Creative Transformation

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Special Issue: The Blessing of Animals

The Blessing of Animals

Resources for Study

Resources for Worship

Resources for Kids

***Creative* Transformation**

exploring the growing edge of religious life

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Process & Faith
EDITORIAL

The name of this special issue is intentionally ambiguous. In "blessing of the animals" services, we bring our pets to be blessed, but as almost any pet owner will tell you, the blessing usually flows the other way. It is we who are blessed by the animal friends in our lives.

The same ambiguity applies when we are explicit about bringing God into this conversation. We human animals have for centuries been fond of a "great chain of being" that places us above the animals and just below the angels, as though we have more in common with the latter than the former. But the creation story in Genesis 1 is emphatic in its declaration that all of creation is good, and Jesus proclaims a Creator who is intimately concerned with sparrows. Can we still, in an era when we recognize the Earth as a fragile ecosystem, delicately balancing all forms of life, confidently hold to a privileged sense of ourselves in relation to our Creator? Or is it time, as Les Muray writes, to yield our conviction of human uniqueness to a humbler view of human distinctiveness?

This notion that it is all animals that are blessed, not just human animals, is not new. It dates back to the Flood—literally. As Rick Marshall writes, we may use Noah's name to identify the promise God made to creation after the flood, but we may not limit the recipients to Noah. The text is quite specific:

> "As for me, I am establishing, my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ***and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you.***" (Genesis 9:9)

We have no difficulty forming profound bonds with our pets and bringing them to church for blessing, but as a society we also kill animals for sport, raise animals for slaughter, eat animals we don't see (but whose meat is packaged in plastic and styrofoam), and use animals as test subjects. In this schizoid context it is almost jarring to read Jay McDaniel's claim that the animals called Noah, too. Not that God also called animals, which was clearly the case, but the animals called Noah—as they continue to call us today. We ignore the call of creation at our own peril.

It is out of this sense—the need to heed creation's call—that many churches have begun to celebrate a new liturgical season, Creation Season. Initially the idea of a single congregation in Australia, this season is now celebrated around the globe, complete with its own cycle of lectionary readings (also supported by TextWeek). It is variously celebrated in September, or in the 4-6 weeks prior to the end of the liturgical year ("Christ the King" Sunday). The Brea Congregational United Church of Christ (where I am a co-pastor) , an intentional process church, has adopted the season, but it sought a more dynamic, specifically process-themed approach, so for the past several years has been creating its own. Cathy Hopkins has developed a lesson plan and series of activities for this year's creation season, which is built around the Noah Contract. (Readers interested in themes and liturgies from previous years can contact me here.) Creation Season also opens the church calendar to other days when a Blessing of the Animals service might take place rather than the traditional Sunday in October closest to the feast day of St. Francis on October 4.

Of course, we live in times when none of us can afford to sequester concern for the Earth to a specially designated Creation Season or an Earth Sunday. And so this issue also offers prayers and ponderables that can be adapted to your congregation, to your church calendar. John B. Cobb, Jr. has said that theology must be formulated for the purpose of saving the Earth, and in that spirit I propose that the same is true of worship. I hope you will find this issue useful for that purpose, but more urgently hope that you will share your ideas and resources with others. I would love to post *your* liturgies online, provide links to *your* church.

The NOAH CONTRACT: How we VALUE ANIMALS and especially PETS

by Rick Marshall

I love hamburgers and Fido, too

My sister and her family moved to a five-acre piece of land on a hilltop in the country. They had a house, a beautiful view of the valley below, and a barn. They decided to raise pigs for food. My sister and her husband thought that farm life would teach their children the value of hard work and the responsibility of caring for animals. The children (two boys and two girls) were involved with the daily care of the pigs. They fed them, cleaned out their stalls, and played with them. They gave the pigs names as they became more attached to them. One day, they all sat down for dinner and the plates of food were passed around—a basic meat-and-potatoes meal. As they were eating and talking, my sister asked her children, "Well, how do you like Pugster?" They all looked at her and then looked at the meat on their plates and became quiet for a moment. Then they began to cry out, "Is this Pugster? How could you do this to us?" They couldn't eat another bite and left the table in tears. Obviously, they were eating the meat of a pig they had known and cared for and befriended.

