

# THE CHIEF END OF ALL FLESH

BY STANLEY HAUERWAS AND JOHN BERKMAN

*"In light of the scriptural witness that humans and other animals share in the ultimate end, which is God's peaceable kingdom, we thus believe that each and every creature is created to manifest God's glory. Animals will not manifest God's glory insofar as their lives are measured in terms of human interests, but only insofar as their lives serve God's good pleasure. Similarly, humans manifest God's glory when we learn to see animals as God sees animals, recognizing that animals exist not to serve us, but rather for God's good pleasure."*

**T**HIS article seeks to engage the issue of the relation between "the world of humans" and "the world of animals" from a thoroughly theological perspective. This task is admittedly both ambitious and fraught with difficulty because there is painfully little precedent for this endeavor in most traditions of theological discourse. In approaching this subject, we want to avoid the approach taken by the "theological mercenary," who uses theology merely to confirm what many of us have already decided on other grounds. Our task, therefore, is to try to show what difference it makes when one strives to discuss the relation between humans and animals in a way that seeks to do justice to the integrity of theological discourse.

The article proceeds in four parts. The first section outlines four hazards in the path of this project that might prevent the reader from taking seriously this challenge to rethink theologically how Christians relate to other animals. The second section presents a trinitarian account of creation, showing how this view of creation is crucial for rightly seeing and living in relation to our fellow creatures. The third section makes suggestions about what is involved in living the way of the Trinity in regard to relationships between humans and other animals. The final section posits vegetarianism as an eschatological act and shows analogies between following the call of Jesus in not doing violence to other humans and not doing violence to the other animals.

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I

The first hazard confronting our approach to this topic involves a possible misreading of the phrase “the integrity of theological discourse” in the opening paragraph. The phrase might indicate to the reader that this essay is simply trying to show how a belief system separated from concrete practices can influence how we *think* about the relationship between humans and other animals.<sup>1</sup> However, while there are, no doubt, valuable things to be learned from such an enterprise, such an understanding of the discipline of theology is severely inadequate. For our practices in all their diversity—including our sinful ones—exercise coercive power over us with regard to our ability to *think* about these matters.

For instance, this essay is written by one person who eats animals and one who does not. That may sound like an irrelevant biographical detail, but we are convinced of its deep significance because our practices, more than our arguments, reveal and shape what is truly important to us. Hauerwas has argued this same point in the past with regard to pacifism: that our theological commitments to that position are distorted insofar as our lives are shaped violently.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Christian pacifism is not the result of holding certain beliefs, nor is pacifism even so much what it might mean to know these beliefs truthfully. Rather, living nonviolently is in a sense the very condition for even knowing what we believe about pacifism. Likewise, if Christians are to engage seriously with the issue of their relationship to other animals, vegetarianism may well be a prerequisite.<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledging this first point, that our practices with regard to other animals shape our beliefs about them, it is clear that practices of consuming animals by Christians have shaped and continue to shape how Christians have thought about them. Here lies a second hazard that threatens to derail our project—a latent anthropocentrism. Returning to the analogy of war, in the same way that our engagement in war encourages a form of patriotism or ethnocentrism that leads us to depersonalize the enemy by turning them into the “other,” that is into a “gook” or “hun” or “madman,” our eating of animals undoubtedly encourages a form of anthropocentrism that maintains animals in the position of “other” and justifies their use as such. We find theological warrant for neither this type of patriotism nor this type of anthropocentrism.

It is revealing that the most determinative attack on anthropocen-

<sup>1</sup>In writing this essay we have struggled with the very issue of how to describe the relationship between humans and other animals. We soon found ourselves resisting phrases like “our relationship with animals,” because we found that this implicitly underwrites a cozy distance between humans and animals. We continue to struggle with the lack of a language to articulate better these relationships.

<sup>2</sup>See Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: a Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Can one seriously discuss these questions with someone who is in the midst of eating a hamburger? We take this to be a serious question.

trism in modern theology does not address theologically the issue of the relationship between humans and other animals. Given James Gustafson's general perspective in *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, that is that we are all ultimately doomed, one can conclude that neither human nor animal life has any special status vis-à-vis God.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, Gustafson's position is much more complex than is indicated here, but it serves to remind us that the way one critiques anthropocentrism makes a huge difference.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, this is but a way of developing the point with which this article began, that theology so often ends up underwriting classifications that are not intrinsic to its own discourse.<sup>6</sup> Avoiding implicitly anthropocentric assumptions is no easy task, as the authors found whenever they met to discuss what would go into this article. For example, one question that came up was whether we have a stake in the survival of particular species that might go out of existence if we stop eating and experimenting on animals.<sup>7</sup> One of us raised the question as to whether we should even retain the notion of "species," and if so, what sense of the term "species." Aristotle meant one thing by "species," medieval theologians meant quite another, and modern biologists mean still something else again. What reasons, if any, do Christian theologians have for preferring one of these ways of classification over the others?

