans, as “rational” creatures, are set apart from and are superior to other animals.

In addition to reason, Hall identifies human freedom, or will, as another significant theme in historic understandings of what it means to be created in the image of God. This belief was premised on the idea that humans, unlike other animals, “are capable of volition” (94). This goes hand in hand with human rationality, since thought and decision are “inextricably interwoven.” He identifies Irenaeus as “the first major theologian to exegete the imago concept” and says that Irenaeus identified both reason and will as constitutive of the image. This idea came to be

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associated with humans as “spiritual beings,” “personalities,” and “moral beings” (94). For example, for Augustine, the distinctive element in being human was the ability to choose, and thus to refrain from sin – a freedom lost in the Fall, when the human will became subject to sin (97). As explained by the Lord Bishop of Durham, writing in the early twentieth century, the image of God “lies in the mysterious gift of Personality, bringing not only mental, but much more, moral capacity, and true free-will and self-agency, such that man within his sphere becomes a true self-guiding Cause, as God in His sphere” (95). The Lord Bishop goes on to distinguish this capacity from “the beasts” who “are not moral, not responsible, not disengaged from material circumstance; not true causes.”

With the Reformation, Martin Luther rejected the “speculations” of the early church fathers that the image of God was something inherent in the human condition. Instead, he recast the *imago Dei* as something that was dependent on a person’s response to and relationship with God. For Luther, when humans sin, the relationship with God is broken and His image is lost, thus Luther denied the presence of the image in fallen humanity (Hall, 100). Like Luther, Calvin rejected the “speculations” of Aquinas and Augustine and other church fathers regarding the image of God. Also like Luther, he rejected the idea that the likeness of God is inherent in some aspect of the human substance. While Calvin agreed with his forebears that will and freedom set humans apart, he argued that the “seat” of the image of God is the human soul, and that the image is to be understood *vocationally*, imposing on humans the obligation to reflect the Creator, something humans can only do when, like a mirror, they are turned toward God (102-104).

Hall calls Luther’s and Calvin’s approaches a “relational” understanding of the image of God (98). These approaches do not deny the uniqueness of the human creature in terms of

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reason and will, but they insist that the image of God requires one to be in relationship with God and they recognize that human sin has had an impact on that image (106). To live in the image of God, then, imposes on us a “decisive ethical trust,” and one we should not take lightly (82). This understanding of the image imposes responsibilities rather than claiming rights.¹⁸

Karl Barth, however, dismissed all these earlier understandings of the image of God, saying, “What we cannot discuss is which of them is the true explanation of Gen.1. For it is obvious that their author merely found the concept in the text and then proceeded to pure invention in accordance with the requirements of contemporary anthropology.”¹⁹ Middleton charges that Barth, despite his attempts to anchor his understanding in the text of Genesis 1, did not do much better. Middleton explains that Barth tied his understanding of the image of God to the creation of humans as male and female in Genesis 1:27 and presupposes a “human-divine, I-Thou encounter” in the text. Thus, “Barth proposed that the image of God refers to the God-given capacity of human beings in their cohumanity (as male and female) to be addressed by and respond to God’s word” (Middleton, 22). Middleton explains that Barth described the male-female relationship and the God-human relationship, both “ontologically constitutive of humanness,” as “the image of the intradivine I-Thou relationship of the triune God” (22). This understanding, whatever its merits, Middleton argues, is clearly influenced by Martin Buber’s “I-Thou ontology,” as well as Barth’s desire to oppose German National Socialism by emphasizing relationship over autonomy (24). Like his predecessors, and notwithstanding his attempts to tie his understanding to biblical exegesis, for Middleton at least, Barth’s understanding was still driven by matters outside the text of Genesis 1.

¹⁸ See also Middleton, pp. 20-21, summarizing Luther and Calvin’s views on the imago Dei.
Middleton’s own critique of each of these approaches is not that they are influenced by the perspectives of their day. He acknowledges that all interpretations are subjective. Rather, he argues that they are dissociated from the scriptural context of the phrase they interpret, failing to address how our creation in the image of God is related to the rest of the creation story.

Middleton also contends that contemporary iterations of both the substantialistic and relational approaches, put forward largely by systematic theologians, “simply ignore the massive literature in Old Testament scholarship on *imago Dei* that developed in the past century” (24). This disengagement with Old Testament scholarship has two unfortunate results in Middleton’s view. First, it excludes any understanding of the human body as related to the image, focusing only on the soul or spirit and perpetuating a dualistic understanding of human nature. Middleton is not suggesting that the human body *looks like* God in any way, but is seeking to incorporate the idea that “the invisible God is imaged by bodily humanity” (24-25, n. 32).

Second, the lack of attention by systematic theologians to recent Old Testament scholarship has meant contemporary systematic discussions of *imago Dei* have failed to address the emerging consensus among Old Testament scholars on the subject, a consensus built around an idea very different from either the substantialistic or relational understandings of the image. Middleton summarizes this consensus in two parts. The first is based on exegesis of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and highlights the royal aspect of the text. Here humans are given the ability to rule over the earth and its creatures just as God rules over the cosmos. “Humanity is created *like* this God, with the special role of representing or imaging God’s rule in the world” (25-26, footnotes omitted). The second basis of the emerging consensus, which is the more prominent, is closely related. It looks to the historical social context of the ancient Near East, where it was the practice for rulers to place images of themselves in regions of their empire where they did not
personally appear to represent their rule. Similarly, God has placed humans on earth to represent Him and His rule; His image on earth. Middleton calls this “a functional – or even missional – interpretation of the image of God.” He further explains that “[o]n this reading, the imago Dei designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God’s representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God’s rule or administration of the earth’s resources and creatures” (27, emphasis added).20 This approach, he believes, in contrast to philosophical speculation, can be used to develop “an ethics of power rooted in a theological model of the self as empowered agent of compassion” (34).

In short, by this functional understanding, the image of God carries with it even stronger implications for the way we live our daily lives than the relational understanding put forward by the Reformers. Here, the exercise of power is central to what it means to be created in the image of God. For Middleton, humans are called upon to represent God to the rest of creation through the compassionate and loving exercise of power, revealing to the world the character of God. In contrast to the substantialistic interpretations, which place humans in a position of privilege based on their inherent capacities or endowments, and to the relational interpretations, which focus on the individual relationship with God, this understanding of imago Dei imposes significant responsibilities on human beings in relation to the rest of the world. Building on Middleton’s logic, it follows that because creation in the image of God is expressly linked with human power over animals, if the image requires a compassionate exercise of power, clearly that compassion must extend to our fellow creatures.

20 While this understanding of imago Dei draws on the world view of the ancient Near East, it differs significantly in one important respect: while many ancient cultures tended to understand kings or priests as representing divine authority, the Genesis account emphasizes that all human beings are created in this image. This means that all human beings share in whatever rights or responsibilities are inherent in imago Dei.
Walter Brueggemann is among the Old Testament scholars who concur that “the most plausible hypothesis [of what it means to be created in the image of God] is that the human person is placed among all other creatures to attest to and enact the rule of God,” reminding creatures of God’s rule, as an ancient ruler would place a statue of himself in areas of his realm where he could not go (Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 106). The particular significance of this role is signaled by the context of the Jewish faith in which these scriptures were written, a context strongly opposed to any iconic representations of God. To say that humans are created in that image, therefore, is a statement of great force (105-06). This underscores that the responsibilities that come with that image are to be taken seriously indeed. Connecting the image of God to dominion over the animals, Brueggemann explains that “the human creature not only exhibits the rule of YHWH, but in fact enacts it on behalf of and in the place of the sovereign God who is not visibly present to the other creatures. . . . With the gift of dominion intrinsic to human personhood comes immense responsibility . . .” (106).

Birch has explained that “[i]t was von Rad who fully developed the view that ‘image of God’ pointed more to human purpose than being – more to teleology than ontology” (Birch, 87). Birch argues that because the words translated as “image” or “likeness” of God are related to representations or models, they “cannot be read to indicate some aspect of the divine within humanity (soul, spirit, rationality, will, etc.). It is the whole of our being that is somehow like God” (87). Birch particularly calls out a hierarchical understanding of the created order as a “distortion of creation theology” (85-86). Humanity’s “special role,” he argues, does not translate into “special valuing by God” (87).

Terrance Fretheim likewise takes a functional view of the image of God. Created in God’s image, he argues, humans are given the gifts necessary to take up the God-given
responsibilities set forth in the verses following Genesis 1:26. “The image functions to mirror God to the world, to be God as God would be to the non-human, to be an extension of God’s own dominion.”

Bruce K. Waltke draws on many early philosophical and theological traditions, but like Brueggemann, Birch, and Fretheim, he argues for a primarily functional understanding of the image. He notes that human creation in the image of God is “fundamental to Genesis and the entirety of Scripture” (65). The imago Dei sets humans apart from other creatures, “establishes humanity’s role on earth and facilitates communication with the divine” (65). The phrase also indicates that humanity is a representation of God, but distinct, not a facsimile; humans express who God is, they do not depict what He looks like. In addition, an image “possesses the life of the one being represented” and represents the presence of that one (65). Inseparable from the notion of image as representation, he argues, “the image functions as ruler in the place of the deity” (66). It is because of this image that we are persons, dependent on God but still able to make our own decisions, thus free to sin and free to accept God’s grace. Thus, as we function as representatives of God, “mirroring God and breathing God’s life, we may live in relationship with God and exercise our dominion over all the earth” (70).

These modern understandings of the imago Dei, grounded in the context of Scripture, are unanimous in concluding that our creation in the image of God imposes on humans significant responsibilities. The image of God is not something we can stand on, but it is something we are called to live into, and a central aspect of that calling is the compassionate exercise of power, revealing to the creation the character of God, caring for the creation, including animals, as God

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Himself would. Moreover, this is not a theological side show. This is foundational to who we are created to be.

B. Dominion

The second half of Genesis 1:26 tells us that, coupled with creation in His image, God gave us dominion over the animals. Birch explains, “God’s resolve to create in the divine image is coupled with a commissioning to have dominion. . . . It is as representative (image) of God that we are given capacity for power in the world” (88-89). It is clear that image and dominion are closely tied, both scripturally and as a practical matter. How we understand one has important implications for how we understand the other. It also has dramatic implications for the well-being of the rest of creation, most especially the animals.

As we have seen, early theologians, influenced by Aristotle’s hierarchy of nature and adopting a substantialistic understanding of *imago Dei*, believed that all of creation was there for human use and benefit. For them, our “dominion” over the animals was understood essentially as *carte blanche* to do with them as we pleased. Augustine exemplifies this viewpoint. In *The City of God*, he explained that “irrational animals . . . are dissociated from us by their want of reason, and therefore by the just appointment of the Creator subjected to us to kill or keep alive for our uses . . . .”

Likewise, Aquinas endorsed this view. In his *Summa Theologica*, for example, he said, “…the love of charity extends to none but God and our neighbor. But the word neighbor cannot be extended to irrational creatures, since they have no fellowship with

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22 Verse 26 sets forth God’s intention, bringing the image and dominion together. Verses 27-28 explain how God fulfills that stated intention, creating humans in His image, male and female, blessing them, and commanding them to fill the earth and “subdue” it and to have dominion over all the animals. It is important to note that the gift of dominion goes expressly to the animals, and not to nature or the earth in general. It is a separate verse that governs our relationship with the earth. It is also significant that both creation stories clearly delineate creation of the earth and the plants from creation of the animals. Thus any suggestion that “animals” and “nature” can be conflated is not supported by the creation stories.

man in the rational life. Therefore charity does not extend to irrational creatures.”

Linzey explains that Aquinas “was clear that human dominion is to be exercised without ‘hindrance’ – that is, without moral limits. The only possible exception is where cruelty practiced on animals might adversely affect the human perpetrator” (Linzey, Animal Suffering, 14). For Aquinas, those passages of Scripture that “seem to forbid us to be cruel to brute animals” do so only because of the danger that in being cruel to animals, one may become cruel to human beings. Otherwise, “it is not wrong for man to make use of [animals], either by killing them or in any other way whatever.”

This perspective reached its pinnacle in the philosophy of René Descartes. While Descartes was a philosopher rather than a theologian, as we have seen, philosophy has been a driving factor in theological understandings of image and dominion. Descartes, who believed that the power of reason was a defining element of existence (“I think, therefore I am”), also believed that because (in his understanding) animals had no language, they had no thoughts. Their lack of language, he reasoned “does not merely show that the brutes have less reason than men, but that they have none at all, since it is clear that very little is required in order to be able to talk.”

Moreover, Descartes believed that if animals did have language, “they could communicate their thoughts to us just as easily as to those of their own race,” since they have “many organs” in common with humans (Linzey & Regan, 47-50). Thus, if animals had thoughts, they would tell us about them. Without thoughts, animals could not understand what was happening to them and therefore, although Descartes did not deny animals had “sensations,”

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he asserted that they had no ability to suffer. Instead, everything they did was purely instinctual, “by disposition of the organs.” Linzey explains, “Descartes’ followers, the Port Royalists, reportedly ‘kicked their dogs and dissected their cats without mercy, laughing at any compassion for them, and calling their screams the noise of breaking machinery.’”

While few people today adopt Descartes’ extreme view, his ideas and the association of the ability for “rational thought” with the ability to “suffer meaningfully” have had a pervasive influence on our understandings of the right treatment of animals and on our understanding of animals as “only,” not meriting our sustained attention or concern – and certainly not meriting any sacrifice on the part of humans for the benefit of animals.

In contrast to the substantialistic view of the *imago Dei*, the “functional” approach focuses on our responsibility to represent the rule of God on earth to the rest of creation, including animals. In this view, humans are not the only creatures of importance to God, and this has important implications for our exercise of dominion. Brueggemann makes the connection between image and dominion explicit, arguing that the creation stories in Genesis 1 “protest against an exclusively anthropocentric view of the world” (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 30-31). Indeed, the first blessings in the Bible are for other creatures, “who have their own relation to God,” not for humans (31). Although the creation story has to do with all of creation and not just humans, humans are nevertheless given special attention and a special role in creation. “The human creature attests to the Godness of God by exercising freedom with and authority over all other creatures entrusted to its care” (32). Critically, this freedom and authority is not an

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29 For example, in *Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002), author Matthew Scully discusses at length the views of Stephen Budiansky, author, animal behaviorist, “and defender of such practices as commercial whaling and elephant hunting.” Budiansky argues that whatever pain animals feel is “mere pain,” not meaningful, an unconscious neurophysiological reaction to external stimuli. E.g., Scully, 6.
unrestricted liberty. It is to be exercised as God exercises His freedom and authority – to invite, evoke, and permit. “There is nothing here of coercive or tyrannical power” (32). Birch adds, “We are not absolute monarchs in the world but trustees or stewards acting in behalf of God’s sovereignty as Creator” (Birch, 89). Brueggemann continues:

The ‘dominion’ mandated here is with reference to the animals. The dominance is that of a shepherd who cares for, tends, and feeds the animals. Or, if transferred to the political arena, the image is that of shepherd king (cf. Ezek. 34). Thus the task of ‘dominion’ does not have to do with exploitation and abuse. It has to do with securing the well-being of every other creature and bringing the promise of each to full fruition (32).

The Ruler we are to represent, Brueggemann explains, is “one who governs by gracious self-giving” (33). Citing 2 Cor. 4:4 and Col. 1:15, Brueggemann continues, arguing that Christians are to view this through the lens of Jesus Christ, whose “identity as God’s image on earth is evident in his readiness to turn from himself toward creation . . .” (34). Jesus shows us that it is the nature of God to look after the interests of others.

Likewise, Birch explains, “Created in the image of God, humankind exercises dominion as representative of God’s sovereignty” (Birch, 200). Moreover, because our authority over animals is a delegated power, it is not absolute; it is answerable to God, who ultimately rules over all. This delegation of power over creation comes with an “implied moral norm [that measures] human actions by reference to their faithfulness in reflecting God’s will and ultimate rule” (89).

Fretheim describes dominion as “a power-sharing relationship” with God. (Fretheim, 345-46). It connotes “care-giving, even nurturing, not exploitation,” and imposes on humans the responsibility to “relate to the nonhuman as God relates to them.” Moreover, this duty of nurturing care “centers on the animals.” The entire structure, Fretheim contends, is intended to bring “the world along to its fullest possible creational potential” (346).
Middleton argues that the dominion, or rule, over creation given by God to humans is not merely the purpose of creation in the image of God, it is its definition. For Middleton, dominion and the *imago Dei* are so closely tied that the exercise of dominion is “virtually constitutive of the image” (Middleton, 55). That exercise of dominion “requires a significant exercise of communal power” as might be exercised by a king (52). Yet this exercise of power, or vocation, is to be modeled on God’s own exercise of power and it is to be exercised through the ordinary activities of day-to-day life, such as the development of agriculture and domestication of animals (60).

Wright grants that there may be room for more than dominion within our understanding of the image of God, but he still insists that dominion is what the image enables. Because God intended for us to exercise this power, He enabled us to do so by creating man in His image. This does not, Wright argues, justify the traditional “instrumentalist” or substantialistic view of the image that understood the rest of creation as existing solely for human benefit. Instead, our exercise of power over creation “must reflect the character and values of God’s own kingship” (Wright, 121). The right exercise of dominion, therefore, requires careful reflection on the character of God (121).