We live in a society that is deeply ambivalent about animals (and the rest of creation, for that matter). In order to eat some of them, we must objectify them and appraise their value as a commodity to be bought and consumed. And yet, at the same time, we bring some of them into our homes and hearts and become attached to animals as pets. We love some; we eat others.

There are two basic ways of valuing a living creature, especially animals and human beings. The first is "instrumental" value, that is, someone is useful to us and we are not concerned about their own experience. As humans, we are instrumentally valuable to companies, for example, and the job market, because of what we can do for employers to advance their purposes. They might be interested in how we like the job, but that interest has little to do with their main concern for how workers perform for the business. We are paid for our work as compensation for this kind of treatment. We are workers and consumers who contribute (or not) to the economy and are valued in these terms. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but if a person is used only as an object (instrumental value) then he or she can be abused; for example, by giving a worker low wages, or in human trafficking and the sex trade. Other examples abound. A woman recently made the news when she sold her five-year-old daughter for sex; her child was "(ab)used" by her mother. Everyone was rightfully outraged. The military is another institution that deals with humans as only instrumentally valuable; loyalty, discipline, and compliance are values that are required for a soldier. By treating others strictly as objects in war, the "enemy" must be reduced to an object in order to kill him. Every soldier is formally related to the military by a number. When I was in the military, my identity number was my Social Security number.

The other way we value others is to acknowledge that they have "intrinsic" value; that is, their own experience is valuable to them, apart from another person's use of them. We know from our own experience that our inner life and our experience of being a living human being is intrinsically valuable. Consider a friend who uses a relationship only for his or her own needs. We often feel "used" by such a so-called friend. Some who we think are our friends, are not truly friends. Mutual friendship acknowledges the intrinsic worth of the other. There is a shared experience and the inherent value of the other is respected, even protected. We are objects to some: employer, marketplace, military, and we are subjects to others: family, friend, lover.

We know that animals are instrumentally valuable as a commodity to consume, or used for another's purpose. Even pets can be used for what they add to our lives; they sometimes can be treated as objects; for example, guard dogs, or fighting roosters. But do animals have intrinsic value? Is the subjective experience of an animal valuable on its own terms?

Fritz was one of my family's favorite pets when I was young. He was a large, beautiful German shepherd. Fritz came into our family somehow, I don't remember. I am not a dog person, but grew to care for Fritz. He was a friendly, intelligent dog. The small children in our family would play with him and try to ride on his back and pull his fur; he was very gentle with all of them—and protective. If a stranger came on the scene, Fritz would snarl and bark, baring his teeth. He became an important and beloved part of our family. He brought a sense of loyalty and companionship to all of us, and we truly loved him. What is the value of Fritz? His instrumental value was what he brought to the family: unconditional love, companionship, enjoyment, and loyalty. But what about his intrinsic value? His own subjective experience was valuable to him, quite apart from the family. Fritz was at times happy, sad, hurt, or lonely. Our culture uses dogs as pets for what they bring to relationships. Their value is both instrumental (objective) and intrinsic (subjective), much in the same way humans are valued. If dogs are of only instrumental value, then they are commodities to be sold and used in sometimes destructive ways; for example, as fighting dogs, or, in some cultures, part of the local cuisine.

Few pet owners would argue that their pets do not experience their own inner life. They have a psyche; they love and hurt; they have qualities of loyalty and companionship. Pets suffer when hurt and respond positively to affection; they can become happy or depressed. There are pet therapists and drugs for pet depression. There are doctors for pets. A great deal of money is spent on pet health and comfort. And when a pet dies, we go through a grief experience that can be as deep and as intense as when a human being dies, sometimes more so. When relationships with people become difficult, the simplicity of a relationship to a beloved pet can be a relief, even healing. We love them and they love us. The relationship between a pet and a human being is defined by all the words that describe human friendships: loyalty, comfort, companionship, affection, respect, love.

A woman I know who has a dog. Her husband of many years died and she has been experiencing deep grief. So does the dog; they get "moody" together. Since the death, her dog has become her consolation. Ironically, she did not want the dog when her husband brought him home a few years ago. After awhile, the dog became part of the family and the woman grew to love the dog. But after the death of her husband, she was surprised by how much she values the dog. She lives alone and talks to the dog and cares for him; she admits that she treats the dog as if he were her child. The dog misses her husband. The woman feels that the dog is a connection between her and her husband. When she is home, sometimes the dog reacts to another presence in the room, something the woman can't see. When the woman witnesses this strange behavior, she believes that her husband is present because the dog reacts in ways that were common for the dog when her husband was alive. However these events are interpreted, a pet that has been shared by the couple is now a living link to the deceased husband. The woman finds the experience comforting. She feels so connected to her dog that she shudders at the thought that, one day, he will die.