Put more radically, it is not clear that Christians have a stake in *any* kind of classification of ourselves in relation to other creatures. That is not to say that there is anything wrong with such classifications in and of themselves, but it may also be the case that these classifications represent interests antithetical to the convictions and practices of Christians.<sup>8</sup> For example, such classifications might underwrite an

<sup>4</sup>See James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Although Gustafson follows Midgely in arguing for an increased appreciation of the continuity between humans and other animals, he does not appeal to any traditional theological categories for understanding this relation (see v. 1, *Theology and Ethics*, pp. 281–293).

<sup>5</sup>On the issue of the relationship between humans and other animals, Gustafson's critique employs broadly scientific criteria. This is shown by the types of appeals made and, more generally, by his view that scientific criteria may lead to the doing away altogether with Christianity in the future (*Theology and Ethics*, p. 324).

<sup>6</sup>As to the question of what constitutes theological discourse, no universal agreement is expected, but it would be a big improvement if we could get this to be an important issue!

<sup>7</sup>We thank Oliver O'Donovan for originally bringing this question to our attention. If we do have a stake in animals survival, it would be along the lines of an argument by James Rimbach, who argues that Noah took all the kinds of animals into the ark, even those that were unclean (which Rimbach says means unfit for human consumption) "to keep their kind alive upon the face of the earth" (Gen. 8:17). See James Rimbach, "'All Creation Groans': Theology/Ecology in St. Paul," in *Ecology and Life*, edited by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1988), pp. 161–177.

<sup>8</sup>For powerful examples of the way particular enlightenment theories of biology and their attendant classifications have been used for wicked ends, see Cornel West's "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" in *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982). West strongly argues that

anthropocentrism antithetical to the Christian conviction that God, not humanity, is the end of all creation. So one must investigate who it is that is making these classifications and the reasons for which these classifications are being made.

Classification systems aside, we are suspicious of almost all purportedly theological justifications for distinguishing humans from other animals. Of course, we as humans generally think of ourselves as “animals with a difference.” Yet the account produced to elicit that difference makes all the difference in the world!

To put it most simply, the only significant theological difference between humans and animals lies in God’s giving humans a unique *purpose*. Herein lies what it means for God to create humans in God’s image. A part of this unique purpose is God’s charge to humans to tell animals who they are, and humans continue to do this by the very way they relate to other animals. We think there is an analogous relationship here; animals need humans to tell them their story, just as gentiles need Jews to tell them their story.<sup>9</sup>

Our account of what humankind as created in the “image of God” means is admittedly a minority viewpoint. The dominant view holds that “image of God” is some unique human capacity or ability, such as rational ability. The presumption of this dominant view has been forcefully challenged by Millard Schumaker, who argues that this stance owes far more to Cartesian presuppositions than to Christian theology.<sup>10</sup> There is simply no good theological reason for claiming that what it means to be human is to possess some unique capacity that distinguishes humankind from that which is non-human. Thus, the

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enlightenment biologists, anthropologists, and naturalists were primarily responsible for producing a new and peculiarly modern form of racism, where “racial differences are often grounded in nature, that is, ontology and later biology” (p. 64).

For a fascinating study of the science of primatology as a form of “simian orientalism,” see Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>9</sup>Indeed, if there is a reason for giving special attention to humankind, it is because Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, because salvation for all comes through one made human. In the same way that animals are privileged through one who became human, so gentiles are privileged through one who became a Jew.

<sup>10</sup>Schumaker describes Cartesianism as follows: “Descartes was a convinced disciple of the then newly-articulated mechanical philosophy, and he believed that all of physical reality (*res extensa*) was mechanical in nature; . . . after much consideration, Descartes came to believe that all animal behaviour could be understood purely in physical and mechanical terms. . . . But according to Descartes, people are not like animals. People possess both a body and a soul; that is, their existence includes both a physical substance (*res extensa*) and a spiritual substance (*res cogitans*). . . . People, then, are utterly unlike the brutes.” Millard Schumaker, *Appreciating our Good Earth: Towards a Pertinent Theology of Nature* (Kingston, Ont.: Queen’s Theological College and Bay of Quinte Conference, The United Church of Canada, 1980), pp. 9–10.