Thus, just as modern Biblical scholarship is nearly unanimous that the image of God is tied to our function in the world as representatives of God, so it is unanimous that that image imposes on us significant responsibilities to the rest of creation, and in particular to animals. Animals, these scholars argue, are here not merely for our own use, but have their own relationship with God, and God has entrusted them to us.

Yet, whether the *imago Dei* is understood as being at the top of the created order with everything else created for human use, or as the representation of God’s authority on earth, both
approaches recognize, as they must, that the gift of dominion is the gift of power. That should lead us to ask: what is the right exercise of power?

The right and wrong exercise of power is a ubiquitous theme throughout scripture, and its message is consistent. Matthew Scully summarizes Judeo-Christian teaching on power, saying its “whole logic . . . is one of gracious condescension, of the proud learning to be humble, the higher serving the lower, and strong protecting the weak” (Scully, 97). Power used to exploit or harm the innocent and the powerless is displeasing to God. Birch, in discussing the formation of the Israelite community out of the Exodus, addresses God’s partiality for the dispossessed and “God’s implacable opposition to evil in the world – all of those forces that make for dispossession: injustice, oppression, economic exploitation, personal greed, and manipulation of others” (Birch, 123). All of these things come from the exercise of power without compassion, without gratitude, and without the recognition that all power comes from God and is answerable to Him. All these offenses are manifest in our current interaction with animals at the societal level.

The Gospel of Matthew assures us that “the last will be first and the first will be last,” and “whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt. 20: 16, 26). Likewise, the Gospel of Luke warns, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required” (Lk. 12:48). There is nothing here to support the idea that humans were given power over animals in order to simply use it as we please. Indeed, the entire teaching of the gospel, as the rest of scripture, is that power and opportunity bring responsibility and obligation, and we will be held to account.

Moreover, the notion that humans have no responsibilities toward animals because of human status in creation is inimicable to the example of Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God.
Paul tells us that for mere humans, Christ “did not regard equality with God a thing to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” to die on the cross. Can we, who are made only in the image of God, “exploit” that image and count ourselves too important to care about those who are “lower” than we are? Christ shows us the character of God: the self-emptying of power for the benefit of the powerless. To justify disregard of animal suffering in the name of our God-given dominion, or to suggest that we owe the animals no duty of care because we are more important, is incompatible with living in God’s image as modeled by Christ.

Thus, our appropriate relationship with animals is hardly a theological throw-away. It cannot be brushed aside for more “important” theological matters and it cannot simply be tolerated with an indulgent smile while the children bring their hamsters to the Blessing of the Animals service. How we understand our relationship with animals and how we exercise our power over them, whether we realize it or not, is a reflection or a distortion of the character of God and a defining element of what it means to be human. It is also a reflection of our understanding of what it means to be given power, the rights and responsibilities that come with power, and the ultimate source of power. It has to do with “the whole logic” of what it means to be Christian. At a time when animals are suffering at human hands as never before, it is a matter on which the church may no longer remain disengaged and silent.
II. Let Everything That Has Breath Praise The Lord:
Scripture And Tradition On The Nature Of Animals

“What do they know – all these scholars, all the philosophers, all the leaders of the world – about such as [a mouse?] They have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them, all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka.”

Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Letter Writer*

While scripture is replete with stories of animals, we rarely focus on them, unless we consider the animals as allegories or metaphors for some element of the human relationship with God. Nevertheless, when we open our eyes to the presence of animals, we see that scripture has a great deal to teach us about our proper relationship with our fellow creatures. This section will look briefly at only a few such examples. In addition, while the dominant church voice regarding animals has been one that viewed them merely as a resource for human exploitation, there has always been a voice raised in protest against such a view. From the time of the early saints, the connection between compassion toward animals and holiness has been recognized by many. From time to time voices have been raised in the church, as some few voices are raised today, pleading for change in our perspective on animals. The second part of this section will consider that minority voice.

A. Scripture

When we begin to look for animals in scripture, they make their appearance in many surprising places. As on so many other topics, of course, scripture is not univocal on the status of animals or our obligations to them, but taken as a whole, there is a clear message of God’s concern for the animals throughout both the Old and New Testaments.
1. *The Foundation: Animals in the Old Testament*

The first image that tends to spring to people’s minds about animals in the Old Testament is their use as items for religious sacrifice, a topic we will address; but before considering that issue, it is helpful to consider some of the many examples in the Hebrew Bible of God’s abiding care for the animals.

The Psalms are a rich source of animal references. Here, the animals praise God together with humans, they reflect His glory, they are in relationship with Him, and He claims them as His own. Just a few examples include:

- **33:14-15**: God “fashions the hearts” “of all the inhabitants of the earth.”
- **50:10-11**: “For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.”
- **104:24, 27-30**: “O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. . . . These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.”
- **150:6**: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

Scripture also tells us that God covenants directly with the animals, just as He does with humans. After the flood, God established His covenant with both humans and animals that He would never again destroy the world with floods (Gen. 9:9-17). Likewise, Hosea promised that when Israel returns to the Lord, the Lord will covenant with “the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky, and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety” (Hos. 2:18). Echoing Hosea’s promise of a new day when humans and animals alike shall live in safety, in Isaiah’s well-loved vision of the
new creation, when the earth is “full of the knowledge of the Lord,” animals and humans will once again be in fellowship:

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 in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Is. 11:6-9).

Richard Bauckham explains that it is important to understand Isaiah’s vision not simply as one of peace between animals and humans. 30 “In fact, it depicts peace between the human world, with its domesticated animals (lamb, kid, calf, bullock, cow), and the wild animals (wolf, leopard, lion, bear, poisonous snakes) that were normally perceived as threats to both human livelihood (dependent on domestic animals) and to human life” (123). It also includes “the cessation of all harm and destruction (11:9), which must mean also that humans are to be vegetarian. The picture is of restoration of paradise (‘my holy mountain’ is Eden, as in Ezek. 28:13-14) and the original vegetarianism of all living creatures (Gen. 1:29-30)” (126).

Animals also turn up in Old Testament stories of the prophets. In the Book of Jonah, for example, God explains his decision not to punish Nineveh not only because of the humans in the city, but also because of the many animal residents (Jonah 4:11). Likewise, Job acknowledges that even the animals know the power of the Lord (Job 12:7-10), and the Lord’s response to Job makes clear that God created and cares for the animals (38:39-39:30). In Proverbs, we learn that caring for one’s animals is a sign of righteousness (Prov. 12:10). Elijah was cared for by the ravens, who were obeying the command of the Lord (1 Kings 17:5-6). It was Balaam’s donkey

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who was able to see the angel of the Lord before Balaam himself, and when the donkey’s “mouth was opened,” he used the opportunity not to point out immediately the presence of the angel, but to complain about Balaam’s injustice in beating him, a complaint echoed by the angel himself (Num. 22:22-30).

A number of Jewish laws underscore our responsibilities to the animals in our care. For example,

- Deut. 22:6-7 prohibits taking a mother bird from its young;
- Deut. 22:10 prohibits yoking an ox and a donkey together;
- Deut. 25:4 prohibits muzzling an ox while it is treading out the grain;
- Ex. 23:4 requires the Israelites to return an enemy’s donkey or ox;
- Ex. 23:5 requires the Israelites to help an enemy’s donkey struggling with a burden;
- Ex. 23:10-11 requires the Israelites to let portions of their fields lie fallow so that both the poor and the wild animals may eat;
- Ex. 23:12 includes animals within the Sabbath rest “so that your ox and your donkey may have relief.”

These texts illustrate that God remains in relationship with the animals, covenants with them, feeds and cares for them, includes them in the renewed creation. He is concerned when they are hurt, abused, or overworked. Indeed, there is a strong Jewish tradition regarding our responsibilities to care for animals based on the general principle that all living things should be spared pain.31

In addition to these texts, Scripture also tells us that how we relate to animals is a test of character. Moses found his bride and his father-in-law Jethro after helping Jethro’s daughters to water their sheep (Ex. 2:15-22). He also discovered the burning bush while tending his father-in-law’s sheep (Ex. 3: 1-2). The Midrash explains “how Moses discovered the burning bush while

31 See, e.g., Bauckham, 80-82.
he was carrying a stray sheep back to the flock. It was not great strength that qualified him as a leader, nor a sharp mind, good looks or personal wealth. It was his great compassion for the smallest and weakest among his charges that made Moses fit to lead the nation.”

Rabbinic tradition also tells us that Noah’s work in saving the animals and in caring for them for long months in the ark reveals what it means to be righteous. The Shamayim V’Aretz Institute explains that the Torah calls Noah “a righteous man (tzaddik), because the term ‘righteous’ specifically refers to one who provides food for God’s creatures. . . . Rav Achavah, son of Rav Ze’ira said, ‘[t]he sons of Noah were all righteous because they showed compassion toward both animal and human.’”

Similarly, Isaac’s wife Rabekah was chosen because she offered water not only to the servant of Abraham, but to his camels, as well (Gen. 24:10-21), and throughout the Hebrew Bible, it is the shepherd who cares diligently for his sheep, even at personal cost, who is held up as a model to follow. For Christians, of course, this image comes to its perfection in the life, teaching, and death of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.

Nevertheless, Scripture is not all good news for animals. Just as Scripture has, at best, a mixed record on such issues as slavery and women’s roles in society, so, too, there are verses that highlight humans’ unique relationship with God and that suggest a hierarchy within God’s concern that has led some to suggest that God has no concern for animals.

32 Rabbi Steve Burgh, “Bullying and the House of Horrors”, op-ed for Orthodox Union, http://www.ou.org/ou/print_this/96636 (accessed January 13, 2013); see also, Judaism 101, “Moses, Aaron, and Miriam,” http://www.jewfaq.org/moshe.htm (accessed January 13, 2013): “A midrash tells that Moses was chosen to lead the Children of Israel because of his kindness to animals. When he was bringing the sheep to a river for water, one lamb did not come. Moses went to the little lamb and carried it to the water so it could drink. Like G-d, Moses cared about each individual in the group, and not just about the group as a whole. This showed that he was a worthy shepherd for G-d’s flock.”


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In Genesis 9:1-7, for example, we learn that after the flood, something fundamental remains broken in creation. For the first time, there is a division between humans and animals. God announces that unlike in the Garden of Eden, where humans and animals lived peacefully together, and unlike Isaiah’s new creation where humans and animals are once again in harmony, now “the fear and dread” of humans will come to all the other animals. Rather than being under the benevolent dominion of humans who are responsible for their naming and care, now the animals are “delivered into [human] hands.” Here, in this broken post-deluvian world, for the first time, animals are given to humans as food, in what Fretheim describes as “a concession to the need for food in a famine-ridden world” (399), and what Waltke suggests was done “to protect human life” (144). Commentary in the New Oxford Annotated Bible asserts that “this is a partial concession to the violence observed prior to the flood.”

Even now, however, God places restrictions on the practice of eating animals. Humans may not eat an animal’s “life, that is its blood” (Gen. 9:4), which is to be poured out on the ground and thereby returned to God. Fretheim points out that this restriction was unique in the ancient world, demonstrating that life still belongs to God, the source of all life. “As such, it guards against brutality, carelessness, and needless killing” (399). Similarly, Waltke asserts that this restriction “instills a respect for the sacredness of life and protects against wanton abuse” (144). The taking of an animal’s life for food is thus to be recognized as the taking of a life given and loved by and belonging to God. It is not an invitation to gluttonous disregard of the cost of meat in the diet.

Even as God makes a concession to allow humans to take animal life, and recognizing the brokenness of the human creation, He announces that “as for [God]”, He will not participate in the human diminishment of His animal creatures; instead, He establishes His covenant not only

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with humans, but with the animals, as well. (Gen. 9:9-10). Where humans have failed, God remains steadfast. We see here a brokenness in creation, not only between humans and animals, but between humans and God. Given the cohesion between our creation in the image of God and our responsibilities to represent God in caring for the animals, it can hardly be otherwise. When we fail the animals, we fail in accurately reflecting God’s image and are separated from Him to some degree.

Still, this passage does recognize a distinction between humans and animals, and a higher status for humans. While limited permission to kill animals is granted, the prohibition against killing other humans is underscored. Anyone who takes a human life must also give his own life as a reckoning (Gen. 9:5). Nevertheless, even here, the animals are not forgotten by God.

Noah’s story also brings to the fore the difficult issue of animal sacrifice. Noah, after caring so diligently for all the animals in the ark, now sacrifices a great number of them to God (Gen. 8:20-22). Animal sacrifice was, of course, a significant element of ancient Israeli worship. This has been taken to support the view that animals are intended to benefit humans and that the taking of their lives is endorsed by God. However, while it is true that the sacrificial system allows, even requires, humans to kill animals as part of their worship of God, it does not follow that God therefore does not care about animals or that any use of animals that may benefit humans is permissible. As Linzey explains, recent scholarship suggests that the sacrificial system had more to do with returning something of value to God than with the destruction of a living object. “The crucial point here is that far from reinforcing the low value of the sacrificial victim, the ritual actually . . . underlines the value of the animals slain and also its acceptance and transformation by God.”35 Gary A. Anderson emphasizes that in practicing sacrifice the Israelites were underscoring their “absolute dependence” on “the graces of God,” and

symbolizing “the miraculous availability of the deity within the Temple.” Norman Wirzba likewise argues that the point of the sacrificial system (whether of animals or plants) was to require practitioners to offer up something that was precious to the family, connected to the family’s well-being, so that in the act of giving it away, the family would learn to trust God and be transformed by that experience. Wirzba stresses that sacrifice teaches that “all life is precious,” and that in offering a sacrifice, the Israelites were offering a life back to God (Wirzba, 116-123). Thus, there is nothing in the sacrificial system to suggest that the lives of the animals offered were of little value. On the contrary, it was because of their value that they were worthwhile sacrifices. While it is true that this system made use of animals for human benefit, and while it is true that many animals died through this means, there was nothing thoughtless or demeaning about it. In view of the perfect sacrifice on the Cross, Christians cannot argue that that which God is willing to sacrifice for the good of humans is of little value, or that God does not care about the suffering of those sacrificed.


Animals also appear in the New Testament, and are strongly associated with Jesus’ ministry. Although Jesus Himself never directly taught about compassion to animals, Richard Bauckham argues that all of Jesus’ teaching needs to be understood in the context of first century Israelite faith, with its tradition of God’s care for animals (Bauckham, 80). Bauckham explicates a number of Old Testament passages that include compassion for animals and discusses how Jesus used them in his own teaching. For example, Jesus pointed to laws requiring compassion for animals even on the Sabbath as a way to explain why doing good for humans is permissible on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:11-12; Lk 14:5; Lk. 13:15-16). Bauckham also considers Jesus’

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teachings regarding God’s provisions for all creatures and how Jesus used such examples to demonstrate that humans are also cared for by God. This is an argument from the lesser to the greater: if God cares for the animals, how much more will he care about you? The important point is that this style of teaching only works if everyone already understands that God does, in fact, care for the animals.

Jesus began his life being placed in a manger – a feeding place for animals (Lk. 2:7). While Scripture does not indicate whether or not animals were present, long-standing Christian tradition holds that they were. In addition, the first people to see Jesus, apart from Mary and Joseph, are shepherds, pre-figuring the Good Shepherd and bringing with them all the symbolism from the Old Testament ideal of the good shepherd, the righteous and compassionate leader, and the lesson that how we treat animals is a reflection of who we are (Lk. 2:8-18).

In addition, Jesus begins his ministry with animals. Mark tells us that after his baptism, “the Spirit immediately drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him” (Mk. 1:12-13). For Bauckham, this verse is extremely important, especially coming as it does after Mark’s prologue (1:1-5), which puts Jesus in a messianic setting. This verse shows Jesus beginning his ministry and ushering in the new kingdom by re-establishing the peace with the wild animals lost after the flood. It is significant that “Jesus does not terrorize or dominate the wild animals, he does not domesticate or even make pets of them. He is simply ‘with them’” (Bauckham, 109). In this way, Jesus “affirms their independent value for themselves and for God. He does not adopt them into the human world, but lets them be themselves in peace, leaving them their wilderness, affirming them as creatures who share the world with us in the community of God’s creation” (110).
Even in those passages where humans seem to enjoy more of God’s favor, His concern for the animals is still clearly manifest. In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, Jesus comforts his disciples, reminding them that not one sparrow falls to the ground without the Father and that they are worth “many sparrows” (Mt. 10:29-31). This passage affirms the special place of humans in relationship with God, while simultaneously affirming God’s care even for individual sparrows. In God’s kingdom, there is enough love and compassion for all.

