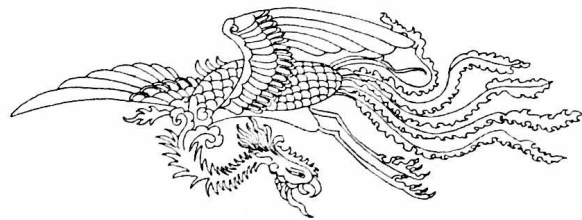


A
COMMUNION
of
SUBJECTS

Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics



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EDITORS



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Practicing the Presence of God

A Christian Approach to Animals

JAY MCDANIEL

Can Christianity, “good news” for humanity as the very term “Gospel” proclaims, become good news for animals? I write as a Christian, influenced by process theology and other sources, who believes that Christianity, which has often been bad news for animals, can become good news for them in the future. I hope this essay will be of service not only to Christians who care about animals and who hope that Christianity can become more sensitive to them, but also to people of other religions or of no religion, who are hopeful that Christianity might become “good news for animals,” if not for the sake of Christians themselves, then at least for the sake of animals. The essay is divided into seven sections. I outline their contents as follows, so that you might read them in whatever order you wish.

The first section suggests that the transformation of Christianity into “good news for animals” requires an encounter with the commodifying effects of consumer culture and a par-

ticipation in what one process theologian, John Cobb, calls “the Earthist movement.”¹ The organizing themes of this volume, inspired by Thomas Berry, offer a similarly profound vision. In this section I also draw upon an international document, the Earth Charter, the principles of which are clear statements of Earthist sentiments.

The second section explains why, even though many Christians are now developing “ecological theologies,” there is still a need to ask: “But can Christianity become good news for animals?” My argument is that ecological theologians too easily emphasize “environmental ethics” and “social justice for humans” over “compassion for individual animals,” when, in fact, all three are important.² A responsible Christian ethic will seek to be good news for individual animals; good news for species of animals and plants; and, of course, good news for people, particularly the poor and powerless. It will try to combine animal welfare, environmen-

tal ethics, and human rights, hopeful that communities can be created in which all three are operative.

The third section considers negative and positive traditions within Christianity concerning animals, suggesting that Christians need to repent of the former and learn from the latter. This involves reclaiming what I call "the Franciscan alternative," which recognizes that individual animals have value "in and for themselves" even as they also have value for one another and for God, and that they are part of a diverse and interconnected whole which has unique value for God.

The fourth section offers more precise definitions of the words "Christianity," "animals," and "good news." I suggest that "Christianity" is not a static set of ideas, but rather a family of people "in process," and that this family is capable of growth and change, that "animals" are ensouled creatures, whose members lie within a variety of biological classes, but whose common characteristic is that they have rich capacities for feeling and goal-guided action, accompanied by intense capacities for pain, and that "good news" for animals involves treating animals kindly, protecting their species, respecting their autonomy, recognizing their independent relations with God, and seeing them as revelations of divine presence.

The final sections turn to three dimensions of Christian life in terms of which Christianity can become "good news for animals": practical action, theological understanding, and spiritual depth. By "practical action" I mean love-in-action: that is, willing responsiveness to the needs of living beings, animals included. By "theological understanding" I mean discursive insight concerning the nature of things, including the nature of animals in their relation to God. And by "spiritual depth" I mean inner availability to the Breath of Life, as exemplified in ecological contemplation.

In the fifth section I turn to practical action. I suggest that becoming "good news for animals"

involves following the norms of the eco-justice movement, particularly its emphasis on solidarity with victims, and then, as a way of concretizing these norms, following the guidelines of the Humane Society of the United States.³ I hope that these norms and guidelines are sufficient to answer the question: How should we Christians treat animals?

In the sixth section I turn to theological understanding. I note three sources which can be of service to a theology sensitive to animals: the trinitarian theology of Andrew Linzey, process theology, and feminist theology of the sort developed by the neo-Thomist theologian, Elizabeth Johnson.⁴ I allude to a dialogue between Johnson and myself, in which we jointly affirm that animals are lured by God as an indwelling Spirit, albeit in a persuasive rather than coercive way; that this Spirit also shares in the suffering and joys of animals, on their own terms and for their own sakes; and that, should there be life after death for humans, it ought also be available for animals.⁵ This dialogue shows the degree to which certain forms of contemporary theology, process and feminist, are willing to move beyond anthropocentric habits of thought toward animal-sensitive understandings of God.

In the seventh section, I turn to the spiritual dimension of Christian life, and more specifically to what Johnson calls "ecological contemplation."⁶ Other theologians have other names for it. The Protestant theologian Sallie McFague calls it "seeing with the loving eye;" while the Orthodox theologian Kallistos Ware calls it "the contemplation of nature."⁷ Following Ware, but also in the spirit of McFague and Johnson, I suggest that contemplative seeing involves seeing all things, animals included, in their particularity, as subjects in and for themselves; combined with a recognition that, in this particularity, they reveal the light of God. I propose that, in the last analysis, it is only when Christians come to see animals in this way, as subjects of their own lives and also as holy icons, that

they—we—can be good news for animals in a sustained way.