When a beloved pet dies, the one who loves the pet often wants to mark the death as a serious loss because their pet's life was important. Many memories are attached to the life of the beloved pet in ways that trigger intense grief. A meaningful ritual seems appropriate and necessary to mark the loss.

We live in a society that is deeply ambivalent about animals.

But when we eat an animal, another value system is required. Our culture is schizophrenic about how we value animals: we are conflicted about befriending some and eating others. Our solution to the problem of eating animals is that we distance ourselves from the brutality of the farming system that must devalue animals in order to slaughter them. But that is not our concern here, though this is an issue in the background of our relationship to animals and to all of creation. Our concern here is to think about the true value of animals and of all creatures, including the environment. Once we are clear about the value

of animals, we can treat them with appropriate and enlightened respect, even if we eat them.

One of my daughters had a hard time adjusting to high school, as many young people do. One day, at the beginning of her freshman year, she brought home a black kitten. "Please daddy, can I keep her?" I reluctantly agreed; my daughter gave her a name: Shelly. To name is to claim. My daughter went through high school, graduated, and then went through some tough times growing into adulthood: boyfriends and moving and jobs—the normal but difficult ups and downs of life. The only constant in her life, besides her parents, was Shelly. Through the tough times, Shelly was a reliable companion. My daughter gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Shelly adjusted to the new member in the family. Shelly lived to be about 15 years old when she died, and my daughter was very sad and buried her body in the garden behind her house. A piece of my daughter's life went into the ground. That piece of land, that spot in the back yard, remains sacred ground to my daughter. Now she has a new family member, a small poodle named Rooky. My daughter and granddaughter are getting to know Rooky, and are building another important loving relationship with an animal.

Pets are often just as important to us as any family member (sometimes more important). Yet, when a family member dies, our society has in place many rituals and resources to help cope with the body of the loved one and the ensuing grief. People are understanding, and we have a social structure that validates the life and death of a person. Our culture has a hard time taking seriously the death of a pet and the ensuing grief. Often, when a beloved pet dies, a family experiences loneliness as it goes through grief in a disapproving environment which treats such grief as minor. "Oh, you can get another cat." "It was just a dog." "You were too attached to Fluffy." People can be dismissive of feelings of profound grief and of sadness over the death of a beloved pet. In the face of such resistance to acknowledging grief over a pet, pet owners can feel isolated and their grief experience ridiculed, which leads to further isolation. Some pet owners can become deeply depressed and even suicidal at the loss of a pet. It's a terrible mistake to devalue the deep attachment and true love that goes on between people and their beloved pets. If rituals were developed and other meaningful resources were in place, the grief over the death of a beloved pet could then be validated by society. It would not make the death of a pet any easier, but the pet lover wouldn't feel so isolated.

Our culture is schizophrenic about how we value animals: we are conflicted about befriending some and eating others.

It is the very nature of love that helps us understand how one person can become part of another. Most parents can understand this. When a newborn child is brought home, there begins a long process of the child becoming part of the parents' experience, and the parents become part of the child's experience. Love is how we become part of one another. The same is true of pets: in a loving relationship, they become part of us and we become part of them.

A problem of theology

"O Lord, you save humans and animals alike." Psalm 36:6

How we value animals and all of creation is, at its core, a theological issue.

My father was a hunter. When I was young, he would take me with him on his annual deer hunting trip to eastern Oregon in the fall. Hunting is something a father often does with a son, perhaps as a step toward manhood. I cherish the times I spent hunting with my father. I would be excited about upcoming hunting trips. On opening day, the air would be cold in late October and you could see your breath as the sun's first light crept over the hills, slowly exposing the details of the valleys. The bellowing of distant cows echoed through the canyons. I would quietly follow my dad as we moved into the steep, hilly terrain. The smell of juniper and sage, mixed with my excitement, is still deep in my memory. One year my father thought I was ready to pack a rifle and to join in the hunt. I was excited. I felt included in the mystery of manhood. Packing a rifle gave me a sense of power, a power to kill, like my father learned from his father.