Likewise, in the story of the Canaanite woman with the sick daughter (Mk. 7:24-30, Mt 15:21-28), what appears at first to be a suggestion that neither non-Israelite humans nor dogs are worthy of God’s notice, instead makes the point that God’s love extends to all He has made, even those we might deem of little value. This story takes place just after Jesus has had a confrontation with the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem, who have relied on status and the keeping of tradition to secure their place before God (Mt. 15:2-3), and after the disciples have been arguing about who will be greater in heaven (Mk. 10:37). The Canaanite woman, however, is only too aware of her lack of status as a non-Israelite and a woman; she makes no presumption of entitlement, but trusts in the vastness of God’s compassion. When Jesus points out that it is wrong to give to the dogs food belonging to the children, she replies that even so, the dogs are fed – she understands that no one is forgotten in God’s compassion. Similarly, God’s primary relationship may be with those of us created in his image, but he still cares about the animals. When we rely on exalted status to define our relationship with God to the exclusion of others, we become “blind guides” with the Pharisees (Mt. 15:14), missing the point that we are tasked with teaching the world not about God’s love for us, but His love for the whole created order, animals (even dogs) included. As Bauckham points out, Jesus never uses human superiority as a means
to devalue animals, instead Jesus uses this hierarchy only to point to the vastness and steadfastness of God’s love for all (Bauckham, 97).

A more challenging gospel story from the standpoint of defending animal welfare as a fundamental theological concern is the story of the Gadarene Pigs, told in Matthew 8:28-9:1, Mark 5: 3-4 and Luke 8:29. Biblical commenters considering the story have considered a variety of interpretations of the pigs’ meaning and role. The pigs have been regarded as ironic, comic, symbolic, evidentiary, disposable, and fictional. Rarely have they been addressed as living creatures worthy of God’s - and our - consideration. Given the uses to which this story has traditionally been put, however, any theology of animal welfare must consider it.

In this story, Jesus heals one or two demoniacs\(^\text{38}\) in the country of Gadarenes. The demons exclaim at Jesus’ presence as soon as he arrives, concerned that Jesus has come to judge them before the end time. They beg that if they are to be cast out of their hosts, Jesus would allow them to enter a nearby herd of swine. Jesus grants their request, and the swine rush headlong into the sea and drown. This is an important episode for consideration of what the gospel has to say about animals because it is told in all three synoptic gospels and has long been used to justify the intentional mistreatment of animals.

The argument that this story shows that God is not concerned about animals comes from St. Augustine himself, who, as explained by Peter Singer, reasoned that “Jesus caused the Gadarene swine to drown in order to demonstrate that we have no duties to animals.”\(^\text{39}\) Since then, this reasoning has been used to justify a great deal of animal abuse, in particular animal


\(^{38}\) In Luke and Mark there is only one demoniac, in Matthew there are two.

experimentation. The issue was particularly hotly debated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the ethics of animal experimentation were being closely examined.

Two references to the Gadarene swine in early public discourse stand out. In a 1904 President’s Address to the British Medical Association, William Collier recalled various episodes in the development of Oxford’s medical school, including debates on vivisection. He told in particular of “the most fantastic argument ever put forward in favour of vivisection, namely, that the Gadarene -miracle sanctioned it, inasmuch as it was a well-known fact that swine in swimming crossed their forelegs, and in so doing cut their own throats.”\textsuperscript{40} Notwithstanding the absurdity of that argument, the anti-vivisectionists at Oxford were defeated. By contrast, a letter in the December 1907 issue of The Animal Defender and Zoophilist observed, in response to an earlier writer who relied on the Gadarene pigs story to justify vivisection, that “while it is quite like a vivisector to put himself in the place of the Deity, he is obviously wrong in doing so this time. In the analogy, if there is any analogy at all in these cases, the licensed vivisectors obviously fill the place of the devils, who, by their own request, are allowed to torment the poor swine.”\textsuperscript{41} The writer concludes that why this was allowed in either case is a mystery.

Notwithstanding these early views, few modern commentators have asked what the story might mean for our relationship with animals. John Nolland, one of the few commentators even to recognize this issue, has observed,

\begin{quote}
The kinds of animal welfare issues to which modern Western peoples have been sensitized are not issues for ancient Mediterranean peoples. As far as Jews were concerned, pigs should not have been raised in the first place. As far as others
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{41}Hall, Earnest. \textit{The Zoophilist and Animals’ Defender}, December 1907, p. 139 (emphasis original). \url{http://books.google.com/books?id=8MvJAAAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA139&lpg=RA1-PA139&dq=gadarene%20%20vivisection&source=bl&ots=tPKwhub9g4&sig=tD5w1O1MQLHerGHmoxvyjWbaig0&hl=en&ei=vxi3TOHaCoL68Ab3_KDICQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CBcQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=gadarene%20%20vivisection&f=false} (accessed Jan. 7, 2013).
were concerned, the pigs were destined for slaughter (for food or religious sacrifice). As the ongoing story hints, the people involved are concerned about their own loss, not the experience of the pigs (377, n. 132).

As Nolland recognized, this story is not intended to illustrate appropriate human relations to animals, and thus is not a justification for mistreatment of animals. Instead, this is a story about Jesus’ authority over the powers of darkness.

The story takes place in a setting of Jesus’ escalating demonstrations of his powers and authority, after he has quelled stormy seas. Getting out of the boat, Jesus is confronted with the demoniacs, whose power and fierceness are stressed. This is a dangerous encounter with powerful and frightening forces. But this time, the demons themselves are terrified, and beg to be allowed to enter the herd of nearby swine. Now, for the first time, Jesus speaks. In Matthew’s telling of the story, it is one word: “Go!” thereby sealing the fate of the pigs, who rush into the water and drown (Mt. 8:32). In this scene, Jesus has met the powers of darkness, and in a foreshadowing of the final judgment, has felled them with “one little word,” to use Martin Luther’s phrase.

Thus, this is not a story about human relationships with pigs. It is not even a story about curing demoniacs. It is a story about Jesus’ authority, pointing to Jesus as the one who will judge all at the end of time. Jesus does not “kill[] two thousand animals for the health of one human being,” as Norman Phelps describes the pro-vivisection position (Phelps, 139-40). Rather, as Eugene Boring explains, this story “represents the cosmic conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.”

The demons were allowed to enter the pigs not for the benefit of one or two human beings, but for the sake of the created order and for the

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triumph of good over evil. As we learn elsewhere in Scripture, humans will likewise suffer in this struggle, and pigs are not therefore singled out as disposable.43

Still, the story is troubling. In contrast, for example, to the story of the Canaanite woman, which is not about dogs, but nevertheless has something to tell us about God’s love even for animals, there is little to be redeemed for the animals here. The invalidity of a negative interpretation does not create a positive one. However, it appears to be the case that this story is the exception, not the rule. In the larger context of biblical teaching on animals, we have seen again and again support for the idea that God cares about the animals and has entrusted us with the responsibility for their care. The fate of the Gadarene pigs in the context of Jesus’s authority over the powers of evil—Augustine notwithstanding—does not change that overarching theme.

Finally, two passages in the New Testament directly address the eating of meat, and both might seem to place it in a favorable light, suggesting that we need have no qualms about the meat we eat today. These stories bear closer scrutiny. First, in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul tells the Corinthians there is no reason not to eat meat sacrificed to pagan idols, as long as by so doing they are not drawing others to the worship of idols. Because the worship of Greco-Roman idols is no longer a concern, this passage would seem to remove any obstacles to eating meat today. Taken in context, however, Paul’s message remains as relevant to us today as it was for the ancient Corinthians. In this passage, Paul is responding to a question from the Corinthian church regarding whether it is permissible to eat food sacrificed to idols. In a lengthy response, Paul emphasizes a central Pauline theme: in discerning appropriate behavior, the Corinthians are to consider what will build up the community and draw people to Christ. The food itself, Paul argues, is not the point: “Food will not bring us close to God” (v. 8). What is important, Paul urges, is whether their behavior becomes a “stumbling block” to others (v. 9). Those who act in

love will act out of concern for the weaker members of the community - even if it means giving up something they might otherwise be entitled to - not only for the sake of those other members of the community, but for the sake of Christ. As Morton Scott Enslin explains, Paul’s emphasis on the edification of others is an underlying principal of all his ethical teachings. For the Corinthians, the question was whether, by eating meat sacrificed to idols, Christians might draw others away from Christ by seeming to participate in pagan practices. For us, the question is whether by eating meat from factory farms, we might draw others away from Christ by seeming to suggest that Christ is not concerned with suffering.

Another passage dealing with meat is Acts 10:9-29, in which Peter has a dream involving “all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air,” and is told to “kill and eat.” (v. 12-13). Peter refuses, protesting that he has never eaten anything “profane or unclean.” (v. 14). Peter is told from heaven, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” (v. 15). Immediately after this, Peter is visited by emissaries from a centurion and then proceeds to the centurion’s house, where he announces that although it is a violation of Jewish law for him to associate with a Gentile, “God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean” (v. 28). In this passage, while the distinction between clean and unclean animals is eliminated, the obligation of Genesis 9 to recognize that eating meat requires the taking of a life given by God is not modified in any way, nor are any of the obligations to treat animals with mercy and compassion. This passage, like so many others, is about the breadth of God’s all-encompassing love, but does not diminish our obligations for humane treatment even of the animals we eat.

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In sum, Scripture taken as a whole clearly expresses God’s care and concern for all that He has made, including the animals. God created the animals and calls them good. He gives them breath, feeds them, covenants with them, protects them under the law, and is eager to spare them when they live with sinners. Christ, the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God, was born where animals eat, began his ministry in their company, and grounds his teaching in the Jewish tradition of God’s care for animals in order to teach God’s about care for us. Scripture also tells us that humans take priority in the created order. Even where humans come first, however, the animals are not forgotten. Scripture emphasizes that God’s love extends to all that he has created. Thus, scripture tells us that animals matter to God. Even where the use of animals for human benefit is sanctioned, this does not in any way convey a warrant to disregard the animals’ well-being. Scripture affirms that just because animals are not made in the image of God does not mean they are made without inherent worth that we must respect.

### B. Tradition

Notwithstanding these scriptural teachings, the Christian tradition has not been kind to animals. As we have seen, traditional understandings of what it means to be created in the image of God focused on identifying ways in which humans were different from and better than animals, most notably emphasizing human reason. Animals were not only considered “irrational,” they were thought to have no relationship with God. Influenced by the Greek philosophical understanding of a natural hierarchy, by which the lesser was intended only to serve the greater, the dominant Christian tradition understood animals as existing solely to serve human needs and understood humans as having no duty to be compassionate or merciful to animals. While few theologians would argue the case so starkly today, it is a perspective deeply entrenched in our cultural understandings of our relationships with animals, as evidenced by such
common comments as, “it’s just a dog,” or “they’re just pests,” or “their whole purpose is to be food.” This perspective also continues to wield significant influence in some faith circles, where the idea of obligations of compassion for animals is viewed skeptically, perceived either as an infringement on scarce time and resources that could be used on “more important” matters dealing with human needs, or as a secular agenda to elevate animals to the same status as humans and to deny that humans are uniquely made in God’s image.

Despite the pervasiveness of these ideas over time, however, there has always been an undercurrent of theological understanding that has valued our fellow creatures for their own sake, rather than for their benefits to humans, and that has strongly urged a duty of compassionate care. In addition, there has been a recent rise of theological perspectives variously called “creation care,” “green theology” or “ecotheology,” which have been informed by our growing environmental crises. They often draw on the general consensus among Old Testament scholars regarding the meaning of creation in the image of God, to give fresh consideration of the obligations imposed on us with dominion over the earth. These perspectives have rarely extended their vision to the animals as our companions in creation, however; instead

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45 It is also deeply entrenched in our legal system, which affords precious few protections to animals, who for the most part are considered nothing more than property and in other cases, such as mice in laboratories and chickens in the slaughterhouse, are simply not considered “animals” under the law. This, too, is changing and new and more stringent animal protection laws are now being passed in many states.

46 For example, in an April 29, 2008 blog post for Christianity Today, Chuck Colson and Anne Morse, while acknowledging that “we should delight in the unique joy that animals bring, and support the work of local shelters that care for abused and abandoned animals,” nevertheless warn against “an aggressive animal-rights movement that seeks to blur the distinction between animals and humans” and caution against excessive love of pets. Keeping Pets in Their Place: Why We Can’t Afford To Treat Animals Like They’re Human, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/april/35.80.html (accessed January 13, 2013). Kay Warren, wife of Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, likewise posted in 2009 on Christianity Today’s Her*maneutics blog expressing her “outrage” at a television advertisement for an animal charity because she believed it was more important to support charities working with human children. Puppies Aren’t People, available at http://blog.christianitytoday.com/women/2009/04/kay_warren_puppies_arent_peopl.html (accessed January 13, 2013). As Mr. Colson pointed out his article, the rhetoric of the animal rights community adds fuel to this fire. Most secular animal activists know only the dominant voices of theologians like Augustine and Aquinas and are only too familiar with the harm it has caused. Our failure to rightly reflect God’s image has left them as suspicious of religious approaches to animal welfare as some Christians are of animal activists.
considering animals as part of, and in the same category with, the rest of “nature.” Nevertheless, they do provide new tools and perspectives to bring to bear in considering human obligations for animals’ welfare.

1. Minority Report: Animals in Traditional Theology

Laura Hobgood-Oster, in her books Holy Dogs & Asses and The Friends We Keep, has examined the presence of animals in the early Christian tradition, including in the stories of the lives of the saints. These stories began to arise early in the Christian tradition, and were told and retold for generations. They demonstrate the very early understanding of kindness given to and received from animals as a mark of holiness. So, for example, St. Jerome is known for his kindness to an injured lion, Abba Macarius did not eat an antelope provided by God when the Abba was hungry, but nursed from her instead, and Simeon Stylites defended a pregnant deer from hunters. Hobgood-Oster writes, “I could go on and on. The tradition is so rich with these stories. . . . Each of these holy people was closely connected to animals and sought after their well-being; they extended hospitality to the entire creation” (123-24, 126). Moreover, Hobgood-Oster continues, “humans are not the only ones who offer hospitality. Other animals do so as well, providing safety, food, and companionship to humans” (126). Paul the Hermit, for example, was fed by a raven, while St. Mary of Egypt was buried by a lion.

In Holy Dogs & Asses, Hobgood-Oster examines a number of other stories of animals in companionship with – and as – saints. She considers stories of animals as models of piety, as sources of revelation, as saintly martyrs, and as close companions. As Hobgood-Oster summarizes:

Yes, in the lives of the saints, the stories of encounters between animals and humans are striking and abundant. Humans and animals offer each other the gift of hospitality, usually without expecting anything in return. It is a model that exemplifies the radical notion that developed early in the tradition and carried through the Middle Ages. . . . As humans became and continue to become more urban and less connected to animals and the natural world around them, animals are increasingly removed from the sacred circle of hospitality (Friends, 129).

Moving to the eighteenth century, in his 1771 sermon, *The General Deliverance*, John Wesley presaged modern theories of the image of God as a functional matter, requiring us to represent God to the rest of creation. He argued that in their perfect state, prior to sin, humans were distinguished from animals by the human ability to be in relationship with God, and that in the gift of dominion “man was God's vicegerent upon earth, the prince and governor of this lower world; and all the blessings of God flowed through him to the inferior creatures. Man was the channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole brute creation.”49 With the Fall, Wesley argued, humans ceased to fulfill that purpose, and the animals were cut off from God; but they will be redeemed by Him in the new creation. This idea is worth considering, he argues, for three reasons. First, it is a comfort to humans because if God cares even for the animals, we can be assured he will care that much more for humans. Second, because it demonstrates the justice of God, that he will not let their earthly sufferings go unnoticed or unredeemed. Third, such considerations may encourage us to imitate Him whose mercy is over all His works. They may soften our hearts towards the meaner creatures, knowing that the Lord careth for them. It may enlarge our hearts towards those poor creatures, to reflect that, as vile as they appear in our eyes, not one of them is forgotten in the sight of our Father which is in heaven. Through all the vanity to which they are now subjected, let us look to what God hath prepared for them. Yea, let us habituate ourselves to look forward, beyond this present scene of bondage, to the happy time when they will be delivered therefrom into the liberty of the children of God (id.).

Not long afterward, in 1776, an Anglican priest by the name of Humphrey Primatt was even more direct in his call for compassion toward animals. In a powerful tract of some 300 plus pages titled *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, Primatt argued there can be no true Christian religion without compassion for all God’s animals and that humans will be called into account by God for their cruelties.  

He opened with a grim, if realistic, assessment of the state of affairs, whereby “consciousness of our own dignity and excellence” leads humans to believe that we alone are deserving of mercy and compassion, and “misled by this prejudice,” we disregard some animals as unworthy of our notice and consider others simply as created for our benefit, and are “indifferent to their happiness or misery, and can hardly bring ourselves to suppose that there is any kind of duty incumbent upon us toward them” (ii-v). It is to counter this “mistaken notion” that Primatt wrote his treatise (iii). In it, Primatt demonstrates that kindness to animals is not only consistent with reason and justice, but also, and most importantly, it is required by revelation. Primatt argued further that all creatures, “whether beast or bird or fish or fly or worm,” are deserving of mercy (Primatt, ii, note). Moreover, he argues that silence from the church on this topic is a serious matter, allowing the faithful to be misled as to the nature of sin.