By way of conclusion, I ask the question: And how might Christians enter into this way of seeing? What kinds of spiritual disciplines are available to us? I suggest that the most important discipline will be to spend time in the presence of animals themselves, not as they appear on television screens or in cartoons, but as they appear in palpable, physical presence. We Christians can become good news for animals, only if we allow ourselves to be awed, again and again, by the sheer beauty of their mysterious presence.

I suggest further that, for the economically and temporally privileged in our world, who have the means and time to leave the city, this may involve spending time in wilderness areas. But for many in our world, spending time with animals can occur only in cities and at home. Toward this end, I recommend a form of spiritual discipline which is often considered sentimental and patronizing by environmentalists, but which may well be necessary for urban peoples if they are to develop “the loving eye” in the age of consumerism. It is spending time with companion animals: dogs and cats, for example, or dwarf hamsters or snakes. My suggestion is that, if we are to develop the loving eye with animals, it will need to begin, for many, with the loving touch—with the knowledge of the life of an animal “other” with whom we are in daily relationship.

Back, then, to the question: Can Christianity become good news for animals? I hope this essay provides an introduction to this question and offers various ways for answering, with hope and humility, “Yes.”

The Earthist Movement

Christianity seeks to be good news to the world. Thomas Berry and other ecological theologians rightly argue that “the world” does not simply mean “the world of human beings.” It means the earth and its creatures, including humans, and

also the stars and galaxies. The “world” is that diverse whole in which God took deep delight on the seventh day of creation.

It is difficult to know how Christianity can be good news to the galaxies. Perhaps Christians, like others, are “good news” to the heavens when they are awed by the womb-like presence of a dark and starlit sky, feeling both insignificant yet included in a deeper mystery many name “God.” In any case, it is clear that Christianity can be, or at least should be, good news for the earth and its creatures. This is not because Christianity is the best religion or because all people should convert to it. Each religion has its gifts and liabilities. Mass conversion to Christianity would destroy part of the world’s religious diversity, which itself contributes to the deeper mystery. Rather it is because slightly less than a third of the world’s population claim “Christianity” as their religion, and they will inevitably influence the world for good or ill. They can become “good news” for the earth by following the first four principles of the Earth Charter (see Steven Rockefeller, “Earth Charter, Ethics, and Animals,” in this volume). They can respect the earth and all life, care for the community of life in all its diversity, strive to build free, just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful societies and secure earth’s abundance for present and future generations.⁸ Should Christians decide that following these guidelines, understood as hymns of hope, is part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, earth would indeed receive good news. Of course, if Christians follow these guidelines, they—we—ought to do so in cooperation with people of other religions, and no religion, who do the same.

In our time, there is perhaps only one religion that is almost incapable of bringing good news to the earth, because its core teachings are inherently un-ecological. That religion is Consumerism. It is an overconsuming lifestyle characteristic of about a fifth of the world’s population, but aspired to by many others, as well as a set of attitudes and values, promulgated twenty-four hours a day by the media and Internet. Its

priests are public policy makers who believe that the world is, or ought to be, a global marketplace united by a worldwide consumer culture. Its “evangelists” are the advertisers who display the products of growth through advertisements, convincing us that we are not “happy” or “whole” unless we possess what they sell. Its holy icons are window displays in department stores. And its church is the shopping mall. One of its core teachings is that each year we are saved, or made whole, by consuming more than we did the year before.

This religion is “bad news” for earth and its creatures in several ways. It leads us to think that the planet is a stockpile of unlimited resources, there for the taking, and that we have no obligations to preserve its resources for future generations of humans and other creatures. It leads us to reduce various forms of land—wetlands and grasslands, for example—to real estate that can be bought and sold in the marketplace. And it leads us to think of plants and animals as mere commodities with no value apart from their usefulness to humans.

The Protestant theologian John Cobb suggests that consumerism is the popular expression of a recent development in world history, which he calls “Economism.” This is his name for a way of structuring public life that measures almost all human interactions in economic terms, and that takes economic growth for its own sake as the central organizing principle. Cobb argues that Economism is gradually replacing Nationalism as a central organizing principle in many modern societies; just as, approximately three centuries ago, Nationalism replaced Christianity, which was the central organizing principle of the West during the Middle Ages. Economism is the public side of much modern life. Consumerist attitudes, with their commodifying tendencies, are the subjective side.

If Christianity is to live up to its ecological potential, and if it is to grow beyond its ecological liabilities, it will have to do so in the face of Economism. It will have to exercise what bib-

lical theologian Walter Brueggemann calls “the prophetic imagination,” which lies in critiquing the dominant modes of thought and practice in one’s age, insofar as they are unjust and unsustainable; and opening oneself to fresh possibilities for new and hopeful futures. Such imagination was evident in Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Jesus, so Brueggemann explains, and it can be part of Christian life today.