Though some might accuse Aquinas and other medieval theologians of holding a similar view with their discussion of “rational souls,” we find much more determinative Aquinas’ view of a human as “an animal that laughs.” This, however, is not the kind of peculiar capacity that Cartesians have in mind when trying to distinguish humans from other animals! See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), 1a, 3, art. 4; 1a, 44, art. 1; 1a2ae, 51, art. 1.

second part of this paper will develop our purposive understanding of “image of God” in a trinitarian context, our emphasis on the Trinity being in opposition to an implicit Deism<sup>11</sup> which is countenanced in much of contemporary theology. Since, contra Gustafson, we believe it is from within a trinitarian context that the anthropocentrism so characteristic of our lives can best be challenged, we will devote the second part of our paper to putting both the doctrine of creation and the concept of image of God in a trinitarian context.

We are well aware of the ways in which our call for a serious theological consideration of these issues can be quite tiresome. Confronted by the horrors of our cruelty towards animals, we are tempted to use any arguments we can to stop it. This temptation is made even more enticing by the fact that our society gives theological language almost no status for operating in the realm of public discourse. At most, theological language is allowed credence for guiding people’s so-called private lives, and, more often than not, it is thought to be pure mystification. Thus, we find ourselves sorely tempted to use a language that has greater currency in the marketplace of public discourse when addressing issues of public concern. This leads to the third stumbling block for our discussion, because, at present—whether the issue is homelessness or homeownership, minorities or majorities, humans or animals—arguments are almost always couched in the language of “rights.” Though this is not the appropriate context to attempt a full-scale critique of the notion of rights, the compelling reasons for avoiding this language require brief mention.

Our hunch is that the language of rights finds mass appeal in a society where individuals can no longer sustain their civic order on the basis of shared ends and purposes. The very idea of inalienable rights is the product of individuals who no longer trust their lives to the hands of those they live with, and who, thus, seek to protect themselves through having trumps against the actions of their neighbors.<sup>12</sup> There are, of course, other accounts of rights besides this rather individualistic one, but this account is still quite prevalent. Moreover, we also see the appeal of universal, inalienable rights, as they seem so “humane” and “enlightened” when compared with particularistic and retrograde moral traditions, such as those associated with Judaism and Christianity!

Ironically though, this use of the language of “rights” embodies the very anthropocentrism that is antithetical to the goals of those who participate in the movement known as “animal rights.” For the language of “rights”—understood as inalienable rather than as correl-

<sup>11</sup>By ‘implicit deism’ we have in mind the view in which “God” is basically understood as “first cause,” which results in a faulty view that understands creation solely in terms of the accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. This error is further exacerbated by reading the Genesis 1 and 2 accounts as being the creation of a world that is more or less the same as the world in which we presently dwell.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

ative of social duties—presupposes that those who are candidates for these inalienable rights are agents with the kind of rationality that is generally ascribed only to humans, and thus this view of rights is inextricably bound up with the Cartesian perspective that we criticized earlier. Most troubling from our theological perspective is that, within this account, animals only have status as a reflection of human interest. Furthermore, the very notion of inalienable rights presupposes a world at war with itself, which is exactly antithetical to Christian convictions about God's good end for creation.<sup>13</sup>

The situation is not significantly different if we understand "rights" from a contractarian perspective of human society, where humans come together and agree that they have certain rights that cannot be overridden. This conception of "rights" also precludes the possibility of the participation of animals in the social contract, except as a reflection of the interests of particular humans. As any rights theorist knows, having an interest is very different from having a right.

From this all too brief discussion, we conclude that to ascribe rights to an animal may, in the short run, be a strategy for its survival, but, in the long run, this language will simply maintain the current understandings of and practices in relation to other animals that continually bring about their destruction. Our reasoning is as follows:

We have already noted our suspicion that we live in a society unable to sustain, either conceptually or practically, the language of rights. This inability is demonstrated every time rights are overridden in favor of a compelling interest. If this is the situation with human rights, how successful can one be in an appeal to animal rights? To give animals rights is to broaden radically traditional uses of the term "rights" into an almost all-encompassing term. From a purely pragmatic viewpoint, rather than having to struggle against a society that is for the most part unwilling to see the language of rights used in the way animal rights activists would like, animal rights activists would be better off coming up with a new concept. Our suspicion is that many animal rights activists, like many human rights activists, do not really know what they are advocating when they call for "rights," besides saying there are certain things we really do not want to be seen done to humans or animals, and the way to prevent these horrible activities is to say humans and animals have a "right" to protection from these horrible activities.