Primatt begins by stipulating that there is, indeed, a natural hierarchy of creatures which places humans at the top, but that this is not a source of pride for humans, because all creatures are as they were designed by God and the subservience or “ugliness” of some creatures is not a defect (6). Moreover, all creatures, from humans to “the vilest brute,” are subject to pain. “Pain is pain, whether it is inflicted on man or beast, and the creature that suffers from it, whether man

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or beast, being sensible of the misery of it while it lasts, suffers *Evil*” (7-8). The sufferance of this evil, where no offense has been given and no good can come, is cruelty and injustice, argues Primatt. He ties the disregard of animal suffering and the misuse of our position of power to similar sins among humans: Just as differences in human skin color do not give some humans the right to enslave others, or tall people to trample short ones, or rich people to abuse poor ones, so “a man can have no natural right to abuse and torment a beast, merely because the beast has not the mental powers of a man” (12). Contrary to Aquinas, Primatt asserts that our duty to treat others as we would wish to be treated extends not just to humans, but to animals as well (17-21). Primatt grants that “custom” would argue against such a view, but custom, he argues, is no reliable teacher. “When we reflect upon the shocking barbarities, and see the brutal rage exercised by the most worthless of men, without control of Law, and without reproof from the Pulpit, we are almost tempted to draw this inference, that *Cruelty cannot be a sin*” (24-25, emphasis original).

Primatt then expounds at length on why cruelty to animals is a serious matter, even more serious in some cases than cruelty to humans, since animals have no voice to complain, no courts for justice, can benefit from no compensation if they are injured, and (contrary to Wesley) have no hope of life everlasting. He considers and counters the various arguments of his day regarding why humans are within their rights to harm animals, he considers numerous arguments from scripture regarding the nature of both humans and animals, including the ways in which we are similar and dissimilar, our obligations toward various classes of animals, and how our treatment of animals reflects on our character and our relationship with God. He sums up his argument with these words, “We may pretend to what religion we please, but Cruelty is Atheism. We may make our boast of Christianity, but Cruelty is Infidelity. We may trust to our
Orthodoxy, but Cruelty is the worst of Heresies” (321-22). Arguing that “a Cruel Christian is a Monster of Ingratitude,” (323), he concludes with an exhortation “to Be Merciful as God is Merciful; to Be Merciful as you hope for Mercy; and to receive with Reverence and Attention the BLESSING of the Lord Jesus Christ – BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY” (326).

Primatt’s contemporaries William Wilberforce and the other members of a group known as the Clapham Evangelicals or Clapham Sect, also saw the connections between faith, mistreatment of humans, and mistreatment of animals. Wilberforce and the Clapham Evangelicals are best known for their efforts to abolish slavery in England, but, motivated by their faith, they were also active in a number of other social reforms, including animal welfare. Wilberforce and others spoke in support of several bills in Parliament aimed at addressing animal cruelty and Wilberforce was instrumental in the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in 1824.51

In the early nineteenth century, Lord Shaftesbury, Vice President of the SPCA, and co-founder of the Victoria Street Society, the first group in the world to campaign against animal vivisection, as well as a social reformer for several human causes, also saw the connection between faith in a God of mercy, compassion for his neighbor, and compassion for animals. He wrote, “I was convinced that God had called me to devote whatever advantages He might have bestowed up me to the cause of the weak, the helpless, both man and beast, and those who had none to help them.”52 Likewise, in an 1842 sermon, Cardinal John Henry Newman asserted that “[c]ruelty to animals is as if man did not love God,” and argued, as summarized by Andrew

Linzey, that “cruelty to all innocents – whether they be children or animals – is morally equivalent to the cruelty inflicted on Christ himself.”

Despite these powerful voices for a Christian obligation to care for animals, however, animal suffering continued to be disregarded as a theological topic into the twentieth century. In the 1970s, Andrew Linzey took up the topic again. His first book, *Animal Rights: A Christian Perspective*, was published in 1976, just before Peter Singer’s widely influential secular work, *Animal Liberation*. Since then, Linzey has authored and co-authored numerous books and articles on the topic of animal rights and animal welfare from a Christian perspective. His message is as direct and urgent as Primatt’s. In *Animal Gospel*, he says, “I believe the Gospel is at stake in the way we understand and treat animals. Believing the Gospel can, and should, make a difference to our daily interactions with other creatures” (11, emphasis original). He sets forth five “articles of faith:”

- to stand for Jesus is to stand for animals as God’s creatures, against all purely humanistic or utilitarian accounts of animals as things, commodities, resources, here for us. . . . we are not God. . . .

- to stand for Jesus is to stand for active compassion for the weak, against the principle that might is right. . . .

- to stand for Jesus is to stand for the Christ-like innocence of animals, against the intrinsic evil of cruelty. . . .

- to stand for Jesus is to stand for a ministry of reconciliation to the whole of creation, against the powers of darkness represented, at least in part, by the destructiveness of human technology. . . .

- to stand for Jesus is to stand for God’s justice and the final release of all creation from bondage to decay, against the moral hopelessness and despair that characterize our time” (11-16).

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54 The “innocence” of animals addressed here recognizes that the animals we harm so readily have done humans no harm, pose no threat, and are helpless before us. They have done nothing to warrant mistreatment or death and are powerless to defend themselves.
Linzey’s arguments throughout his writings are wide-ranging, but his views are grounded in two concepts: the inherent evil of suffering, and the essential idea of Jesus Christ as our model for what it means to be made in the image of God, to rightly exercise power, and to be an innocent made to suffer. So, for example, in Animal Gospel, he provides a brief overview of some of the gospel references to Jesus and animals. The most significant of all, he argues is the identification of Christ with the Lamb of God. Pointing to Cardinal Newman’s 1842 sermon, which likened the suffering of animals to the suffering of Christ, Linzey argues that by looking at the awfulness of the Cross, we will better understand the awfulness of animal suffering. “The Cross of Christ embraces the suffering of the whole creation; our sensitivity to that suffering is a litmus test of Christian discipleship. I would suggest that no theology that desensitizes us to suffering can possibly be Christian theology” (14). Again, “[t]he automated, institutionalized, routine destruction of billions of creatures every year for food, for profit, for science and for sport, raises the question whether Christians have lost their grasp of the reality of evil. Animal rights constitute a spiritual struggle against the forces of cruelty and death” (15). Linzey acknowledges that animals and humans are not identical; humans, he asserts, are given the responsibility “to represent and actualize the loving, divine will for all creatures” (38). He thus echoes the idea expressed by Birch (89), Fretheim (354-46), and others that humans, in “dominion,” are given unique power over other animals, but bear heavy responsibility for how they use it. “No appeal to the power of God can be sufficient without reference to the revelation of that power exemplified in Jesus Christ. . . . The power of God in Jesus is expressed in katabsis, humility, self-sacrifice, powerlessness” (Linzey, Animal Gospel, 39). Human lordship of creation is a lordship of service. Thus, in living in imitation of Christ, the Image of God, humans exercise dominion as “the servant species” (39).
In *Animal Theology*, Linzey again roots his arguments in Christology. He contrasts the Thomist view of animals as “dissociated from humans by their want of reason,” which Linzey argues is a primarily Hellenistic - not Christian - view, with Primatt’s *Dissertation*, which Linzey describes as “deeply theological, indeed christological” in its reliance on God’s love of creation and Primatt’s call to emulate the “great creative generosity shown us in Jesus Christ” (17). In addition, citing Philippians 2:5-9 and Matthew 25:35-37, Linzey discusses the “paradigm of generosity” shown to us in Christ, according to which the “obligation is always and everywhere on the ‘higher’ to sacrifice for the ‘lower’; for the strong, powerful and rich to give to those who are vulnerable, poor or powerless. This is not some by-theme of the moral example of Jesus, it is rather central to the demands of the kingdom. . .” (32). We are to be “present to creation as Christ is present to us” (33). Linzey is clear that this paradigm “will cost human beings” because it means that human interests cannot always come first (44).

In a later work, *Creatures of the Same God*, Linzey refers to *Animal Theology*, and says its argument “stands or falls by whether I have grasped some of the important biblical insights that should be at the heart of this debate. The most significant of these is the generosity of God disclosed in the life of Jesus Christ.”\(^{55}\) In *Creatures*, Linzey attempts to answer the question “why bother with animals?” His first answer rests on an appeal to reason and the inherent evil of suffering:

> Given that it is reasonable to suppose (as reasonable as almost anything is) that mammals (at least) experience pain and suffering only to a greater or lesser extent than we do, then the infliction of suffering and death upon them merits strong (some would say very strong) justification. To kill or inflict suffering without justification is wrong. Now that is surely a fairly minimal proposition in ethics, and not many would want to dissent from it.

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But consider: we routinely kill and inflict suffering on millions, if not billions, of animals in the world today. In some cases there may be a genuine need, but in the vast majority of cases there is nothing of the sort . . .

If tomorrow we decided to desist only from killing and causing suffering for sport and entertainment, the world would be significantly better for animals (xi).

In addition, he argues, there is strong warrant for it in the Christian tradition if one will look for it (xii–xiii), and it is an issue that has significant implications for the way we should live as Christians (xiii-xiv).

In Why Animal Suffering Matters, Linzey gives a more detailed exposition of Newman’s sermon, pointing out in particular Newman’s statement that “there is something so very dreadful, so satanic in tormenting those who have never harmed us, who cannot defend themselves, and who are utterly in our power . . . . Now this was just our Savior’s case” (quoted in Linzey, Animal Suffering, 39). Here, Linzey argues, Newman has made a moral equivalence between the suffering of animals and the suffering of Christ and, in so doing, has “uncovered the all-important rational ground for positing that such cruelty is nothing less than (in his word) ‘satanic’” (39).

Linzey also underscores the importance of the subject of animal suffering in the modern world for the theological underpinnings of the Church itself, arguing that the failure of the church to address the massive institutionalized animal suffering inherent in our world causes a serious credibility gap “between the Gospel it preaches and its practical insensitivity to cruelty” (Linzey, Creatures, 100). Nevertheless, he continues, “I do not want the Church to support animals simply to conform to secular pressure, rather I want the Church to see that its own Gospel requires opposition to cruelty” (101). Quoting Primatt, Linzey asserts that “cruelty is the worst of heresies” (101). “The world looks in vain for Church leaders and theologians to speak God’s truth – that human interests are not God’s only interests in the world” (101). In Animal
Gospel, he put it this way: “the failure of the Church to champion humaneness is a fundamental failure on its own part to understand its own Gospel;” service to God, he continues, is service to the least in the world, including animals (Animal Gospel, 83).

Linzey remains a strong and active proponent of animal welfare as a Christian issue – and a Christian issue of some urgency. By basing his arguments in the inherent evil of the suffering of God’s innocent creatures and on Christ as a model for the use of power, Linzey indirectly ties his arguments to our obligations to live into the image of God by caring for what God cares for and by using our God-given power in service to those in need. With Primatt, he also points to the seriousness of the issue theologically and the cost to the church of remaining silent; the cost in credibility, the cost in failure to identify sin, and the cost in failing to live up to the gospel.

Thus, from the early church through the Middle Ages to Wesley and Primatt to Wilberforce to Linzey and others, there have always been voices raised in opposition to the dominant Christian tradition regarding animals, their relation to humans, and how the animals should be treated. That we owe animals some duty of kindness, while it has not been the dominant Christian view, is nevertheless not a novel idea. It is not some secular import from our modern culture. It is grounded in the fundamental Christian understanding of the compassion of God, the inherent evil in suffering, the right use of power, and the image of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

2. A New Perspective: Creation Care

In recent years, a new perspective has been developing. A growing chorus of “creation care” voices has argued for a re-imagining of our understanding of “dominion” as stewardship of the earth and its resources. These authors provide important insights into how we are to relate to the rest of creation, often picking up the theme of modeling Christ as the perfect image of God,
and giving the lie to an understanding of dominion as power without responsibility. The main focus of creation care, however, is environmental stewardship, and its proponents often fail to understand or address the distinction between animals as sentient individuals, and the earth, water, and sky, to which we also owe important and related, but differing, responsibilities.

Creation care, then, is a helpful step away from the traditional understanding of humans as entitled to exploit creation for solely human benefit, but it is insufficient, as currently articulated, to bring us to terms with the cruelty inherent in our current societal relationship with animals. To the good work of these creation care authors we must add an awareness of the theological significance of the suffering of other creatures and recognize our obligations to address that suffering as distinct from, but in concert with, obligations to preserve the non-sentient earth.  

In *Imaging God*, for example, John Hall discusses “relations between human and extrahuman nature,” asking about the special role of humans in the “biosphere” (53). Hall argues that being created in the image of God means being created in the image of love, and that brings with it an “ontology of being-with.” “We move toward real humanity, not when we have achieved all manner of personal success of brain, will, or body, but when through the media of brain, will, and body we have entered as unreservedly as possible into communion with ‘the other’” (123). This raises the question, who is the “other”? Hall contends that the traditional answer to this question, that God is the “other” with whom we are called to be in communion, while not incorrect, is incomplete. He points out that Jesus moves our focus from God alone as other to God and neighbor. Hall then moves our attention to a “third dimension,” to “the inarticulate but ‘unsilent’ creation, the physical universe that is our home, the creatures whose

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56 In some cases, creation care authors use the word “creatures” as nearly synonymous with “nature,” including not only animals, but other aspects of creation, as well, such as the moon, stars, trees, mountains, etc.; in short, all of creation. When I use the word “creature” or “creatures,” I am referring to non-human animals. In addition, it should be noted that there are times when what may seem best from an ecological, natural resource, or species-based perspective will be in conflict with the need to address the suffering of individual animals.
‘otherness’ is more conspicuous still than the otherness of those of our kind – in short, what we call nature” (123-24). Hall quotes Joseph Sittler, who wrote:

For the first time man has added to his natural curiosity and creativity a perverse aggressiveness whereby nature is absolutely suppliant before him in such a way that she lives by his sufferance and can die by his decision. . . . And this requires not only that Christian and Jewish morality shall be offended by pollution but that theology must do more: it must be reconceived, under the shock of filth, into fresh scope and profundity. 57

This passage illustrates why we need to expand our vision of what it means to care for creation. This may be the first time that “nature” has lived or died at the whim of humans, but for animals it has ever been thus, and the theological implications, though often unnoticed, have always been just as profound. Moreover, in today’s world, with animals around the world in their billions living in unprecedented misery, treated not as living creatures, but as tools, economic units, or mere hindrances to human acquisitiveness, this, too requires that Christian and Jewish morality be offended and that our theology be reconceived “under the shock of filth, into fresh scope and profundity,” not just for the sake of the earth or for the sake of “nature,” not just to address pollution, but for the sake of those living, feeling creatures who suffer, the animals themselves.

Hall makes important contributions to our understanding of the relatedness of humans to the rest of the creation, and our understanding of our obligations – instead of just our rights – that inhere in that relationship, but he fails to acknowledge the individual nature of animals and their capacity for suffering and happiness. For example, he seems to consider “trees, rocks, and whales” all as one category of being (178). But to harpoon a whale is not the same thing as to cut down a tree. The forest may be diminished by the loss of the tree, but neither the tree nor the forest suffers (in the sense of feeling pain or knowing loss), although the animals who formerly made the tree their habitat may. When a whale is hunted, not only must we worry about

57 Sittler, Joseph, “Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility,” pp. 177-78, quoted in Hall, 125.
“preservation of the species,” we must, as creatures in relation with the whale as God is in relation with us, be concerned about the fear the whale endures during the hunt, the thwarting of her will to live, the pain she feels when she is struck, and the loss endured by her pod, especially her offspring, if she is killed – or worse, her suffering if she is mortally wounded and left to linger and die slowly. Thus, to Hall’s three dimensions of “being with:” being-with-God, being-with-the-human-counterpart, and being-with-nature (127), we must add a fourth: being-with-animals, so that we may see and respond to their suffering.

In another creation care offering, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, Ellen F. Davis has provided what she subtitles “An Agrarian Reading of the Bible.”58 She describes agrarianism as “a way of thinking and ordering life in community that is based on the health of the land and of living creatures” (1). The need for an agrarian theology is urgent, she argues, because current agricultural practices are, worldwide, “a major threat to economic and political democracy” and, quoting the 2005 United Nations-sponsored Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, current practices are the “largest threat to biodiversity and ecosystem function of any single human activity” (2). A new way, a way grounded in biblical principles guiding our relations to the earth and agriculture, is needed, she argues.