How, then, can Christians live into this prophetic calling? One way is to understand that they are part of a larger social movement—a people’s movement, if you will—which Cobb, as mentioned earlier, calls “Earthism.” This is Cobb’s name for a social movement, found in many different circles today under different names, which puts devotion to the earth and humanity ahead of devotion to the economy and consumer values. The spirit of this movement is found in people of many different religions and also of no religion. According to Cobb, Earthism can overcome the dominance of Economism only if it has the support of people from many traditions and communities.⁹ If Christianity is to become good news for the earth, it will need to lend its support to the Earthist hope.

Environmental Ethics and Animal Welfare

Of course, Christianity has not often lived up to its ecological promise. It has not often enough been “Earthist” in orientation. Often it has fostered anthropocentric forms of thought, feeling, and action that neglect the kinship of humans with other creatures and presume that the earth and its creatures are but instruments for human use. This instrumentalist approach to the planet and nonhuman creatures has been reinforced by dualistic attitudes that elevate men over women, spirit over flesh, mind over matter, reason over feeling, urban over rural. All of this has been well-documented in theological critiques of the Christian past, particularly by feminist theologians.

For ecological theologians, feminist and otherwise, the “good news” is that this “bad news” is not “all the news.” There are also traditions within the Christian past that are antidotes to anthropocentrism and can provide nourishment for a healthier future. Both sides of this equation—the bad news of unecological ways of thinking and the good news of ecological ways of thinking—have now been highlighted in many books on ecological theology. These are well summarized in the published proceedings from the Harvard Conference on Christianity and Ecology. My aim here is to extend the discussion by asking a new question: Can Christianity become good news for animals?

The question is important because, despite their good intentions, even ecologically sensitive theologians can sometimes neglect individual animals. By “individual” animals I do not mean Cartesian individuals. I am not imagining animals as disembodied souls whose relations with their own bodies and environments are external. Rather I am imagining them as relational souls, whose very selves are creative responses to bodily influences and environmental surroundings. If individual human beings are persons-in-community, then so are individual animals. They are subjects of their own lives, either consciously or unconsciously, and their subjectivity—their awareness and feeling, their creativity and intelligence—is itself a creative response to such influences.

Ecological theologies come in many forms: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical; mystical, feminist, prophetic, and philosophical. Amid their diversity, they rightly encourage a “care for the community of life in all its diversity,” but then they can easily fall into one or both of two traps. Either they can so emphasize the diversity of various “species” that they forget the individual creatures who constitute the species. Or they can recognize the importance of individual animals, but then so emphasize the instrumental value of these individuals to their species and to ecosystems that

they forget the intrinsic value of these individuals in and for themselves. In these two ways, ecological theologies sometimes slide into a one-sided emphasis on “environmental ethics” at the expense of “animal welfare.” They satisfy the legitimate concerns of the Sierra Club, but forget the concerns of the Humane Society.

Diverging Paths Within Christianity?

Back, then, to the question. Can Christianity become good news for animals? I use the word “become,” with its future emphasis. The point is painfully obvious to many who have deep respect for animals, who find joy in their presence, who are concerned with the suffering humans too often inflict upon them, and who wish that Christianity might validate such feelings. Some of these people are Christian; others are post-Christians who long since rejected Christianity as hopelessly anti-animal. For the most disillusioned among them, the only “good news” about Christianity is that it permits, and even encourages, repentance and conversion. Their hope is that Christians will repent of their attitudes toward animals, and convert to a more compassionate approach.

THE NEGATIVE TRADITIONS

Let us begin by addressing the negative aspects of the tradition, because they have been dominant historically, before we turn to the positive traditions, which I take them to be the heart and soul of the Christian approach to the world.

Unfortunately, on the negative side, there is much of which to repent. The anti-animal aspects of the Christian past have been well documented in various books, including *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology*. The book is co-written by the most prominent of animal rights theologians, Andrew Linzey of Mansfield College at Oxford, and a professor of Judaism at the University of Wales, Dan Cohn-Sherbok,

also a contributor to the present volume. These authors point to five teachings that are found in Judaism and Christianity, all of which contribute to prejudice against animals. They are: (1) that animals are “put here for us,” (2) that some animals are inherently unclean, (3) that some animals are meant to be sacrificed for ritual purposes, (4) that animals are slaves to human need, and (5) that animals have no rational soul, mind, or sentience.¹⁰ Each of these five teachings deserves extensive discussion. It is arguable, for example, that some of the sacrifice traditions involve a respect for individual animals because they recognize that animals belong to God, not to humans, and because the very idea that they are “sacrificed” presupposes their great value.¹¹ Nevertheless, Linzey and Cohn-Sherbok argue that all five teachings—including those which teach that animals are to be sacrificed—are morally problematic because they reduce animals to mere instruments, if not for humans, then for God.