We think that Christians have far richer resources by which to address the question of how we should relate to other animals; any appeal to "rights" pales in comparison with the peace and love of Christ to which the Christian is called. Thus, while we do not wish to argue for "animal rights," neither do we wish to argue for human

<sup>13</sup>This claim may be confusing to those who think of "creation" as synonymous with "nature," for it often appears that nature, too, is at war with itself. In the second part of the paper we will argue that "creation" must be understood as something both radically different and more widely encompassing than "nature."

rights. Andrew Linzey, perhaps the foremost Christian advocate of animal rights, attacks the position of those who will argue for human rights but not animal rights and claims that “the most consistent position is that . . . of Christians who *consistently* refrain from all such [rights] language.”<sup>14</sup> Here, Linzey is perfectly correct. However, Linzey then errs when he assumes that “it is *inevitable*, however, that ‘rights’ language *should* have an appeal to Christians.”<sup>15</sup> For this appeal only becomes inevitable when the Christian community can no longer articulate and sustain its own particular convictions about human relations with other animals. Contra Linzey, there simply are no good theological reasons why “rights” language should appeal to Christians. It will be the task of the second part of the paper to develop this alternative theological account.

The final hazard—one relating to our earlier remark about the power our sinful practices exert over us—is our fear of criticizing our most impressive institutions. This is particularly the case when we realize that what are thought to be our most humane institutions—the medical profession, those dedicated to the development of food for the hungry—have routinized cruelty toward animals. However, we take these horrible truths to be reminders that good and humane people are capable of doing terrible things, as we gentiles well know from our participation in the holocaust.

## II

We have outlined only briefly what we take to be some of the major obstacles impeding Christians from even raising questions about the relationship between humans and other animals. The first section challenges the presumption that the issue should be posed in terms of questions such as, How should *we* treat animals? or Do animals have rights? Instead, we believe the place to begin is with God’s creation of the world.

Of course, the notion of creation is not self-explanatory. In much of the literature devoted to questions concerning how Christians conceive of the environment and of animals, the term “creation” too easily becomes synonymous with “nature” and reasons why nature is important. In such an account, the affirmation of creation becomes simply a kind of romanticism toward nature. Though we stand in awe of our so-called “natural world,” we certainly do not intend to stand for this kind of romanticism.<sup>16</sup> We discussed earlier how the language of “inalienable rights” presupposes a world at war with itself, a view

<sup>14</sup>Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (New York, Crossroad, 1987), p. 72 (Linzey’s emphasis).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.* (our emphasis)

<sup>16</sup>As we will try to show, it is profoundly important that creation does not become just another way of praising the importance of “Mother Earth.” Much has been written already about how Christians need to learn more from Native American attitudes about the earth, the sky, and the water. While we admire much that native peoples know about the nature of their world and how they should live in it, we are not sure how, if at all, these insights can be related to what should inform Christians on this matter.

that is antithetical to the Christian understanding of creation.<sup>17</sup> However, advocates of “inalienable rights” and other analogous viewpoints may rightfully argue that the natural world is also at war with itself. We are acutely aware that animals still eat animals, even under the best of conditions. We cannot avoid the fact that hawks eat rabbits, lions eat gazelles, cats eat mice, and that, if necessary, we human animals eat all of them.

Acknowledging the tragedy of the natural world being at war with itself inevitably leads us to “survival of the fittest” conclusions, unless we realize that “nature” and “creation” are not referring to the same world. Those who believe that “nature” and “creation” are synonymous often buy into an implicit Deism (which sometimes also appears under the name “theism”), believing that God functions primarily as “the first cause of it all” and thus presuming that “nature” is coextensive with what Christians mean by “creation.”