Davis offers in this work a thorough-going indictment of our modern food delivery system. “In this half-century,” she says, “it has given North Americans probably the cheapest food in human history, but at what cost?” (13). She addresses at some length the destruction industrial agriculture wreaks on the land, on the farming families who cannot compete with this industrial model, and on “the natural machinery that supports life on Earth,” and puts it all in the context of the biblical covenant and the tie of the ancient Israelites to the land (13-20). She also

addresses a host of other natural, economic, and social impacts of industrial agriculture. One looks in vain, however, for any sustained discussion of the catastrophic suffering industrial agriculture imposes on animals. She writes movingly of the devastation caused by current agricultural practices from a number of perspectives, yet, notwithstanding her definition of agrarianism as addressing the health of “all living creatures,” she offers no theological vision for how an agrarian viewpoint should inform our relations with animals, either those animals within the industrial agriculture system, those few relatively fortunate animals raised for food on humane farms, or those in the wild who are impacted not only by the pollution resulting from overworked soil, but also by industrial agriculture practices (particularly those involving animals raised for food) that befoul the water, the air, and habitat. With all her concern about our food supply, one might expect greater attention to the staple of the American diet: factory farmed meat. Indeed, her failure to address this issue with the same attention she gives myriad other problems caused by our modern food delivery system suggests that she does not consider animal suffering an issue that merits our attention, calling to mind Primatt’s concern that when cruelty is not addressed by theological teachers, one is tempted to conclude that “cruelty is not a sin” (Primatt, 24-25).

Davis does directly confront factory farming in her examination of Leviticus. She opens this chapter quoting Aldo Leopold’s comments regarding ethical considerations being extended “to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land” (83). Thus, Davis (and Leopold) appears to conflate the needs of animals with the needs of inanimate nature. Yet, animals, as sentient creatures, are manifestly not “the land” and are entitled to a whole collection of ethical considerations that have no analogy to those for soils, waters, or plants. Nevertheless, in a section of this essay entitled “Eating To Blessing Or Damnation” (94-100), animals raised
for food do come briefly to the fore. She points out that biblical writers considered eating “a religious act, and all these writers treat thoughtless eating a sacrilege” (94), and argues that provisions for clean and unclean animals and methods of slaughter harken back to Genesis 1 (despite the fact that in Genesis 1 only plants were given as food) (95-96). However, she is clear that while scripture allows for the eating of animals, it is to be done with respect for the life taken; “it is an occasion for covenant faithfulness” (97).

By contrast to this biblical vision for eating, she addresses the realities of our current food production system and declares, “[o]ur own culture, especially in North America, certainly operates the most death-dealing market the world has ever known. Considered within the context of creation, it epitomizes our ingratitude for what God has done” (97). She then briefly discusses factory farming, accurately describing it as motivated solely by profit, resulting in the management of animals in completely unnatural environments. She also correctly notes that while costs to the consumer for meat at the market are kept low as a result of the system, the real cost is much higher.

Even here, however, she does not turn first to the cost in the suffering of the billions and billions of animals who exist in this system. Instead, she first addresses human suffering, identifying the cost to mostly nonunionized workers in slaughterhouses, who must handle huge numbers of animals with split-second timing, slaughtering thousands a day in poor working conditions (97). Turning only then to conditions in factory farms, she notes, “[s]uffering, disease, and wasteful death for so-called domesticated animals is also a large part of the cost our eating habits and food production system,” and then she gives particular attention to hogs in gestation crates, emphasizing the industrialized atmosphere in which hogs are handled, “from birth to bacon,” including mechanized slaughter methods (98). Quoting Matthew Scully, she describes
the scene on the slaughterhouse floor, where “[t]he electrocutors, stabbers, and carvers who work on the floor wear earplugs to muffle the screaming” (98). All of this is covered in a few paragraphs, with minimal discussion of the impact on the animals themselves and without consideration of the theological implications of the sheer cruelty of this system to the animals.

Earlier in the book, Davis has provided her own reflection on the creation stories and what it means to have been created in the image of God and given dominion over the animals. Citing Genesis 1:26, she points to the connection between “mastery among” other animals (a translation she prefers to “dominion over”) and our creation in the image of God. In considering what it means to be created in that image, she argues that more than anything, the image of God gives human life value (56). She acknowledges the view that the image is tied to the ancient role of kings and the unique Biblical perspective that all humans are created as representatives of God’s rule on earth (56). This vision includes the call to be holy, and for Davis, this holiness is tied to proper use of the land for the good of community. According to Genesis, she argues, “the form of human life is fundamentally ecological,” which she understands as involved in the science of infinitely complex relationships, with God at their center (56-57 emphasis original). For agrarians, she argues, these relationships are “best known as ‘food chains’” (57). Quoting Aldo Leopold, she describes, “a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil” (57). Taking these patterns and relationships into account, she concludes that “the most essential activity befitting humans created in the image of God is to secure the food system that God gives to sustain all creatures” (58). Considering our exercise of “mastery among” the animals, she notes that humans are called upon to actively manage animal populations, particularly in view of the damage human activity has caused to natural ecosystems.
(53-54). She does not address what value animal life may have in view of her assertion that human life derives its value from the image of God; she does not address the fact that only plants are part of the food chain in the creation stories; and she does not address any potential conflict between managing animal populations and compassionate care toward individual animals.

Thus, while Davis’ work provides important insights into several problems with our current food system, even while she holds up agrarianism as concerned with “all living creatures,” she fails to take the opportunity to address the cruelty and suffering that our food system imposes on animals. Here again, we see that environmental concerns, while important, are not sufficient to open our eyes to issues of animal welfare.

Norman Wirzba likewise analyzes our food production systems in a theological context. In *Food & Faith: A Theology of Eating*, he discusses the sacred nature of producing and consuming food. Like Davis, he focuses on our relationship to the land, but even more than Davis, Wirzba, while acknowledging the need to treat animals raised for food humanely, seems to miss the idea that animals are sentient beings with their own inherent value. To be created in the image of God, for Wirzba, is to be tasked with “living a life reflective of God’s intentions in the world” (64). However, God’s intentions, as Wirzba understands them, seem to restrict animals’ primary value to that of means to human ends.

This is most evident in Wirzba’s lengthy discussion of eating meat. While it may be biblically permissible to eat animals who have been humanely raised and slaughtered, Wirzba

seeks to argue that not eating meat may be thwarting God’s intentions because eating meat that has been carefully cared for and nurtured is a means of “self-sacrifice.” Wirzba’s reasoning is complex, beginning with the inevitability of death, and the Christian belief in death as a means to greater life. He considers the ancient sacrificial system, which called upon its practitioners to give up something of value, and portrays all of creation as God’s eternal self-giving wherein all creatures feed on one another. In this context, he theorizes, refusing to eat of God’s bounty, including the animals, is a refusal of God.

Considering these points in more detail, Wirzba begins with the observation that “[e]ating is a daily reminder of creaturely mortality,” noting that without food, we will die, but in order to eat, we depend on “the deaths of others – microbes, insects, plants, animals” (110-11). Eating relates to our own mortality, as well: “In the temporal and mortal flesh of Jesus Christ, God’s communion life is revealed as the life that offers itself completely. Jesus transforms the meaning of life . . . and death by placing both within the eternal self-offering that God is” (111, emphasis original). Thus, “it is a mistake to view all death as evil” (111). Biological death is a ceasing to function, but the Christian understanding of death “is a self-offering movement in which an individual gives himself or herself to another for the furtherance of another’s life.” To live well, therefore, we must learn to receive the gifts of others and to give of ourselves. In this way, he argues, we acknowledge “the gifts of life sacrificially given” and we “participate in God’s own self-offering life as revealed in Christ.” He goes on to posit creation “as the altar on which creatures are offered to each other as the expression of the Creator’s self-giving care and provision for life” (112).

With this backdrop, Wirzba considers the practice of animal sacrifice as a means of understanding life through death. Wirzba argues that the practice of sacrifice in ancient Israel, a
subsistence economy, would have required giving up something “integral to the economic well-being of the family;” thus the sacrifice of the animal became “a self-offering because in presenting the animal one also offered the hours of personal care that nurtured the animal to a full life.” It was also an offering of one’s own future, since economic well-being depended on the health of the herd (118). Sacrifice is thus an act of self-offering in the giving up of something treasured and something important to one’s future and thus opening the way to communion with God (124).

Turning to creation, Wirzba asserts that “Creation, understood as God’s offering of creatures to each other as food and nurture, reflects a sacrificial power in which life continually moves through death to new life” (126). It is “the destiny of all creatures,” he says, “that they offer themselves or be offered up as the temporal expression of God’s eternal love” (126). Such offering, however, must give glory to God or it is not a “genuine sacrifice” (127). Exploitation and abuse, therefore, have no role in this offering up.

Wirzba then turns to vegetarianism as a way “to think more deeply about the nature of eating as an act that leads us into the life and death of creation. It invites us to think carefully about how human eaters are best to approach and consume the gifts of plant and animal life” (130). In considering eating meat, he says, it is not “simply the animal’s life that is at stake. Of equal, and sometimes greater, importance is the training and refinement of persons into a morally and spiritually sensitive humanity” (130). Wirzba recognizes the merits of what he identifies as the three basic arguments in favor of vegetarianism, namely that it is healthier for humans, that animals consumed today are raised and slaughtered inhumanely, and that raising animals for food is an inefficient use of scarce soil, water, plant, and fossil fuel resources, but he nevertheless
argues not only that eating meat is permissible, he suggests that choosing not to do so is problematic (131).

He concedes that Genesis, Hosea, and Isaiah all suggest that in the Garden and in the new creation vegetarianism is the ideal, but argues that the scriptures abound with stories of people eating meat and “there is little indication that Jesus was a vegetarian or that he, while protesting abuses, opposed the tradition of temple sacrifices” (132).⁶⁰ He then argues that if Jesus believed the vegetarian diet to be ideal, we would have expected him to say something about it. Moreover, he says, the Book of Acts and Paul’s letter to the Romans suggest that early Christians did not ban eating meat. Considering Genesis 1 and 9, Wirzba points out that God gave plants and animals to humans for food and “this giving is a reflection of the self-offering that characterizes God’s creative and sustaining life from the beginning” (133). He concludes that a refusal to eat meat “may signal an inability to appreciate appropriate death as a movement into and constitutive of life” (133, emphasis original). He quotes Robert Farrar Capon: “It is by the death of chickens, chicory, and chickpeas that you have lived until today. . . . To reject death is to reject the only possible soil out of which life can come.”⁶¹ In short, according to Wirzba, vegetarianism runs the risk of being a rejection of God’s gift of “the death of others as God’s means of provision and salvation for the world” and therefore becomes “a refusal to accept creation on God’s terms” (134-35).

This proposal is unpersuasive. First, in saying that the moral formation of humans is more important than the life of the animal taken, he relegates animals to the role of mere means

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⁶⁰ There have been many arguments regarding whether Jesus was a vegetarian. See, e.g., Phelps, Dominion of Love, 125-36. There is no mention in scripture of Jesus ever eating meat except for one piece of fish after the resurrection (Lk. 24:41-43), and this, too, is debated, so some argue he was vegetarian. Nevertheless, others argue from the culture of ancient Israel that he must have eaten meat occasionally. Whether or not Jesus ate meat, however, does not settle the question for people living in modern Western cultures, where different ethical questions are posed, in part because of the way animals are treated, and in part because of the greater food resources available.

⁶¹ Capon, Robert Farrar, Food For Thought, quoted in Wirzba, Food & Faith, 133.
to human ends rather than acknowledging their inherent worth as creatures loved by God.

Second, his arguments that Jesus and the early church did not condemn meat eating shed little light on the relative merits of vegetarianism or meat-eating. Similar arguments been made with regard to many social issues, such as slavery and the oppression of women, neither of which was condemned directly by Jesus or the early church, but both of which we view in a different ethical light today. Third, he fails to address the fact that only plants were given as food in “the beginning” (Genesis 1 and 2), and that the animals were given only when the world had fallen into sin. Creation on “God’s terms,” as described in Genesis, Isaiah, and Hosea, does not include eating meat. It may be that in the world as we know it, all of us – including humans – become food for others in one way or another, but that is not to say that is God’s original intent.

Moreover, it is unclear how non-human animals “offer themselves up” as food for others. In fact, they are simply taken by others, human and non-human, whether they will or no. Nor does he address how meat as “self-sacrifice” works in a post-Cross world, where animal sacrifice to God is no longer called for. Indeed, the idea of creation as “God’s offering of creatures to each other as food,” posits a troubling picture of God’s original intention for the world being one of suffering and death in a kill-or-be-killed setting, in contrast to the image of creation expressed in Genesis, Isaiah, and Hosea, with all creatures living peaceably together.

In addition, of all the ways the American culture rejects death, the failure to eat meat is not among them. For people who choose not to eat meat out of concern for animals, particularly in the modern world where almost all meat comes from factory farms, it is a rejection of wanton and unnecessary death, preceded by a life of suffering. Capon notwithstanding, the death of chickens is simply not necessary for human life any more than the death of dogs or cats or other
humans. While Wirzba argues that even vegetarian diets result in the deaths of microbes, plants, field rodents, and insects, surely that is no justification for adding more deaths to the toll. Do we not have an obligation to minimize death even where we can’t eliminate it? While death may be a part of life for both humans and animals, there is no reason to suppose that unnecessarily cutting short an animal’s life is to be disregarded any more than unnecessarily cutting short a human’s life.

Most significantly, if living into the sacrifice of God means self-offering so that another may live, isn’t the decision to do without meat (even humanely raised meat) so that animals may live a more appropriate means to that end? Whatever self-offering may have been involved in ancient Israelites giving up a lamb to the altar of God, that dynamic is simply not in play in today’s Western world, culturally, economically, or theologically, where people are no longer subsistence farmers raising their own animals for food. In the slaughterhouse, there is no suggestion that the animals’ lives are being offered to God (with the possible exception of kosher slaughter). There is no self-offering in requiring an unconsenting, sentient creature to be brought to a premature death almost certainly filled with fear and pain in order to please one’s own palate. The way of the cross (and the image of God) is in offering one’s own life, not in taking the life of another.

Nevertheless, considering eating meat as a means of appropriating death as a way to life, Wirzba argues that “as creatures made in the image of a self-giving God, humanity’s most fundamental task is to participate in God’s self-offering life dedicated to the nurture and well-

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62 Wirzba’s analysis does not address whether this sacrificial self-offering includes all animals or only the ones we are culturally pre-conditioned to view as food – a moving target around the world and throughout history. Is it a refusal to accept creation on God’s terms to refuse to eat a dog?

63 There are parts of the world where food resources are scarce and eating such meat as may be available may be necessary for adequate nutrition. That is certainly not the case in the United States any many other parts of the world.

64 Again, Wirzba fails to distinguish in this list the sentient from the non-sentient.
being of all creatures raised and eaten” (135). This means, he says, that we cannot eat without concern for the well-being of plants, animals, and soils and that “domesticated animals, and fields and forests, must be treated with a view to their health and flourishing” (135). While this is indeed a laudable sentiment, once again it seems to assume a false equivalence among animals, plants, and soils, thereby underscoring Wirzba’s a failure to understand animals as sentient individuals. Of that group only animals are capable of suffering. Treating animals with a view to their flourishing requires considerations, including consideration of the value of life and the animals’ desire to live, that simply have no relevance for plants or soils.

Addressing modern industrial practices, Wirzba draws a sharp contrast between these practices and the care required to produce an animal fit for sacrifice in ancient Israel, which sanctified the farmers and shepherds and developed care and compassion. Many of these modern practices, he insists, must stop, not only for the sake of the animals, but also because they make profitability the measure of all things to the ruin of the soil and the water. “It is not enough to refrain from the eating of meat if the rest of one’s food is produced and consumed in ways that exhaust, degrade, or destroy creation’s life” (136). He goes on to describe a world in which industrial agricultural practices are changed, soil restored, monoculture disappears, and factory farms are eliminated. He notes, rightly, that this will require a dramatic reduction in the number of animals produced for food, but does not seem to acknowledge that such a reduction would only be possible if much of the population were nearly, if not completely, vegetarian. Nevertheless, he suggests that this vision is one that would require “self-offering care” so that “animals can be eaten in ways that respect their integrity and well-being and honor God. But for this condition [to] be met, it is crucial that these animals be accorded the attention and care that reflects God’s own self-giving care for creation” (136-37). While one can applaud the move to
humane animal husbandry, and while Wirzba is correct that if we are going to eat animals in a theologically defensible way, this is the direction in which we must move, he misses the point Linzey identifies as a minimal ethical proposition: “To kill or inflict suffering without justification is wrong” (Linzey, Creatures, xi). In a modern society where we have a glorious array of nutritious, satisfying, and delicious plant-based food options readily available, and where the perfect sacrifice has been made on the Cross, rendering animal sacrifice redundant at a minimum, where is the justification for taking life? Animals are sentient creatures with inherent value to God, and we honor that, sacrificially, when we care for them and do not require their lives in return. Wirzba’s failure to address the value of animal lives as something other than a means to human ends weakens his analysis and once again demonstrates why, in fulfilling our obligations of right dominion over the animals, we need to address animals as sentient beings with needs that go beyond the needs of the environment.