The first four are found within biblical traditions themselves and are the common symbolic heritage of Judaism and Christianity. In Christianity, even Jesus is understood as a sacrifice, albeit the last one. He is the “lamb of God” who, once and for all, took away the sins of the world.

Equally influential within later historical Christianity, however, are the ideas that animals are “here for us” and that they are “slaves.” According to Linzey, these two themes recur time and again within Christian theology, represented by notable theologians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. The final teaching—that animals are mere machines—is a more modern and Cartesian way of thinking. In our time, this teaching is intensified by consumerist habits of thought which, as noted above, tend to reduce all living beings—plants as well as animals—into commodities for exchange in the marketplace.

As I move toward more positive contributions from Christianity, it is important for us to keep the negative tradition in mind. Perhaps two

illustrations can serve as reminders. The first is Thomas Aquinas’ view, following Aristotle, that animals are here for us, and that we can use them as we wish:

There is no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is. Now the order of things is such that the imperfect are for the perfect. . . . It is not unlawful if man uses plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man as the Philosopher (Aristotle) states.¹²

We rightly note that “the order of things” to which Aquinas appeals functions as a legitimation of a certain approach to animals to which he is already committed. Here “theology” functions as a legitimation of domination.

The second illustration is Martin Luther’s exegesis of Genesis 9:3, where God permits meat-eating. Luther writes:

In this passage God sets himself up as a butcher; for with his word he slaughters and kills the animals that are suited for food, in order to make up, as it were, for the great sorrow that Noah experienced during the flood. For this reason God thinks Noah ought to be provided for sumptuously now.¹³

Apparently, even God is more interested in the gastronomic needs of Noah than the suffering of the animals. Here, too, a hermeneutics of suspicion seems appropriate.

THE POSITIVE TRADITIONS

Within historical Christianity, these negative traditions are dominant, but they are not the whole of the tradition. Christianity contains less influential traditions that serve as correctives to each of the five themes identified above. For the sake of balance, I will name five of them.

First and foremost, there are various themes within the Bible that are friendly to animals. These include the injunction to give animals rest

on the sabbath; the idea that animals are subject to divine purposes which are beyond human need; and the idea that animals, no less than humans, are beneficiaries of the messianic age. John Wesley, for one, took the latter idea to suggest that individual animals, no less than humans, will enjoy life-after-death.

While many imagine the Bible to be mostly “bad news” for animals, some theologians suggest the contrary. One contemporary theologian, Lukas Vischer, has written a book on animals for the World Council of Churches in which he argues that the Bible as a whole is good news for animals, or at least better news than modernity. In his words:

The testimony of the Bible sees humans and animals in close community. They are near to one another. Even though the special role of human beings is emphasized, scripture as a whole takes for granted that animals are part of the environment.

The degradation of the status of animals to objects finds no justification in the Bible. While the cultural roots of it are in antiquity, it is essentially the product of the sequence of modern thought since Descartes (1596–1650) which has made humankind the center of the universe and has seen the outside world as subject to the human mind.¹⁴

If Vischer is correct, this is good news indeed, because the Bible is, of course, the single most important document of the Christian tradition. If Christians were to think more biblically, and less Cartesianly, they might be better news for animals.

Additionally, however, there are four more resources within historical Christianity that are relevant to animals. These include many stories concerning Jesus’ companionship with, and kindness toward, animals in early Christian noncanonical texts, such as the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew; the teachings of various theologians within the history of Christianity—such as John Chrysostom and John Wesley—

for whom a kindly approach to animals is a sign of Christian compassion; the examples of many a saint, who—at least in depictions of the sixteenth century—were so often presented as companions to, and protectors of, animals. Francis of Assisi is a prime example, but there are many others. Finally, the additional resources within historical Christianity include ways of feeling, celebrated by many Christians, which, if extended to animals, can be quite good news. These include empathy for the vulnerable, non-violence, compassion, and what Kallistos Ware, has called “the contemplation of nature,” as mentioned earlier.

THE FRANCISCAN ALTERNATIVE

What I am suggesting, then, is that there is a “Franciscan” alternative to the dominant tradition, which might be called the “Instrumentalist” tradition. At the heart of this alternative is a recognition that individual animals are kin to us, that they have value in and for themselves, and that they are sacramental presences in human life. Of course, for some environmentalists, it may seem as if this Franciscan alternative neglects larger ecological considerations. It may seem sentimental, short-sighted, environmentally irresponsible, and a distraction from more important concerns. And, for human rights advocates, it may seem to neglect the needs of human beings.

These suspicions are not necessary. The heart of the Franciscan alternative lies in recognizing the value of all life, human life included, as was evident in the example of Francis himself. This “Franciscan” point of view is well captured in a single sentence from a 1998 Report to the World Council of Churches. The sentence defines that the World Council calls “the integrity of creation.” That “integrity” is: “the value of all creatures in and for themselves, for one another, and for God, and their interconnectedness in a diverse whole that has unique value for God.”