This implicit Deism fails on two counts. First, it does not recognize that the world created in the Genesis accounts is radically different from our present “natural” world, and, thus, it ignores the significance of the Fall as an account of our present tragedy. Even more significantly, those who buy into this implicit Deism are oblivious to the fact that Christian convictions about creation must be correlated with christological and eschatological convictions, since Christian convictions about creation are trinitarian convictions. On our trinitarian view, “nature” must be understood as “creation in bondage.”

The Westminster Catechism begins by asking us “What is the chief end of man?” This question—a question concerning the ultimate end for life—is the one with which Christians must begin if they are to understand themselves and other animals. So, minus the sexism and anthropocentrism of the original question, let us begin by discussing the chief end for all God’s creation.

We have criticized the view that understands nature and creation as coextensive and its attendant survivalist ethic. This “survivalist ethic” is frequently underwritten by theologians, not only on the issue of human relations with animals but also in debates concerning nuclear weaponry.<sup>18</sup> It is particularly important that the position being argued for in this section be distinguished from this survivalist ethic, because Christians simply do not have an overriding stake in the survival of the earth or our own survival. As God’s creatures, our “chief end” is not to survive but to be capable of serving one another, and in doing so to

<sup>17</sup>For a massive critique of theories which assume an ontology of violence, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>18</sup>For a defense of a “survivalist ethic” on the issue of nuclear weapons, see the United Methodist Church (U.S.A.) Council of Bishops’ *In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986). See also Paul Ramsey’s critique of this document in his *Speak up for Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the United Methodist Bishops’ Pastoral Letter “In Defense of Creation”* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).

serve as signs of the kingdom of God. In comparison to this service, survival is a secondary commitment.

Thus, we must not allow the Christian doctrine of creation to function as an apology for a survivalist ethic, for, in the end, this ethic requires us to sacrifice not only many fellow human beings to guarantee human survival, but also any other animal that may possibly help guarantee human survival. We oppose this survivalist ethic because we believe the Christian affirmation that we are God's creatures means that neither our lives nor the lives of other animals are at our disposal. This Christian affirmation requires a very different attitude towards the world.

These kinds of reflections help make it clear that the doctrine of creation is by no means self-explanatory. Without a theologically disciplined account of creation, one easily arrives at a survivalist ethic. When the exponent of this survivalist ethic understands God fundamentally as first cause, creation is thought of as the way Christians, and perhaps other religious people, explain the fact that the world had to have a beginning. On this view, creation becomes an explanation rather than a confession.

Yet, in Christian theology, the last thing creation does is to serve as an explanation. Rather, creation is a christological and an eschatological affirmation derived from the Christian confession that the God who has discovered us in Jesus of Nazareth, the God who intends for us to share in God's peaceable kingdom, is a saving God from the beginning. Christians do not believe that the notion of God as creator is conceptually self-sufficient, to which one then has the option, if one so chooses, of specifying further God's nature in terms of Jesus of Nazareth. On the contrary, creation is part of a narrative of fulfillment for Christians; from our conviction that God redeems all of creation, we learn that God, having created all things, wills that all things enjoy their status as God's creatures.

As for how Scripture is thus to be read, a Christian understanding of creation cannot be guided first and foremost by Genesis 1 and 2. In fact, these passages must be read in the light of our redemption in Christ and our end in the kingdom of God, an end to which Christians are guided by the Holy Spirit. More specifically, Christians cannot understand creation solely in terms of Genesis 1:31—"Behold, it was very good"—but must read this passage in conjunction with Romans 8:19–21 and Isaiah 11, where the original creation is understood in relation to the present bondage of creation and the dawning eschatology of the new creation.

In light of the scriptural witness that humans and other animals share in the ultimate end, which is God's peaceable kingdom, we thus believe that each and every creature is created to manifest God's glory. Animals will not manifest God's glory insofar as their lives are measured in terms of human interests, but only insofar as their lives serve God's good pleasure. Similarly, humans manifest God's glory

when we learn to see animals as God sees animals, recognizing that animals exist not to serve us, but rather for God's good pleasure.

Understanding creation in this way decisively challenges many traditional theological efforts that make a sharp distinction between our status as humans and the status of other animals. Too often, the story of God's creation of humans in God's image has been read falsely as licensing humankind to dominate the animal world. Thus, the language of dominion in Genesis 1:28 is used to justify human manipulation of the rest of God's creation for humanity's own ends, thereby underwriting the presumption that all the world is created for the flourishing of humankind.