Richard Bauckham shows us one way a “green theology” perspective can specifically address our obligations to animals. In his book, Living With Other Creatures: Green Exegesis And Theology, Bauckham starts with a look at the history of the Christian understanding of “dominion” over animals (15-62). While recognizing with Hobgood-Oster the tradition of saints and their care of animals, Bauckham acknowledges that the dominant voice of the early church understood the rest of creation, including animals, as entirely available for human uses. Yet, he says, initially this perspective understood that there were limitations on those uses, as expressed in the natural order of things. With the Enlightenment, however, and the belief that humans

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65 Issues of animal welfare aside, it is surprising that Davis and Wirzba fail to directly urge a plant-based diet or a dramatically reduced consumption of meat in view of the environmental devastation and long term unsustainability of animal agriculture, which contributes more greenhouse gas to the atmosphere than the entire transportation sector, uses vast land and water resources inefficiently, and, for factory farms, requires massive animal waste lagoons which result in air and water pollution, to say nothing of the individual and public health issues associated with factory farming. See Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America, a report of the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, available at http://www.ncifap.org/_images/PCIFAPFin.pdf.
could overcome natural limitations through technology, that sense of living within the limitations of God’s created order was lost. As a corrective to this view, he argues, the church has more recently turned to the word “stewardship” in place of “dominion” as a means of re-envisioning our relationship with the rest of creation. But for Bauckham, even stewardship is an insufficient understanding of who we are and our place in the world because it continues to see our relationship to the rest of creation “vertically;” humans are placed above creation in order to care for it. What is needed, he asserts, is a renewed understanding of our “common creatureliness” with other creatures, a rebuilding of the “horizontal” nature of our relationships (58-62).

Bauckham reviews the synoptic gospels with an eye toward exploring this theme and provides extensive exegesis of a number of passages. He considers two issues in particular, the ecological setting of first century Palestine and Jesus’ role in ushering in the kingdom of God, “in order to show that the kingdom includes the whole of creation and that some of the acts in which Jesus anticipated the coming kingdom point to the redemption of the human relationship with the rest of creation” (64). He emphasizes both the dependence of the people in Jesus’ time and place on the land and the contemporary understanding of the coming of God’s kingdom as a renewal of, not escape from, the earth. His exegesis stresses that Jesus’ perspective was informed by the Jewish tradition of compassion for animals and that his teachings are grounded in this assumption. For Bauckham, it is clear that God’s kingdom will include peace for and with the animals, including a restoration of human relationships with the wild animals that posed a serious threat to the lives and livelihoods of Jesus’ contemporaries (71-76).

Like Wirzba, Bauckham takes up the topic of ritual sacrifice and the eating of meat. He acknowledges that Jesus did not condemn the sacrificial system (when properly practiced) and in all likelihood participated in sacrifice himself. He also concludes, given the culture in which he
lived and the wealthy homes to which he was invited, that it is most likely that Jesus ate meat from time to time (101). Thus, he concludes that the case cannot be made from scripture that “meat-eating is absolutely wrong,” but in contrast to Wirzba, he is careful to say that this does not mean there are not good Christian arguments for being vegetarian, although he does not elaborate on what those might be (104).

Bauckham also stresses that in the Bible, all creation praises God. Bauckham explains that animals “bring glory to God simply by being themselves and fulfilling their God-given roles in God’s creation” (149). Our own praise in our distinctly human voice, he continues, is worthless unless we likewise live our whole lives to God’s glory. Part of that is the right exercise of dominion, recognizing our power over the animals, our responsibilities to them, and our common creatureliness with them (150). This is a point of particular significance in a world where we have bred animals into caricatures of themselves,66 where we keep so many of them in cramped, filthy, barren cages that prevent them from exhibiting any of their natural behaviors, and where we subject others to such painful and frightening experiments that they sometimes kill themselves trying to escape. In these cases, it would seem that we have not only taken away the animals’ ability to praise God, we have made a mockery of our own praises, as well.

In Living With Other Creatures, Bauckham has recognized the connectedness of humans, animals, and the rest of creation without losing their distinction. In contrast to Hall, Davis, and Wirzba, he acknowledges and honors that sparrows and wild animals and domestic animals are not the same thing as trees and streams and grains. God’s love and care extends to all of creation

66 For example, factory farmed turkeys have been bred to have such heavy breasts (because Americans like white meat) that they cannot mate. Chickens intended for food are bred to grow so fast that often their own skeletons can’t keep up. Their legs can break under them, leaving them to starve to death in an overcrowded barn because they can’t get to food.
and “humans and animals alike exist for God’s glory” and both will enjoy the peace of the new kingdom when all of creation is renewed (97).

The work of “creation care” theologians, then, is an important tool for helping us recognize our obligations to care for the earth. It has significant common ground with a theology of animal welfare, but creation care as it is often understood is not sufficient to open our eyes to the particular plight of animals. Animals are not “nature,” “the land,” “natural resources,” “the biosphere,” or “species.” Too often, creation care perspectives fail to address the sentience of animals and their individual capacity to suffer. Nevertheless, these discussions do provide us with new perspectives on our relations to the rest of creation and an understanding of the grave consequences our misunderstanding of “dominion” has had. Bauckham shows us that these perspectives can help us re-imagine our relationships with and obligations toward animals.

III. Ask The Animals And They Will Tell You: Who Are The Animals?

After a year Louis Leakey arranged for me to go to Cambridge University to work toward a PhD in ethology. There I was criticized for my lack of scientific method, for naming the chimpanzees rather than assigning each a number, for ‘giving’ them personalities, and for maintaining they had emotions. For these, I was told sternly, were attributes reserved for the human animal. I was even reprimanded for referring to a male chimpanzee as ‘he’ and a female as ‘she’: Didn’t I know that ‘it’ was the correct way to refer to an animal?

Jane Goodall, Forward to The Emotional Lives of Animals by Mark Bekoff.67

The groundwork for a theology of animal welfare has been laid. Our creation in the image of God and the gift of dominion are not a license to make use of the animals without counting the cost. We have a long theological tradition based in recognizing that our own dependence on the compassion of God requires us offer compassion to those at our mercy,

including animals. And our eyes newly opened to the cost of human misuse of the environment are now perhaps better able to see the cost of human misuse of animals. It remains, however, to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of animals in order to better understand the ways in which they suffer so that we may take an honest look at how our daily decisions impact the lives of animals, especially the animals we never see.

Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham famously said of animals and our obligations of mercy toward them, “[t]he question is not, Can they reason? nor Can the talk? But, Can they suffer?” (Quoted in Bekoff, 27). Sadly, historically, many thinkers have answered that question no. It was believed (and in some cases still is believed) that because animals did not have the ability to reason, they could not understand what was happening to them, and therefore did not suffer, at least not in any meaningful way. It was thought that they merely reacted instinctively to sensations they did not comprehend. Increasingly, that position is becoming untenable. Jonathan Balcombe explains that there is “a wealth of evidence now emerging that animals are more perceptive, intelligent, aware, and emotional than humans usually give them credit for. . . . [R]esearchers around the world have found that there is more thought and feeling in animals than humans have ever imaged.” (Balcombe, 4).

Nevertheless, the idea that animal suffering is somehow not real or not significant remains deeply ingrained in our societal understanding of animals. In her forward to Mark Bekoff’s book Animal Emotions, Jane Goodall explains that as recently as the 1960s “ethologists, along with many philosophers and theologians, argued that personality, mind, and emotions were uniquely human attributes and that the behavior of other-than-human animals was for the most part merely a response to some environmental or social stimulus” (Bekoff, xii). She writes that despite decades of research to the contrary, “there are countless people among both
the scientific and lay communities who still genuinely believe that animals are just objects, activated by responses to environmental stimuli” (xiii). Matthew Scully, in *Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and The Call to Mercy*, writing in 2002, quotes a California dairy farmer: “A cow’s a piece of machinery. If it’s broke, we try to fix it, and if we can’t, it’s replaced” (Scully, 192). Scully also points to a 1996 study that demonstrated that the intensity of a pig’s squeal was correlated to the degree of discomfort the pig felt. The researchers were unable to conclude, however, that the pigs were suffering in any meaningful way, because whatever they felt, it was “unconscious pain” (215).68

This view, however, is finally starting to fail. In July 2012, a “prominent international group of cognitive neuroscientists, neuropharmacologists, neurophysiologists, neuroanatomists and computational neuroscientists” issued the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, concluding that “the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness.”69 While this seems a minimal proposition and the Declaration does not spell out what these scientists consider the implications of the statement might be, in view of the historical resistance to the idea of animals as conscious beings, as Goodall’s experience demonstrates, it is a major step forward. At a minimum, perhaps we can agree that when animals feel pain, they are conscious of it. Animals are sentient creatures: they are “responsive to, or conscious of, sense impressions;” they are “aware.”70 In fact, significant scientific research allows us to go much further.

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68 According to Budiansky, animals’ supposed inability to have thoughts about their pain means that their pain has no meaning, thus, their “pain isn’t even pain” (Scully, 6, quoting Stephen Budiansky, *If Lions Could Talk: Animal Intelligence and the Evolution of Consciousness* (New York: Free Press, 1998) pp 193-94).
Regarding physical pain, Jonathan Balcombe writes, “As far as is known from physiological studies, the perception of noxious stimuli and their conduction to parts of the brain that register pain are fairly identical processes among the different mammals that have been so examined. . . . What proof do we have that a needle prick is less painful to a mouse than to a man?” (Balcombe, Second Nature, 17). Even where pain responses are instinctual, that does not mean they are not real pain. Balcombe explains, “When you jump at a sudden noise, or you blink when something suddenly flashes before your face, you still experience and remember these events, even though your body responded involuntarily. All of the basic feelings we experience are fundamentally instinctual” (Balcombe, 27-28). He cites Mark Bekoff and others who have suggested that fishes and other animals may suffer more than humans because they lack many of the resources we have for dealing with pain (17). Balcombe argues that physiology supports this idea, pointing out that the adrenal response to stress, for example, is significantly less in humans than animals. This is true whether animals experience pain themselves or watch others being killed or mistreated. Regarding farm animals, whose pain response has been extensively studied, “[p]hysiological and behavioral responses to such routine practices as castration, hot-iron branding, tail removal, horn cauterizing and beak-searing – all of which are performed without anesthesia – indicate that pain is intense and lasting” (18). Notwithstanding these study results, these practices remain legal and routine.

Awareness of pain is not limited to mammals, however. A recently released study led by Robert Ellwood likewise suggests that crabs also feel pain and will avoid even superior hiding places when they have previously received electrical shocks in those locations.71 Even insects and invertebrates, as Humphrey Primatt knew in 1776, feel pain and are more aware then

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previous believed. According to Jonathan Balcombe, “a 2001 review of scientific evidence by British biologist Chris Sherwin throws up some challenges to traditional scientific views of the insect as spineless, pre-programmed automaton. Sherwin found scientific evidence that invertebrates can remember and learn, have spatial awareness and mental maps, show preferences, develop habits, and respond to noxious stimuli.”

Animals’ experience of the world, however, involves much more than simple physical sensations. They have also been shown to have wide-ranging emotions, surprising intellectual capacities, and a keen awareness of their surroundings and fellow creatures. Refraining from cruelty to animals, therefore, means much more than refraining from causing them physical pain. It involves allowing them to exercise their normal behaviors, allowing them to interact with the world, and respecting the relationships they form with others of their own and other species. It means allowing them to be who they were created to be.

Bekoff writes, “Humans and animals share neural pathways when it comes to suffering,” and that includes the emotional element of suffering (63). The case against animal emotions is “bad biology,” Bekoff continues, “Scientific research in evolutionary biology, cognitive ethology, and social neuroscience supports the view that numerous and diverse animals have rich and deep emotional lives. . . . Emotions, empathy, and knowing right from wrong are keys to survival, without which animals – both human and nonhuman – would perish. That’s how important they are” (Bekoff, xviii - xix). “Recognizing that animals have emotions is important,” he says, “because animal feelings matter. Animals are sentient beings who experience the ups and downs of daily life, and we must respect this when we interact with them” (Bekoff, xx). Balcombe adds, “it is remarkable that the existence of animal emotions has

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been so much in dispute when they express their feelings so markedly for anyone paying attention” (58). Still, there are those who argue we cannot know what is going on inside an animal’s brain, so to conclude that they think or feel anything is anthropomorphizing. In response to these people, Mark Bekoff responds:

one reason [we know animals think and feel] is because of behavioral flexibility. . . . For example, monkeys will choose not to engage in an experiment if they think they’ll fail. Research has shown that rats often take a moment to reflect on what they’ve learned when running a maze . . . When animals need to make decisions that involve . . . purposefully choosing among alternative actions, many are quite able to do so – they’re aware of their surroundings and intentionally make appropriate, purposeful, and flexible choices in a wide variety of situations. ¶ Flexibility in behavior is one of the litmus tests for consciousness, for a mind at work (31).

In addition, Bekoff writes, “it is now largely accepted as fact that animals share the primary emotions, those instinctual reactions to the world we call fear, anger, surprise, sadness, disgust, and joy” (10). Both data and experience indicate that animals also feel many so-called secondary emotions. So, for example, many animals display empathy and compassion, feelings that would make no sense for animals unable to suffer themselves. Bekoff and Balcombe provide examples of these types of behavior:

- A wild elephant herd in Northern Kenya was observed to slow its pace so a crippled member of the herd could keep up. There was no self-interested reason for the herd to do this, as the crippled member could not help the herd (Bekoff, 3).

- An elephant herd in eastern India burst through a village looking for a group member who had fallen into a ditch and drowned. The elephants searched for the fallen member, who had already been buried by the village, for three days (Bekoff, 3).

- In Alaska two cubs were left on their own after their mother was killed by a hunter. The male cub was injured, but the female would not leave him. She even brought him food (Bekoff, 11).

- Mice in experiments recognize pain in other mice and respond to it negatively, when they know the mice being harmed. This distinction demonstrates their response is not purely instinctual (Balcombe, 131, Bekoff 11).
Rhesus monkeys and rats have been shown to voluntarily forgo food when eating will cause another of their species to be harmed (Bekoff, 11; Balcombe, 129-30).

There are also numerous stories of wild animals helping humans, such as dolphins protecting humans from sharks and even wild lions in Ethiopia rescuing a young girl from a gang who had kidnapped her, guarding her until the police arrived, then disappearing again into the forest (Bekoff, 16-19). These stories and many more like them are significant because there is no “instinctual” explanation for them.

Animals display gratitude and grief, as well. For example, a female humpback whale entangled in the ropes of crab traps off the coast of the Farallon Islands near San Francisco did not immediately swim off when freed by divers, but approached and nuzzled each diver. “An outpouring of gratitude signals something profound,” explains Balcombe. “It shows that the animal values his or her life. It suggests feelings of relief from pain and fear and the fulfillment of a fundamental desire for freedom” (50). Animals also value their relationships with others and grieve their loss. “Some scientists even say that the demeanor of elephants suffering from the loss of friends and the disruption of social bonds resembles post-traumatic stress disorder,” and “[g]orillas are known to hold wakes for dead friends, something some zoos have formalized in a ceremony when one of their gorillas passes away” (Bekoff, 63-64). Numerous other species, from baboons and wolves, to chickens and pigs, to dogs and cats, have likewise shown clear signs of grief at the passing of another with whom they had a close bond.

Thus, animals suffer not only physical pain, but emotional pain as well. Moreover, they may suffer when their natural behaviors are frustrated and when they are deprived of intellectual stimulation. Starlings who have had cages enriched with branches and water baths and foraging opportunities for food were shown to be more optimistic, expecting rewards in ambiguous
situations, than birds who were housed in barren cages. “It appears that these animals, like humans, can suffer from depressed morale. Furthermore, it shows that life for a bird can go well or ill, and that an individual’s emotional state has duration over time beyond the fleeting emotions of a given moment” (Balcombe, 51-52). Balcombe concludes that these studies and others like them demonstrate that animals “aren’t merely alive, but that they have lives” (53).

Moreover, Balcombe argues, animals “are keenly attuned to their surroundings, . . . they possess intellect suited to their ecological station, and . . . they have a range of emotions. All of these capacities are relevant to awareness” (62). He argues that many animals show an awareness of others and their perspectives, by for example, following the gaze of another. They are able “to view a situation from the perceptual perspective of another. Scientists explain this sort of awareness in terms of a theory of mind. To have a theory of mind is to be aware that another individual also has a mind” (63, emphasis original). He explains in detail the many ways a variety of animals, from apes to chimps to dolphins, elephants, magpies, and rats demonstrate in one way or another that they have some type of theory of mind, through following the gaze of another, recognizing themselves in a mirror, demonstrating an awareness that they know or do not know information necessary to complete a task, changing their behavior to affect the behavior of another, and other means (63-77). He concludes, “Study after study is finding that animals are attuned to their living environments in subtle, sophisticated ways. Animals are experiencing much more than we have been giving them credit for since around the time 2,300 years ago when Aristotle declared that animals lacked reason” (77).