The Franciscan alternative I recommend lies in recognizing the value of creatures “in and

for themselves" as well as "for one another" and "for God" in a "diverse whole" that has "unique value" for God. Certainly human beings possess value "in and for themselves" even as they also possess value "for one another" and "for God." So do animals. And ecosystems possess value as making possible many forms of life, plant and animal. From the perspective of this report to the World Council of Churches, all of these values are contained within, and contribute to, the life of the divine.

In short, a Franciscan alternative is holistic rather than issue-dominated. It is not human-centered, animal-centered, plant-centered, or systems-centered, at the expense of these other centers; rather it is divinely centered, in a way that understands the divine life as including all life, individually and communally, within an interconnected, diverse whole.

To be sure, tradeoffs between these kinds of values are sometimes required. Honest decisions must sometimes be made between the value that some organisms—malarial mosquitoes, for example—have "in and for themselves," and the value that others—children whom they might infect—also have "in and for themselves."

A Franciscan approach, thus, cannot avoid ranking organisms, relative to context, for the sake of practical considerations. If a choice must be made between the mosquito and the child, it will probably choose the child. Just as it will chose between the tick and the dog. But the aim of a Franciscan approach is to make tradeoffs a last resort, not a first resort. The aim is to respect all life as much as possible, and then to live as lightly and gently as possible, realizing that "absolute moral purity" is an illusion, because life inevitably involves the taking of life. It is to live lovingly, and also to be honest about the reality of conflicting aims within the scope of life. If life is robbery, it involves robbing as little and as humanely as possible, with a humble realization that all life, not just human life, matters to God "in and for itself."

Back, then, to the question: Can Christianity seek to live lightly and gently with other crea-

tures? Can it become good news for animals? Let me define my terms more carefully.

Definitions

CHRISTIANITY

By "Christianity" I do not mean a static set of doctrines with a well-defined essence. Rather I mean a multicultural and multigenerational family of people, with roots in the healing ministry of Jesus, who seek to live what they call the Christian life. Among the world's Christians, 20 percent live in North America, 20 percent in Latin America, 15 percent in Africa, 30 percent in Europe, 14 percent in Asia, and 1 percent in Oceania. They represent and are influenced by many different traditions: Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and African Independent Churches. In certain parts of the world, the latter two traditions are the fastest growing. This means that, if Christianity is to become good news for animals, it will not be because a single theology, emerging in the West, will be a voice for that good news. Rather it will be because the Christian life, as lived from many different points of view and in many different ways, becomes good news for animals.

Should this happen, it will not be that Christians have adopted "care for animals" as an issue among issues. Rather it will be that they will have grown deeply dissatisfied with the many problems of the world, and seek a better way of living, of which care for animals will be a part. Their "preferential option for animals" will be part of a larger "preferential option for the earth." They will call this preferential option "the Christian life."

ANIMALS

By "animals" I mean something close to what the Bible means by creatures of "the flesh," that is, creatures with fragile tissue who have inner drives akin to humans and who can suffer in

ways that resemble human suffering. My point is not that such creatures are “better” than other creatures who are less like humans, but rather that we have moral obligations to these kinds of creatures that are different from our obligations to other kinds: sponges and mites, for example.

By “animals,” then, I mean something more specific than is found in an ordinary biology text. I mean members of the animal kingdom, primarily but not exclusively chordates, with brains and nervous systems similar to our own, who possess four properties. I mean creatures who can feel the presence of their surroundings; who, within the limits imposed by body chemistry and environmental influences, can choose and be guided by subjective aims for “living well” in situations in which they find themselves; who can suffer pain, distress, discomfort, anxiety, and fear; and who act as “relatively unified selves” or “subjective centers of awareness,” and thus who receive energy and influence from their bodies and initiate responses, much as we do.¹⁵

GOOD NEWS

By “good news” I mean a certain way of feeling, thinking, and behaving toward animals that include compassion, humility, and amazement. I mean treating animals—and more specifically nonhuman animals—with compassion and protecting them from cruelty and destruction, protecting the species to which they belong, such that earth is filled with biological diversity, recognizing animals as having intrinsic value quite apart from their usefulness to humans, recognizing that they have their own unique ways of being related to God, however God is understood, and recognizing that, precisely amid their uniqueness, they can reveal the mystery of divine presence to human beings.

From an animal’s perspective, the first two are probably the most important. We can imagine a Christian who treats individual animals with compassion and who protects the species,

but who does so with no interest in the “intrinsic value” of the individual, or who does not think that animals have independent relations with God, or who does not think that animals can reveal God to human beings. This person would be good news for animals in a minimal sense. This good news would then be completed if, in addition to treating animals ethically, she approached them with respect, amazement, and gratitude, as expressed in the three additional sensibilities named above.