However, as Schumaker makes clear, this sense of dominion cannot be justified theologically. At most, the concept of dominion can only mean that God has chosen humanity to be an image of God's own rule in the world. In other words, God appoints humans as rulers not because humans hold any special intrinsic trait, but simply because of God's sovereign will; God simply chooses humans for the task of acting as God's deputies amidst God's good creation.<sup>19</sup> Thus, following Schumaker, Christians must not understand "image of God" to be based on any metaphysical or morphological difference between humans and other animals but must reconceive "image of God" in terms of the particular purposes that God assigns to humans. Specifically, Christians need to discover what it means for a human to act as an image of God's *rule* in the world.

At this point, we realize that our understanding of how Christians are to rule over animals is directly connected with how we understand God to be ruling over us. If we are to throw off the view that dominion means domination over the other animals, we must turn to a trinitarian understanding of what it means for humans to be in the image of God.<sup>20</sup> Christians cannot read "image of God" in Genesis 1 apart from what it means for them to be "image of Christ." Ultimately, true likeness to God is not found in the "image of God" of Genesis 1, nor even in the present striving to live in the image of Christ, but will only come at the end of time when we shall see God face to face. Jürgen Moltmann puts this point very well, "The restoration for new creation of the likeness to God comes about in the fellowship of believers with

<sup>19</sup>Schumaker gives this purposive understanding of the *imago Dei* a historical base by arguing, following Mendenhall, that the Genesis story is to be read as patterned after treaties of Mesopotamian feudal empires. According to such a reading, "Eden is to be considered as like a vassal state in the empire of the Great King, God: Adam is to be seen as . . . a governor appointed by God to manage Eden" (Schumaker, *Appreciating our Good Earth: Toward a Pertinent Theology of Nature*, p. 12.). Schumaker goes on to argue that this idea in itself is very difficult for us to accept. We are very suspicious of any kind of monarch or hierarchy, therefore, we cannot distinguish between the domination of a monarch and the domination of a tyrant, or more basically, the leadership of anyone we have not elected. Christians, too, forget to make this distinction when they forget that what they long for is the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of love and peace, rather than one of tyranny and oppression.

<sup>20</sup>For a critique of the view of dominion as domination, see Janet Martin Soskice, "Creation as Revelation," *Theology*, xciv, (January/February, 1991).

Christ: since [Christ] is the messianic *imago Dei*, believers become *imago Christi*, and through this enter upon the path which will make them *gloria Dei* on earth.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, Christian lives are to display this purposive understanding of the image of God. In Genesis 1, the image of God is part of the vision of a peaceable creation, both between human and animal and between animal and animal, a peace where it is not necessary to sacrifice one for the other. Similarly, for Christians to live as the image of Christ means to live according to the call of the kingdom of God. In Gethsemene—in taking up the way of the Cross—Christ shows us clearly that the way of the kingdom of God is not the way of violence. In reaching the ultimate end of all our strivings, in the peaceable kingdom of God, we shall finally live in true shalom with all creatures of God.

### III

A prime reason why Christians have such difficulty with the question of what it means to live in the image of God lies in a failure to live our lives in the faith, hope, and love of the Trinity. This is particularly true with regard to our inability to live our lives with a trinitarian view of our history and of time, and thus of our inability to live in the light of our ultimate end and to see animals in light of their ultimate end.

To see our place in the world in such a manner is to think of our lives in community with all flesh. However, the temptation of this line of thinking is then to think that what it means to be God's creature is to see ourselves in continuity with nature and the animals. The difficulty with putting the matter in this way is that it privileges the notions of nature and animals, assuming that Christians know how to distinguish between nature and animals on grounds separate from our knowledge of God. We are not denying such classifications are possible, as they obviously exist all around us, and we constantly use them. Our challenge is to root out the origins of such classifications and to know why they are being produced and who is producing them.

We are aware that the claim that creation is a christological and eschatological affirmation will appear odd and probably unnecessary for consideration of the place of animals. However, we believe that this claim is extremely important, as the very phrase "the place of animals" illustrates. We find problematic the very notion that we already have a standpoint that requires us to determine a place for the other animals, because this standpoint presumes a sense of power on the part of humans and a sense of separation between ourselves and our fellow creatures.

To say that creation is an eschatological notion is to say that the universe is part of the drama that is not of its own making. That is, creation is part of a story Christians learn through being initiated into a

<sup>21</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 226.

community that has learned to live appropriately to that story. Since one cannot understand creation apart from initiation into such a story, we do not believe that creation is something that all people can affirm. Rather, the confession of creation is something made by a group of people who are called to be the church in a world of people who do not know that they are, in fact, "creatures."