Finally, animals are much more intelligent than we have previously believed, and they can suffer from boredom, as well. Bekoff cautions, “[i]ntelligence and suffering are not necessarily correlated, and clever animals don’t suffer more than less clever individuals. . . .
even if animals don’t know who they are, they can still suffer, they can still be aware of their feelings, and they can still clearly tell us and other animals what they want and what they don’t want” (Bekoff, 28). Likewise, Jonathan Balcombe tells us that “a less intelligent animal may experience life no less richly than a human, in the sensory realms” (Balcombe, 16). Moreover, he continues, “[i]n the emotional domain, it is far from clear that a monkey’s or a rabbit’s fear is felt less acutely than our own fear, or that feelings of affection, and subsequent grief at their loss, are duller between two parrots who mate for life than such feelings between two humans” (16). Yet, while intelligence is not necessary to suffering and we should not assume that because an animal is less intelligent it suffers less, still, understanding the intellectual capacities of animals helps us to understand what their lives are like, so that we can better understand our obligations to care for them in our exercise of dominion.

Balcombe explains that it is difficult to compare the intelligence of different kinds of animals, including the intelligence of nonhumans with humans. It is like comparing the way animals move. “Do fish move better than horses? . . . Animals are as intelligent as they need to be” (Balcombe, 31).73 Stories and study results demonstrating animals’ reason, memory, problem-solving, and intelligence abound, involving animals from chimps and dolphins to birds, fish and mice. Balcombe observes: “[w]hen animals show the hallmarks of having a mind and thinking about things, down tumbles one of the most insidious and destructive ideas of all time:

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73 He also notes that in some cases, nonhumans are “smarter” than humans. In Japan, one study of cognition using chimpanzees required chimps to recall in sequence the numbers 1 through 9 randomly scattered on a computer screen. One particular chimp excelled at this, regularly getting the entire sequence correct. “Humans barely pass the test with just four or five numbers.” In a head-to-head competition with a human memory champion, “the chimp performed three times better.” Even “the average chimp scores twice as well as the average human on this short-term memory task” (32-33).
that you need language to think” (Balcombe, 43-44). For instance, many animals think about and plan for the future. Bekoff again:

… there are literally volumes of data showing that individuals of many species do think about the future, from Mexican jays, red foxes, and wolves caching feed for later retrieval, to a subordinate chimpanzee or wolf pretending that he doesn’t see a favored food item in the presence of a dominant individual and later returning to eat it when the dominant animal is not around” (Bekoff, 14).

Laboratory mice have demonstrated significant intelligence, learning extremely complex mazes in little time with no associated deprivation or reward and have shown “an almost obstinate insistence on exercising control over their environment” (Balcombe, 26). Balcombe recounts one experiment in which the scientist “noticed that the mice tended to resist ‘with astonishing vigor’ being forced to do something. . . . The conclusion: mice value self-actualization” (Balcombe, 26-27). Crows have also demonstrated significant intelligence. For example, they make tools to solve problems. They also teach others in the flock and their young how to make and use tools once they have solved a problem. Some scientists believe they may even be better at tool use than chimps. They also recognize individual humans, remember them for years, and can distinguish between those who are friendly and those who are dangerous, and they pass along their knowledge to others. “Crows hold a grudge, and they are big gossips,” says Professor David Craig, co-author of the crow study, which appeared in *Animal Behavior*

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74 Dr. Temple Grandin believes that animals think in the same way autistic people, such as Grandin herself, think: in visual images rather than words. (Scully, 244-45; Grandin, *Thinking the Way Animals Do*, Western Horseman, Nov. 1997, pp.140-145, [http://www.grandin.com/references/thinking.animals.html](http://www.grandin.com/references/thinking.animals.html), (accessed January 13, 2013).

75 Descartes made clear that this limitation was not, in his view (or in the views of many influenced by him), restricted to the ability to think abstractly. He asserted that it was clear that animals have no thoughts, and no ability to reason, at all. See, pp. 19-20, supra, and sources cited there.


magazine, “They spread the information around. If you're bad to one crow, many more may hear about it.”

Moreover, many animals depend on a complex social structure for their well-being. These animals display a sense of fair play and know right from wrong, in the sense of knowing what is expected among members of the group. They may not philosophize about universal truths or the meaning of life, but they understand the rules by which they are expected to conduct themselves in the setting in which they operate. In order to succeed within their groups, they need what Bekoff, describes as “morality,” which requires “cooperation, reciprocity, empathy, and helping” (88). Animal play “appears to rely on the universal human value of the Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do to you” (87). This, he explains, requires empathy and implies reciprocity. It also requires a sense of “fairness,” so when animals play together, those of greater size, strength, or social status, do not take advantage of those assets (87-96). Balcombe likewise explains that animals will “self-handicap” in play, so as not to be unfairly matched with a play partner (Balcombe, 129-30). Those who do well in play tend to be those who do well in the social setting. Those who disregard the rules are not invited to play again (Bekoff, 87). The animal kingdom, Bekoff, Balcombe, and others have concluded, has more to do with cooperation than competition.

Nor is the life of wild animals a mere trudge through the day or a constant struggle for survival, as so many television depictions of life in the wild would have us believe; there is

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79 Bekoff distinguishes between morality, which he describes as “an essentially social phenomenon: it arises in the interactions between and among individuals, and it exists as a kind of webbing or social fabric that holds together a complicated tapestry of social relationships,” and ethics, which he views as suggesting “the contemplative study of subtle questions of rightness or fairness.” Bekoff is “arguing that some animals have moral codes of behavior, but not that animals have ethics” (88, emphasis original).
happiness. If we are to care for the animals as God cares for us, we need to understand that a
fulfilled life for them is more than the absence of pain. Bekoff explains

To observe animals for any length of time is to see that animals clearly enjoy themselves. Animals experience joy in a wide range of situations: when they play, greet friends, groom one another, are freed from confinement, sing, and perhaps even when watching others having fun (Bekoff, 53).

He recounts the obvious pleasure of cows and lambs when they lie with their heads raised to the sun, of joyful reunions among companions after a period of separation, of animals exhibiting a sense of humor, and of chimps tickling each other for the fun of it (54–60).

So, too, are the animals we view primarily as food, capable of happiness and sorrow, well-being and suffering. Amy Hatkoff provides a detailed discussion of cows, pigs, chickens, and other animals raised for food in The Inner World of Farm Animals: Their Amazing Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Capacities. She recounts their surprising intellectual capabilities, social bonds, decision-making, and other aspects of their lives. She explains, for example, that cows have excellent memories; they can remember up to 50 bovine faces for several years and they can remember and distinguish human faces. They select leaders of the herd not by dominance, but by confidence and intelligence: the leader will be the cow that knows the best places to eat and find good water. They remember who treats them well and who treats them badly, and respond accordingly (78–82). They also form strong social attachments and, like other animals, mothers and their young are very strongly bonded. Nevertheless, in the dairy industry, calves are taken from their mothers almost immediately after birth, so they won’t drink any of the milk. In a story recorded by Scully, Dr. Temple Grandin describes the scene when cattle are separated:

When cows are weaned, both the cows and the calves bellow for about twenty-four hours. Some calves bellow until they are hoarse. Cattle will also bellow for departed penmates. . . . I have seen Holstein steers bellowing to penmates that were departing in a truck. The cattle that were left behind watched as their fat penmates walked up the ramp to get on the truck that would take them to Burgerland. The two steers stared at the truck as it turned out of the parking lot. One stretched out his neck and bellowed at the truck, and his penmate on the truck bellowed back (Scully, 245).

Hatkoff tells the story of Maya, a rescued dairy cow at Farm Sanctuary in Watkins Glen, NY, who “holds a grudge” against Gene Bauer, the organization’s co-founder. Maya never had the chance to raise her own calves, and at the sanctuary she “welcomes and nurtures all the new calves who arrive at the sanctuary.” Bauer escorted one group of calves away from Maya so they could go to an adoptive home. “Maya was inconsolable, rolling on her back and wailing. To this day, almost fifteen years later, she has not forgiven Gene and will not allow him to come anywhere near her. If he tries to approach her, Maya will charge him” (Hatkoff, 83).

By way of a second example, Hatkoff describes the particular intelligence of pigs. Like dogs, they are able to learn tricks and follow commands, learn their own names, learn the names of objects and commands (“push the dumbbell on the mat”) and remember the objects’ names up to three years (Hatkoff, 94). They are also very fast learners and have been taught to play video games, using their snouts to operate joysticks, which requires an understanding that what they do here causes an effect over there (97). They even could remember how to do this a year later with slightly different equipment. Like other animals, Hatkoff explains, they also are very social and form important social bonds (97-103). Yet, in factory farms these animals are kept row upon row in giant warehouses in crates so small they can barely move and without any social or intellectual stimulation.

Animals, then, including the animals we eat, are each unique individuals, with their own preferences and perspectives on the world. Species from the mighty elephant to the humble
grasshopper have been shown to feel pain, and in varying degrees, to plan, to problem solve, to have best friends, and to be engaged in their surroundings. They have full lives wholly apart from any interaction with humans and they suffer in ways that are just as real as human suffering. Mark Bekoff writes:

Sentience is the central reason to better care for animals. Questions regarding sentience are important and extremely challenging, but we also need to distinguish between feeling and knowing. Well-being centers on what animals feel, not what they know. Does it really matter if monkeys in a zoo, rats in a lab, or cows on a farm ever understand what is going on around them, or what is being done to them by humans, if they can feel pain and experience suffering? Animals in these situations depend on us completely, and their behavior tells us when they are healthy and happy or in pain and sad. Animals can’t call 911 in an emergency; they depend on our goodwill and mercy (134, emphasis original).

As Jonathan Balcombe has observed, “The problem in our relationship with animals is that our treatment of them hasn’t evolved to keep up with our knowledge” (Balcombe, 14). Modern science is telling us things our forefathers didn’t know about animals. They are not like machines. Their behavior is not purely a reaction to external stimuli, and even to the extent it is, that does not make their pain or fear less real. They are aware of what happens to them, they are aware of their surroundings, and they are capable of happiness and sorrow. If we are to exercise dominion in the image of God, we must be attuned to these needs. Both science and scripture tell us that animals suffer and that their suffering matters. We cannot continue to kid ourselves that it somehow doesn’t matter if animals are caged, immobilized, isolated, controlled with electric prods, beaten, chained, abandoned, poisoned, trapped, worked or bred to exhaustion, left to starve, experimented on, or mutilated without anesthesia. All of these things, to name only a few of the ways we “manage” animals for some perceived human benefit, cause genuine suffering. If we will look at these practices through the teachings of scripture, we cannot fail to
ask, with Linzey, “where is the justification” for this suffering? What genuine need is being met? How can I make things better?

IV. The Cattle of the Field – How We Treat Animals

“So our animals can't turn around for the 2.5 years that they are in the stalls producing piglets,” said Dave Warner, a spokesman for [National Pork Producers Council]. “I don't know who asked the sow if she wanted to turn around.”

*The National Journal, July 2012*

We have seen that our creation in the image of God imposes on us the responsibility to care compassionately for animals, that scripture likewise requires us to act with mercy toward them, and that there is a strong Christian tradition of compassion toward animals as a sign of holiness. We have also seen that recent forays into creation care have provided a new perspective on our relationship with the earth and those new perspectives can help us open our eyes even further to see the possibilities for a new relationship with animals. We have also seen that animals are not unthinking creatures making their way through the world purely on instinct. Instead, they are fully capable of suffering, they have rich emotional lives, they form important social bonds, they solve problems, and they make intentional choices. Knowing all this, we cannot continue to hide our faces from the suffering we impose daily on God’s other creatures.

In order to understand both the need to change our perspectives and our behavior, and the impact even a few changes can make, we must first be honest with ourselves about how animals are faring in our world today. This section will only briefly touch on a few of the ways we make animals suffer, and will focus on animals in the United States, since that is where we can have the strongest and most immediate impact. All of the things discussed here are fully legal and in

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some cases subsidized by state and/or federal governments. We can make a difference by choosing where to spend our money and by supporting appropriate legal changes.

A. Factory Farming

Far and away the greatest number of animals suffer in factory farms. Contrary to popular assumption, we have not always eaten the way we eat now. The modern diet is possible only as a result of the development since World War II of factory farms, also known as “Confined Animal Feeding Operations” or “CAFOs”, which are designed to house the highest number of animals in the smallest space with the least possible expense, thereby reducing production costs and reducing consumer prices, all while maximizing profits for business. As a result of the rise of factory farms, according to the United States Department of Agriculture, in 2011, 9.1 billion farm animals were slaughtered in the United States alone for human consumption.\(^{82}\) That was 289 animals per second, 17,313 animals per minute, 1,038,812 animals per hour, or 24,831,546 animals every day for 365 days. Yet, this number was down slightly from 2010, when 9.2 billion farm animals were killed. In comparison to the 1.8 billion slaughtered in 1960 (itself a fairly daunting figure), however, it remains a staggering increase, reflecting a per person increase in annual meat consumption from 184.75 pounds in 1960 to 298.05 pounds per person in 2011.\(^{83}\)

While factory farming keeps the cost of meat at the supermarket low, its real costs, including in damage to the environment, risks to personal and public health, poor working conditions, threats to the existence of family farms, and overwhelming animal suffering, are actively hidden from view.\(^{84}\)


\(^{83}\) Humane Society of the United States, US Per Capita Meat Consumption, based on USDA statistics, http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/farm/table_us_per_capita_meat.pdf (accessed January 13, 2013). Even the 1960 figure is a significant increase from 1950, when per capita consumption was 145.88 pounds. Id.

\(^{84}\) Almost all meat consumed in the United States – and increasingly around the world – is the product of factory farming.
Matthew Scully sums up factory farming this way:

Factory farming isn’t just killing: It is negation, a complete denial of the animal as a living being with his or her own needs and nature. It is not the worst evil we can do, but it is the worst evil we can do to them. It confronts us with the animal equivalent of Abraham Lincoln’s condemnation of human slavery: “If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.” (289)

There are endless resources for learning about the conditions of factory farmed animals, yet, according to Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson in his book, The Face On Your Plate, an astonishing 80 percent of people still believe that the animals they eat are humanely treated.

What follows is a sampling of information regarding chickens, pigs, and cows, as described by Farm Sanctuary, a rescue organization for farm animals. “Chickens used for egg production are among the most abused of all farm animals. In order to meet the consumer demand for eggs, 280 million hens laid 77.3 billion eggs in 2007. From hatching to slaughter, egg-laying hens are subjected to mutilation, confinement, and deprivation of the ability to live their lives as the active, social beings they are.” Male chicks are simply killed upon hatching, since they have no value for laying eggs. Among the methods by which they are die are being sucked through a series of pipes onto an electrified “kill plate,” being ground up alive and fully conscious in a “macerator,” or being gassed. The laying hens have their beaks seared off without anesthesia and are confined for their entire lives to battery cages, stacked one on top of the other,

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87 Information in the following paragraphs is summarized, paraphrased, and/or quoted from information available at http://www.farmsanctuary.org/learn/factory-farming/ (accessed January 13, 2013).
8-10 in a cage, in which each hen has space roughly equivalent to 2/3 of a letter-sized piece of paper. Their laying cycles are artificially manipulated through the use of light, dark, and starvation to maximize the number of eggs they lay. “The lifespan of an industry chicken would be 5–8 years. However, when egg production declines after 1–2 years, hens are considered ‘spent, and sent to slaughter.”

Chickens raised for meat are selectively bred to grow to “market weight” at an artificially fast pace, usually within just 6-7 weeks. In the past 50 years, the growth rate for chickens used for meat has increased by more than 300 percent, resulting in skeletal, heart, and lung problems for the chickens. They typically spend their lives confined to warehouse-like buildings, each packed with as many as 20,000 chickens. On average, the space per chicken is only slightly larger than a sheet of letter-size paper. This crowding can result in scratches and sores from the birds being forced to walk all over each other. Floors can be covered in the waste of tens of thousands of chickens resulting in excessive ammonia levels and health problems for chickens, including difficulty breathing. At the slaughterhouse, there is no law in place requiring chickens to be rendered unconscious before slaughter, and the electrified water bath stunning method used has been shown to cause painful shocks before it stuns the birds.

Breeding sows spend nearly the entirety of their repeated pregnancies in crates barely larger than their bodies, making it impossible for them to turn around, move, or even lie down comfortably. They are on slatted floors, which often cause foot problems and means that they lie directly above their own waste. This exposes sows to high levels of ammonia, and respiratory disease is common in confined sows. As we have noted, pigs are extremely intelligent animals and the intense boredom and frustration pigs suffer in gestation crates have been blamed by researchers for the abnormal, neurotic behaviors confined pigs sometimes exhibit, like
repetitively biting at the bars of the gestation crate or chewing with an empty mouth. These behaviors can lead to additional suffering by causing sores and mouth damage. Shortly before piglets are born, sows are moved to “farrowing crates” where the piglets will be nursed. The crates, meant to separate the mother from the piglets to avoid crushing, are restrictive to the point that the mother pig can only stand and lie down — she cannot even turn around to see her piglets. Once they are weaned, she is re-impregnated and sent back to the gestation crate.