Practical Action

ECO-JUSTICE AND THE HUMANE SOCIETY

If Christianity does become good news, that news will involve all three dimensions of Christian life: practical action, theological understanding, and spiritual depth. By practical action, I mean what Christians usually mean by “discipleship.” I mean moral behavior, guided by sound thinking and spiritual discernment, which promotes the well-being of animals. By “theological understanding” I mean voluntary assent to worldviews, stories, and ideas that help orient a person to the role and value of animals within the interconnected and diverse whole Christians call “creation.” And by “spiritual depth” I mean preverbal and predoctrinal modes of perceiving and feeling the presence of animals in their intrinsic value. Toward this end of practical action, two sources are particularly helpful: the eco-justice movement, which is now some three decades old, but has roots in the social gospel movement, and the guidelines of the Humane Society of the United States.

THE ECO-JUSTICE MOVEMENT

“Eco-justice” names a moral perspective that is part of the worldwide ecumenical movement within Christianity. It links concerns for justice and peace with concerns for environmental well-

being, so that ecology *and* justice, not ecology *or* justice, are the norm. Accordingly, as explained by Dieter Hessel, it “provides a dynamic framework for thought and action that fosters ecological integrity and the struggle for social and economic justice. It emerges through constructive human responses that serve environmental health and social equity together—for the sake of human beings and otherkind.”

Hessel explains further that this perspective is grounded in four basic norms:

- Solidarity with other people and creatures—companions, victims, and allies—in each community, reflecting deep respect for creation.
- Ecological sustainability—environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish; and using ecologically and socially appropriate technology.
- Sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing, which requires basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable or fair consumption.
- Participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good in common and the good of the commons.¹⁶

Eco-justice advocates belong to many different Christian traditions, and they have different racial, ethnic, sexual, economic, and gender identities. But they generally emphasize these four themes in their ethical deliberations, their advocacy, and their actions. To date, according to Hessel, eco-justice ethics has become operationally significant in relation to several major problems: energy production and use, sustainable development, population policy, food security, and environmental justice. It is also relevant to thought and action on endangered species, climate change, and equitable and sustainable livelihoods. “Operational significance” involves recommending public policies (economic and political) aimed at addressing these problems and then helping to create the political will to enact and enforce those policies.

My suggestion, then, is that Christianity can become good news for animals if participants in the eco-justice movement also begin to work on issues of animal abuse. Already they are working on the preservation of species, which is part of what it means to be “good news for animals.” The need is to combine such work with attention to individual animals and their suffering. In terms of sheer numbers, the most serious abuse lies in the rearing, transporting, and slaughtering of animals for “meat,” particularly under factory farm conditions. The animals at issue include chickens, pigs, cows, and lambs. In the interests of the first of the four norms identified above—solidarity with the victims—an eco-justice ethic will protest against the abuse of these animals, recommend consumer boycotts, and help develop legislation to prevent future abuse. Similar attention will be given to animals used for the testing of industrial products (soaps and shampoos), animals used for recreational purposes (rodeos, bullfights), and animals that are hunted for pure sport.

At the same time, an eco-justice approach will attend to connections between the abuse of animals in these settings and the abuse of human beings: e.g., the workers in slaughter houses, who are often poor and powerless, and whose working conditions are oftentimes inhumane. And it will attend to ways in which the abuse of animals is connected to other forms of violence in the world, as is exemplified in studies that suggest linkages with domestic violence and serial killing.

In short, an eco-justice approach to animals will not compartmentalize “the abuse of animals,” treating it as an issue disconnected from other forms of injustice and violence in the world, but will see this abuse as part of a larger and more destructive way of living in the world to which Christianity, and other religions as well, offer peaceful alternatives. The best hope for Christianity becoming good news for animals at an ethical level lies in eco-justice advocates adding animals to the creatures with whom

they feel solidarity, and then encouraging others to do the same.

HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

To the moral perspective of eco-justice, the Humane Society of the United States adds practical guidelines for treating animals, each of which can help in the application of eco-justice norms, and each of which can guide legislation and other forms of public policy. The guidelines are stated as mandates:

- It is wrong to kill animals needlessly or for entertainment or to cause animals pain or torment.
- It is wrong to fail to provide adequate food, shelter, and care for animals for which humans have accepted responsibility.
- It is wrong to use animals for medical, educational, or commercial experimentation or research, unless absolute necessity can be found and demonstrated, and unless this is done without causing the animal pain or torment.
- It is wrong to maintain animals that are to be used for food in a manner that causes them discomfort or denies them an opportunity to develop and live in conditions that are reasonably natural for them.
- It is wrong for those who eat animals to kill them in any manner that does not result in instantaneous unconsciousness. Methods employed should cause no more than minimum apprehension.
- It is wrong to confine animals for display, impoundment, or as pets in conditions that are not comfortable and appropriate.
- It is wrong to permit domestic animals to propagate to an extent that leads to overpopulation or misery.

An eco-justice movement that takes these guidelines seriously will, in fact, be good news for animals.

Theological Understanding

Ethics cannot really be separated from theology. How we understand God in relation to animals will influence how we treat them. Thus, if Christianity is to become good news for animals, it will require that traditional Christian teachings be displayed in their relevance to animal life.