Therefore, Christians cannot separate their understanding of creation from their ecclesial stance. The church's confession of God as creator is also a confession of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit; thus, confession of the Trinity is necessary if Christians are to affirm that God is creator of all. For the church finds in Jesus not simply the restorer of a lost creation known separately from Jesus himself, but rather in Jesus the church discovers the very nature of the created order. In short, in Christ we know that creation was not an act in and for itself but an act carried out for a purpose. This is what is meant by saying that God's creation of the world is an eschatological confession. The original creation is aimed at a new creation, the creation of a community of all flesh that glorifies God.

Thus, we believe the church is faithful when it lives out the fact that nature has a sacred element, not because Christians wish to uphold or preserve nature for its own sake, but because nature is creation in travail, and, as such, has its own end to glorify God, rather than to serve humans. Thus, Christians must strive to live the relationship between human and animal life in terms of the common end being life in the peaceable kingdom, the kingdom of God. In addition, Christians will strive to read Jesus' parables of the kingdom as indications that our everyday actions may be signs of the power of the Christ who will bring about the coming of that kingdom.

#### IV

If we have been right so far about the trinitarian context of creation and of the church's participation in it, we think this puts the practical issues of Christians' relationship to the other animals in a different framework. In this respect, we think that there is a significant similarity between the issues of pacifism and vegetarianism. For just as we believe that Christians are not called to be nonviolent because nonviolence is a strategy to free the world from war, but because as Christians we cannot conceive of living other than nonviolently in a world of war, so it may also be true that Christians are called to live nonviolently towards animals in a world of meat-eaters. Thus, the perspective that we have presented that leads us towards vegetarianism is not one that can be for everyone; rather, it is the perspective that a particular people called to be the church must embody in their relationship to other animals, given that Christians live in God's space and time. So Christian vegetarianism might be understood as a witness to the world that God's creation is not meant to be at war with itself. Such a witness does not entail romantic conceptions of nature or of our

fallen creation but rather is an eschatological act signifying that our lives are not captured by the old order.

One person who understood the logic of our position, but who would not go along with it to its practical conclusion was Karl Barth. Barth knew that the killing of animals was not part of God's vision for peaceableness, but then backed off from the inevitable conclusion by saying that to stop eating animals entirely would be "wanton anticipation" of the kingdom of God.<sup>22</sup> Even though we believe this response is less than faithful to the gospel, those who take this view still at least need to accept the following: Those in the Christian community who would eat animals bear the burden of proof. This can be understood in much the same way that just war reflection works in the Christian community: presupposing that nonviolence is the fundamental stance of Christians. Christian just war theory is most appropriately understood as a theory of exceptions, exceptions for allowing Christians to engage in limited forms of violence in order to protect the neighbor.<sup>23</sup> Analogously, those Christians who cannot abstain entirely from eating animals need to develop similar criteria of "just" meat-eating.<sup>24</sup>

If any form of meat-eating is to be justified for Christians, it must be understood as animals making a sacrifice for us that we might live, analogous to the way soldiers are seen to be making a sacrifice of their lives for their nation-state, empire or tribe. This is but a reminder that, as Christians, we cannot understand the story of our lives apart from the importance of sacrifice, because God sacrificed his son Jesus that we might live.

We are aware that the language of sacrifice is dangerous language, and we have no desire to underwrite the way this language of sacrifice has so often been used in the past, and no doubt will continue to be used, to justify all kinds of murderous deeds. However, Christians cannot give up the language of sacrifice if they are to be the kind of people Jesus has made possible. After all, it is the great good news that, in our eucharistic celebrations, God has called us to walk in the way of the sacrifice of Jesus—the way of the cross and the way of resurrection life—so that the world might know that we are meant to live at peace with God, with one another, and with the other animals. In this time between the times, the good news for the other animals is that Christians do not need to ask the other animals to be part of a sacrifice that has no purpose in God's kingdom.

<sup>22</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), pp. 355–356.

<sup>23</sup>On this issue, we might ask how the possibility of human starvation might make a difference in how we understand our relationship with other animals.

<sup>24</sup>We also think it important to mention the heightened significance of saying "grace" before meals for those who continue to eat animals, particularly that element of thanking God for the sacrifice animals made so that they might eat them.