Cows used by the dairy industry are intensively confined, continually impregnated, and bred for high milk production with little concern for their well-being. They are generally confined indoors on hard, abrasive floors. They are bred and given hormones to increase milk production, so that in 2007, the average cow in the dairy industry produced more than 20,000 lbs. of milk in one year, which was more than double the milk produced 40 years before. They spend so much time connected to milk machines that they often develop mastitis, a painful condition of the udders. Dairy producers also remove cows’ tails, either by placing a tight rubber ring around the tail until it falls off or by cutting it off with a sharp instrument. “Each method causes chronic pain. Cows use their tail to swish away flies and without their tails can suffer immensely during fly season.” Nearly all cows used for dairy in the United States are eventually slaughtered for human consumption. The average dairy cow is considered “spent” and sent to slaughter at less than 5 years of age, although in a natural setting cows live more than 20 years. “Investigations have found that cows who collapse because they are too sick or injured to walk or stand, known as ‘downers’ by the industry, are routinely prodded, dragged, and pushed around slaughter facilities.”

In addition, dairy cows are given little rest between pregnancies, and their calves are taken from them almost immediately after birth – causing great distress to both calf and cow.
“Calves can become so distressed from separation that they become sick, lose weight from not eating, and cry so much that their throats become raw.” The calves are either raised for beef or they become veal. Veal calves are tethered by their necks in stalls so small they can barely move and they are intentionally undernourished to keep their flesh pink. They are slaughtered at only a few months of age. A few years ago, veterinarian Holly Cheever told the story of a cow she cared for in her early years as a vet. The farmer called her because he could not understand why his cow, who had just given birth, was not giving any milk. Her calf had been taken away from her as usual. Cheever could find no explanation, but some time later the farmer called to say that he had followed the cow to her pasture one day and discovered a second calf hidden at the edge of the pasture. Cheever explains:

she had delivered twins, and in a bovine’s “Sophie’s Choice,” she had brought one to the farmer and kept one hidden in the woods at the edge of her pasture, so that every day and every night, she stayed with her baby — the first she had been able to nurture FINALLY—and her calf nursed her dry with gusto. Though I pleaded for the farmer to keep her and her bull calf together, she lost this baby, too—off to the hell of the veal crate.

Cows raised for beef often begin their short lives on rangeland, but calves are soon separated from their nurturing mothers and endure a series of painful mutilations, including dehorning, castration, and branding without pain relief. Before they are a year old, young calves endure a long and stressful journey to a feedlot, where they are fattened on an unnatural diet until they reach “market weight” and are sent to slaughter.

These are just a small sample of the miseries that farm animals must endure – and they are all legal and routine. Sadly, undercover investigation after undercover investigation, year

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89 Cheever explains that “this was back in the days when cattle were permitted a modicum of pleasure and natural behaviors in their lives.”
after year, reveals such extreme brutality by those who handle these animals that criminal charges are often the result. The industry and political response to these undercover investigations is not to improve conditions for the animals, but to seek to criminalize undercover investigations. In some cases, those who undertake these investigations are labeled “terrorists” for exposing cruelties such as kicking and throwing turkeys, violently slamming them into tiny transport crates, and allowing sick or injured birds to slowly suffer and die without veterinary care. 

We can help reduce the number of animals who suffer in this way, and decrease the need for factory farming as a means to raise the animals we eat, by reducing the amount of meat and dairy in our diets – or even eliminating them altogether. If every American went meat-free for only one day a week, we could save 1.3 billion animals per year. The “Meatless Monday” movement is one way to do this. Others have adopted a vegan diet for breakfast and lunch, having animal products only at dinner. Others have found that giving up animal products in their


94 One seventh of the 9.1 billion animals killed in 2011.
diet altogether is not nearly the challenge they thought it would be.\textsuperscript{95} Yet, changes can be in small steps and easily made, and still have a significant impact.

We can also make a difference by speaking out against laws designed to protect these cruelties and by letting our elected representatives know that animals welfare is a significant issue.

B. Animals in Labs

Another means by which we cause animals to suffer is by using them in laboratory experiments. Animals are used in biomedical research, cloning experiments, cosmetic and product testing, medical training, pain and distress research, and other areas. Accurate numbers of animals used in experiments are difficult to come by, since the Animal Welfare Act, which requires reporting of animal testing, does not cover most animals used in research.\textsuperscript{96} As Mark Bekoff explains:

Only about 1 percent of animals used in research in the United States are protected by legislation. . . . It may surprise some people to hear that birds, rats, and mice are no longer considered animals. Since researchers are not ‘allowed’ to abuse animals, the definition of ‘animal’ is simply revised until it refers only to creatures whom researchers use less frequently, even if they are sentient and empathetic beings (139).

Nevertheless, Bekoff reports that

[b]y one count, in 2001 American laboratories conducted research on about 690,800 guinea pigs, rabbits, and hamsters, in addition to 161,700 farm animals, 70,000 dogs, 49,400 primates, 22,800 cats, and 80 million mice and rats. . . . The vast majority of these animals live most of their lives in extremely small cages, bored and lonely, and they will die in the lab when researchers are done with them (138-39).

\textsuperscript{95} It is important to note that while adopting a vegan diet can be easy and rewarding, some nutritional education before taking that step is important to be sure new vegans (and vegetarians) are getting all the nutrients they need for a healthy diet. Such information is readily available in numerous books and online resources.

The merits of much of this research is debatable. Bekoff, again, citing a Journal of the American Medical Association essay:

[I]t’s been estimated that 106,000 people die each year in hospitals from adverse reactions to drugs that had previously been tested on animals and were approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Adverse drug reactions is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States, following heart disease, cancer, stroke, and lung disease (141).  

While there may be a necessity for some such testing, much of it, especially testing on cosmetics, household cleaners, and personal products, even if reliable, serves little purpose. Moreover, alternative products, not tested on animals and not using ingredients tested on animals, are readily available. The European Union has already banned the sale of cosmetics tested on animals and those using ingredients tested on animals; Israel, having banned animal testing for cosmetics and personal products within its borders since 2007, now bans the import of any such products, as well.  

Nevertheless, although it is not required by the Food & Drug Administration, animal testing on cosmetics remains common in the United States. Describing one such test, eye irritancy testing, Mercy for Animals reports:

In these tests, a liquid, flake, granule, or powdered substance is dropped into the eyes of a group of albino rabbits. The animals are often immobilized in stocks from which only their heads protrude. They usually receive no anesthesia during the tests. ¶ After placing the substance in the rabbits' eyes,
laboratory technicians record the damage to the eye tissue at specific intervals over an average period of 72 hours, with tests sometimes lasting 7 to 18 days. Reactions to the substances include swollen eyelids, inflamed irises, ulceration, bleeding, massive deterioration, and blindness. During the tests, the rabbits’ eyelids are held open with clips. Many animals break their necks as they struggle to escape.\footnote{Mercy For Animals, “Cosmetic Testing,” \url{http://209.61.249.27/cosmetic_testing.asp} (accessed January 13, 2013).}

Other common types of testing include acute toxicity testing, repeated dose toxicity, skin corrosivity/irritation, and others.\footnote{HSUS provides a list and brief description of the types of cosmetic testing commonly done on animals. HSUS, “Cosmetic Tests That Use Animals,” August 31, 2012, \url{http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/cosmetic_testing/tips/common_cosmetics_tests_animals.html} (accessed February 2, 2013).}

Just as with farm animals, so with animals in labs, it is easy to make a difference. Many cosmetics and household products that use no animal testing are readily available. While many of the animal organizations already mentioned provide information on cruelty-free shopping, perhaps the most comprehensive and user-friendly list is maintained, and available for free downloading, by Leaping Bunny.\footnote{Leaping Bunny Shopping Guide available at \url{http://www.leapingbunny.org/shopping.php} (accessed February 2, 2013).} Consumer demand will drive how long animals continue to suffer needlessly in development of cosmetics, personal products, and household supplies. While this may not address all the issues related to animal testing, it is an important, and achievable, first step.

C. Pets, Entertainment, and Fashion

There are a host of other ways we impact animals in our day-to-day lives and an equal number of ways we can make small but important changes in our lives that can make a world of difference to animals.

In the United States, we love our pets, and we rarely think of pet ownership as an avenue of large-scale animal cruelty. Unfortunately, with the rise of puppy mills, that is not a safe assumption. Puppy mills are breeding farms for dogs. The mothers are bred repeatedly and kept

100  HSUS provides a list and brief description of the types of cosmetic testing commonly done on animals. HSUS, “Cosmetic Tests That Use Animals,” August 31, 2012, \url{http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/cosmetic_testing/tips/common_cosmetics_tests_animals.html} (accessed February 2, 2013).
their entire lives in small cages in filthy conditions, often without medical care, exercise, or socialization. There are thousands of puppy mills around the country, many with hundreds of dogs in battery-like cages, churning out many thousands of puppies every year. Puppy mills sell their puppies -- often inbred or sick -- through the Internet, newspaper advertisements, and in pet stores. At the same time, every year approximately four million cats and dogs are euthanized, about one every eight seconds, for want of a loving home. Where we get our pets matters. Animals land in shelters for a variety of reasons, most having nothing to do with the behavior of the animal. Shelters have every kind of dog and cat, pure bred and mixed breeds, and there are rescue groups for every breed of dog. There are also small-scale responsible breeders who are more interested in the welfare of their animals than the money to be made from them. When we bring an animal into our home, we can be responsible about where it comes from, choosing not to support and encourage the cruelties of puppy mills. We can also recognize that we have made a commitment for the entire life the animal, so that our pets do not join the millions dropped off at a shelter to face an uncertain future.

Fashion is another way we impact animals, and the most obvious way we do that is through fur. Even if we don’t have a luxurious fur coat, items with fur trim or linings are popular. Much of that fur comes from fur farms around the world. Like factory farms and puppy mills, fur farms keep animals in small wire cages for their entire lives. Millions of animals, including, raccoon dogs, rabbits, foxes, mink, and chinchillas, are killed by anal electrocution, by neck-breaking, or in gas chambers, so as not to damage their valuable coats.

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Other animals are caught in painful steel jawed traps and left to suffer until the trapper comes to check his traps. Those same traps also catch dogs, cats, and other animals, who step in the wrong spot, only to suffer and die needlessly. In addition, raccoon dogs, who are largely bred and killed in China and whose fur is often used as trim on a variety of garments sold in the United States, have been documented to be skinned alive. Again, we can make a difference through the simple choice not to buy or wear fur. Faux fur is an option, but care is needed because labels are often misleading, incorrect, or missing, so you can never be sure whether fur labeled as imitation is really cruelty-free.

The entertainment we select can also impact animals. In circuses, “Wild animals used in circus acts are routinely beaten, poked, and shocked with electric prods, all to force them to perform unnatural tricks for an unsuspecting viewing public. This abuse continues year after year.” In addition, circus animals are rarely out of small cages and endure difficult travelling conditions, often without heat or air conditioning, and often without adequate food or water. Animals in marine parks, rodeos, horse racing, and dog racing all raise issues of animal welfare. Animals are often kept in close confinement, mutilated to obtain a certain look or behavior (Tennessee walking horses, for example, are sometimes subjected to intentional infliction of pain on the feet and legs to exaggerate their gate), subjected to dangerous breeding or medication practices (racing horses are often drugged so that they will run when injured, sometimes resulting in their deaths), overbred and simply killed when their usefulness is at an end (many

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more greyhounds are bred for racing than can be used and many are killed\textsuperscript{107}. In any setting where animals are valued primarily for their ability to make money for their owner, their welfare is likely to get short shrift. We can all go to circuses and parks that do not use animal acts, and if we participate in horse shows or racing, we can investigate the venue carefully to ensure only humane practices are used.

V. Thy Kingdom Come: Making the World a Better Place For Animals

When a man’s love of finery clouds his moral judgment, that is vanity. When he lets a demanding palate make his moral choices, that is gluttony. When he ascribes divine will to his own whims, that is pride. And when he gets angry at being reminded of animal suffering that his own daily choices might help avoid, that is moral cowardice.

Matthew Scully, Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy, p. 121

We all contribute to these cruelties every day with our decisions about what to eat, what to wear, what personal and cleaning products to use, what entertainment to engage in, where to get our pets, and many other daily decisions. In each of these decisions, we exercise our dominion and impact the lives of animals for better or for worse. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous nature of this mistreatment and these abuses can make the issue of animal welfare seem daunting and hopeless. As Christians, however, we are always called to hope. Scully, in response to the idea that animal suffering is inevitable and factory farming is just the way things are has laid the matter before us:

I don't answer to inevitabilities, and neither do you. I don't answer to the economy. I don't answer to tradition and I don't answer to Everyone. For me, it comes down to a question of whether I am a man or just a consumer. Whether to reason or just to rationalize. Whether to heed my conscience or

my every craving, to assert my free will or just my will. Whether to side with the powerful and comfortable or with the weak, afflicted, and forgotten. Whether, as an economic actor in a free market, I answer to the God of money or the God of mercy (325).

As we have seen, making the world a better place for animals, exercising our dominion more in keeping with the image of God, and making God’s kingdom just a little more present, need not be difficult. Changes can be made one step at a time; small actions now may lead to bigger ones later, but even the smallest contribution to reducing animal suffering is better than none at all. When churches begin to open their eyes to the theological implications of animal cruelty and to take it seriously, they can become an avenue of education for the faithful – both about the theological aspects of animal welfare and the practical ways to make a difference. Churches can incorporate acts of compassion towards animals in their ministries geared toward compassion to fellow humans, by including pet food in their food banks, rides to vet care with rides to the doctor, dog walks with visits to shut-ins, and including animal shelters among the community organizations they support. They can set an example with the menus at church dinners and vegan recipes in church recipe books. They can participate in the Meatless Monday movement and encourage a meatless Lent. They can be welcoming and supportive of those who choose to give up animal products in their diets altogether. They can provide information about vegetarian and vegan diets as well as about companies that do not test their products on animals in their tract racks. They can use only cleaning products that are cruelty-free for the church. They can include animal theology among the issues addressed in Christian formation. They can include examples of acts of kindness or cruelty toward animals when preaching includes examples of kindness or cruelty toward people. The HSUS Faith Outreach Department has a booklet, a web page, and a staff dedicated to helping churches incorporate animal welfare
concerns into their ministries. The need is great, the issues are varied, and possibilities for action are nearly limitless. This is an area where everyone can do something to make a difference for God’s creatures.

Small changes can lead to big things. A group of fourth graders working with the Washington Animal Rescue League Humane Education program came up with this list of ways to be nicer to animals:

1. Give animals food.
2. Adopt an animal and convince people in your neighborhood to adopt.
3. Take care of your pet if you have one.
4. Volunteer at a shelter.
5. Boycott companies that hurt animals.
6. Make your animal not be able to have babies.
7. Write a letter to Congress.
8. For your birthday, collect food for animals instead of presents.
9. Write a Facebook story about homeless animals.
10. Tell animals how good they are.

If fourth graders can do it, so, surely, can churches. We have the theology, we have the science, we have the tools to do better. We need only the will.

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CONCLUSION

Our creation in the image of God is foundational to who we are as humans and as Christians. Our exercise of dominion over the animals is intrinsic to how we live into that image. Scripture teaches that the right exercise of dominion is to reflect the loving, compassionate, and merciful character of God to all the animals we encounter, directly or indirectly. Moreover, dominion deals expressly with animals, as distinguished from the earth. It is not enough to appreciate the glories of nature; it is not enough to recycle and limit our carbon footprint, important as those activities are. We owe the sentient creation, our fellow creatures, an extra measure of care precisely because they suffer as we do, and they depend utterly on our mercy.

We know now what God has always known, that the animals have full and meaningful lives wholly apart from humans, that they have their own perspectives on the world, and that most of the distinctions we have relied on to support our superiority over them – our ability to think, to make choices, to use tools, to form meaningful relationships – are differences of degree, not kind. Most of all, we know that animals suffer in real and meaningful ways – and mostly, they suffer at human hands. This is a singular and devastating dereliction of the duty given us by God, a duty constitutive of what it means to be human and to be in relationship with God; that is, a duty fundamental to what it means to be created in the image of God.

As individuals and as a Christian community, we cannot continue to sit silently by while billions of animals suffer annually to feed human greed, gluttony, pride, and vanity. Knowing what we know, we cannot maintain the fiction that they are “only animals” and that their suffering does not matter. We cannot claim Christ and assert that our own interests always come
first, even if it is just our interest in a little fur trim or luxurious coat, or an extra large cheeseburger with bacon, or a particular brand of mascara.

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed” (Prov. 31:8, New Living Translation). When we who claim the name of Christ disregard the obligations of right dominion and remain silent in the face of animals’ suffering, deeming it unworthy of our time and attention, we are making affirmative representations to the world about God. We suggest that we are silent because God is silent; that God does not hear the cries of the helpless and that He is indifferent to suffering. In the words of Henry Primatt, when cruelty continues “without reproof from the pulpit, we are almost tempted to draw this inference: that Cruelty cannot be a sin” (24-25, emphasis original). But when, as faith communities, we do speak up, we not only help to alleviate the suffering of the innocent, we lead our members more deeply into the image of and communion with God, and we proclaim the good news of God’s love for all of His creation to the whole world.
Prayer attributed to St. Basil

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom you gave the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to you in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live not for us alone but for themselves and for you and that they love the sweetness of life.

In Christ’s name,

Amen.
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