In our time, the theologian who has done the most to show this relevance is Andrew Linzey. He has developed many ideas to show how trinitarian thinking would be relevant to animals. Suffice it to say that Linzey has himself developed a theology that satisfies these very demands. For Christians interested in what he calls "Animal Theology," his own trinitarian perspective is the model.

Two additional forms of theology that can help Christians become "good news for animals" are process and feminist theologies, particularly as the latter is exemplified in the neo-Thomist perspective of Elizabeth Johnson. Process theology and the feminist neo-Thomism of Johnson have much in common. Both are forms of philosophical theology that enter into the fray of contemporary philosophical debate, recommending worldviews that can make sense not only to Christians shaped by Christian language, but also to people of other orientations: scientists, artists, politicians, and homemakers. Both recognize that too much traditional Christian theology has been wedded to particularized modes of discourse that have often grown stale and static. And both recognize that these stale modes of discourse, such as the insistence that God always be conceived as He Who Is, and never as She Who Is, have supported and valorized patriarchal habits of thought and behavior. Both seek to be postpatriarchal.¹⁷

Spiritual Depth

THE CONTEMPLATION OF NATURE

Theology itself can take us only so far. In the final analysis, Christians can become good news for animals only if we feel the presence of animals in fresh ways. What is needed are not simply new ways of thinking about animals, but more contemplative ways of perceiving them. In the Christian tradition, of course, the word "contemplation" does not mean thinking about things. It refers to a kind of prayer in which the mind does not function discursively but rather is relaxed and alert. In *The Orthodox Way* Kallistos Ware interprets this attention in relation to nature. He means simple, nondiscursive attention to natural world. Elizabeth Johnson calls it "ecological contemplation" and Sallie McFague calls it "the loving eye."

QUIET LISTENING TO NATURE

Ware distinguishes two aspects of such seeing. The first involves appreciating the sheer uniqueness—the "thusness" or the "thisness"—of God's creation: "We are to see each stone, each leaf, each blade of grass, each frog, each human face, for what it truly is, in all its distinctness and intensity of its specific being."¹⁸

In seeing an animal, for example, we "contemplate nature" when we look into her eyes, behold her face, and listen to the sounds and silences. We bracket our own subjective agendas and are simply present to her in her suchness. Ware's point is that this mindful awareness, this appreciative consciousness, can be enjoyed in relation to stones and frogs, rivers and stars, as well as people. It is prayer.

In the second aspect of contemplating nature there is also the quiet listening and inner silence. But this listening is slightly different from seeing things in their suchness. We see things as pointing beyond themselves to the one who created them, and the one who shines through them in

their particularity: "we see all things, persons, and moments as signs or sacraments of God."¹⁹

In looking into the eyes of an animal, for example, we may be aware that there is something sacred and holy, something divine, in the animal. God's Spirit is in her, shining through her, even as she is more than the Spirit. It is as if she is a holy icon, a stained glass window, through which holy light shines. This is the second aspect of contemplation noted by Ware in his discussion of contemplating nature. If we call the first "mindful attention," we might call the second "sacramental consciousness." It is sensing others as visible signs of an invisible grace.

According to Ware, this contemplation of nature can be part of our daily lives. It does not preclude thinking and acting; we can approach life prayerfully even as we approach it thoughtfully and practically. This does not mean that we approve of all that we see. Some of what we see is tragic, some horrible, and some sinful. But it does mean that we can see things lovingly and forgivingly, gratefully and empathically, like God. Our anger over the world's injustices and tragedies can be, like God's wrath itself, the obverse side of pain. Thus, "we are to see all things as essentially sacred, as a gift from God and a means of communion with him."²⁰ Such is the life of prayer. It receives the world prayerfully, with a listening spirit, full of wisdom.

The question then becomes: And how can we cultivate this listening spirit? Traditionally, the answer has been: "With the help of spiritual disciplines." If Christianity is to become good news for animals, we will need such disciplines that take us into the palpable presence of animals, such that we can listen to them and be awed by them, again and again.

For the privileged among us, spending time in the presence of wild animals can help. Their very wildness bespeaks an "otherness" that is beyond self-absorption and that can have a healing effect in our lives. We appreciate them in their suchness, precisely because we do not matter to them. In our irrelevance, they help heal us of

our pretensions. We realize that they have their own connections to the Mystery at the heart of the universe, and that we are not the center of things.

But most people on our planet do not have the luxury of wilderness excursions. They live in cities; they are overly busy; and their closest possibility for intimacy with animals is with companion animals. Thus, as a spiritual discipline for learning to listen to animals, I recommend "taking care of pets." Clearly the relationship in such caretaking is hierarchical, like that of a parent and a child. The parent establishes guidelines for behavior and the child lives within them. According to Sallie McFague, this is a serious problem in relation to pets. She equates owner-pet relations with parent-child relations, and deems both problematic, because they so easily lapse into subject-object relations.

However, for many people today, a relationship with their pets (or "companion animals," to use a term preferred by many), is the first way, and perhaps the only way, they can learn to listen to animals. They will enter into what Sallie McFague calls "the loving eye" by first discovering "the loving touch" of an animal they love and care for. This touch can itself be good news for the animal. Many companion animals do indeed benefit from being loved and cared for by their "owners," and in many ways, they "own their owners" in delightful and loving ways. The relationship is subject-subject, and it is mutually beneficial.

My suggestion, then, is that one kind of "spiritual discipline" which is good news for animals, because it leads to contemplative listening, is taking care of companion animals and being in their presence. This discipline is good news for animals, among other reasons, because there are so many animals who need such care. It can also lead to a wider respect for the whole of animal life, wild animals included. And it can lead one to consider the many ways in which domestic animals—chickens, pigs, and cows, for example—are inhumanely reared and slaughtered for food.

If Christianity is to become good news for animals, it will be because all three dimensions of Christian life are involved: practical action, theological understanding, and spiritual depth. And it will be because Christians in different parts of the world, some among the overconsumers of the world, and some among the poorest of the poor, grow dissatisfied with the illusions of consumer culture, seeking instead a more holistic approach to life, in the companionship of others who seek the same. I have written this essay in order to show how this transformation might occur among Christians. For many Christians, a first step will be to dwell in the presence of animals already in their midst. It will begin, not with theology, but with touch: flesh-upon-flesh, as enlivened by the Spirit. For a religion that celebrates enfleshment, supremely realized in incarnation, salvation by touch is an appropriate beginning.

NOTES

1. John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Earthist Challenge to Economism: A Theological Critique of the World Bank* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
2. Surveys of ecological theologies include: Peter W. Bakkan, Joan Gibb Engel, and J. Ronald Engel, eds., *Ecology, Justice, and Christian Faith: A Critical Guide to the Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995); Max Oeschlager, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1996); Dieter T. Hessel and Stephen Bede Sharper, eds., *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). Sharper's survey is particularly instructive vis-à-vis the issue of "environmental ethics" and "animal welfare." In his survey he treats many kinds of ecological theology: biblical, tra-

ditionalist, "new cosmology" approaches, ecofeminist, process, and liberationist, but singles out process theology as one of the few that attends to individual animals as well as collectives. An exception to Scharper's generalization is James Nash's *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991). Nash is well aware of the tendency among ecological theologians to emphasize "collectives" over "individuals" (pp. 179–83). For readers interested in ways in which traditional Christian doctrines might offer "firm foundations" for an ecological theology, Nash's book is without parallel. His own constructive approach includes attention to individuals and collectives.

3. For an introduction to the eco-justice movement, see Dieter Hessel, "Ecumenical Ethics for the Earth Community," *Theology and Public Policy* 8, nos. 1 and 2 (Summer and Winter 1996): 17–29. The guidelines recommended by the Humane Society of the United States appear, among other places, in Charles Birch and Lukas Vischer, *Living with the Animals: The Community of God's Creatures* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), pp. 80–81.

4. See Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1995); see also Phyllis Zagano and Terrence Tilley, eds., *Things Old and New: Essays on the Theology of Elizabeth A. Johnson* (New York: Crossroad, 1999). I wrote pp. 56–80, offering a process approach to God in relation to animals, with particular attention to problems of animal suffering; pp. 110–16 are Johnson's response to process theology, in which she draws parallels from a feminist, neo-Thomist perspective.

5. See Zagano and Tilley, *Things Old and New*, especially pp. 56–80 and 110–16.

6. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), p. 63.

7. Sallie McFague, *Supernatural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,

1997), pp. 91–117; Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, revised edition (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 1995), p. 119.

8. These are the first four principles of the Earth Charter (Benchmark Draft II).

9. Cobb, *The Earthist Challenge to Economism*, p. 82.

10. Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997) pp. 1–16.

11. For a systematic discussion of animals as unclean, see Walter Houston, "What Was the Meaning of Classifying Animals as Clean or Unclean?" in Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto, eds., *Animals on the Agenda* (London: SCM Press, 1998), pp. 18–24. For a discussion of animals as sacrifices, see J. W. Rogerson, "What was the Meaning of Animal Sacrifice?" in *ibid.*, pp. 8–17.

12. Linzey and Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah*, p. 7.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

14. Vischer, *Living with the Animals*, p. 2.

15. In process theology, we call such selves "souls," and recognize that there can be degrees of soul. An embryo just after conception, for example, has less soul than an embryo in the third trimester. Moreover, we suggest that "souls" are evolutionary expressions of, not exceptions to, the kind of energetic aliveness found also in the living cells of plants, in microorganisms, and in rocks. By this definition, "souls" are natural, not supernatural. By animals, then, I mean sentient beings with souls. By this definition, humans, too, are animals.

16. Hessel, "Ecumenical Ethics for Earth Community," p. 19.

17. See Zagano and Tilley, *Things Old and New*, especially pp. 56–80 and 110–116.

18. Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p. 119.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 120.