With great anticipation, we drove over the Cascade Mountains into the high desert of Oregon. The first day of the hunt we saw no deer, so also the second day. As the weekend moved toward our time to go home, we had no luck. Driving on a gravel road in the warm sun of the afternoon, my father pulled the car over and stopped, with the dust from the wheels passing us. He looked at a spot on the hillside. "There, there's one." He looked at me, "Go check it out." I gently opened the car door with my rifle in my hand and quietly made my way through the sage brush. Halfway up the hill, a buck stood up and looked at me; he was only a few yards away. The adrenaline made me shake with excitement. I snuggled the rifled butt into my shoulder and peered down the scope. My finger was curled over the trigger, the bead was on the target; I squeezed. The explosion of the bullet violently pushed against my shoulder. The noise of the blast of the gunpowder filled the canyon with its echo. Through the smoke, I could see that the deer remained still for a moment, then fell to its knees, struggling to get up. Unsure of itself, it stumbled downhill toward me and fell at my feet. By this time, my father was standing beside me. The deer's hind legs scratched franticly at the ground. He couldn't get up and lay quietly for a moment, looking at me. My father said, "You have to finish him off." The weight of his words still haunts me to this day.

I looked at the deer and noticed how it looked back at me with big, liquid, brown eyes, eyes that had life in them, eyes that looked at me. It was no longer an "it," but a beautiful living creature lying at my feet. It struggled again but couldn't get up. Blood began to form in shining rivulets around a hole in its chest. It was frightened. I was filled with dread at the realization of having to kill this beautiful animal that lay before me, its sides heaving, blood dripping from the wound. "You gotta do it, Rick." The reality of what I had just done paralyzed me. I wished I could take the bullet back, put the lead back in its shell, along with the gunpowder, back in the chamber, back to five minutes before. As I looked into this beautiful animal's large brown eyes, I placed the muzzle of the rifle right behind his ear, looked at his eyes for the last time, then closed my eyes and pulled the trigger. The gun blast echoed and my ears felt muffled by the shock of the explosion. The deer instantly went limp and the light in its eyes went out. "Great job," my father said, patting my shoulder as smoke curled out of the barrel of my gun. His voice seemed to come from a distance, but he was standing beside me. I didn't feel so great. I wanted this to be the last deer I ever killed. I felt like I had blood on my hands which would soon become literally true. I was thirteen years old.

Killing an animal is no small thing.

We gutted the deer, slitting its belly and exposing its steaming innards to the cold air, spilling them onto the ground—the lungs, the stomach, the heart. We loaded its body into the back of the station wagon and drove home. The next day, we butchered the carcass in our kitchen, which filled the house with a distinct odor of musk and metal. Raw meat and red blood covered the kitchen table and the kitchen counters, and the sink washed blood down the drain. Knives smeared with blood. I was repulsed by it and I don't believe I have ever eaten venison in the forty-five years since that time. I had blood on my hands. Something happened inside me the second I pulled the trigger and killed that beautiful animal. I became a little older and wiser—and sadder. I felt like I had no right to kill. The reason the details of the setting are important is to emphasize the jarring contrast between the beauty of the place, the beauty of the animal, and the seriousness of killing a living creature. In later years, I ran across a quote by the philosopher A.N. Whitehead that is theological to the core: "Life is robbery and the robber requires justification." This is the theological dilemma: what right do we have to deprive a fellow creature of its life? And yet we must kill in order to live.

Since that time, I have been acutely aware that the meat I buy in the grocery store comes from a cow or a pig or a chicken or a fish that has been killed by someone else, somewhere else, out of my sight. The truth is, we must eat in order to live; what other option is there? Eating lower on the food chain is better, I suppose, but still doesn't resolve the dilemma. The reality is that we are in a food chain and we are at the top of it. That is the dilemma we face as human beings in relation to animals, and to all other creatures. Is it possible to recognize the intrinsic value of a creature, and to treat it with respect, and still kill it and eat it? Maybe older cultures knew more about the serious ethical act of killing an animal in order to eat it, which is necessary to sustain life. In some cultures that live closer to the land, there are rituals, prayers, and offerings to prepare for killing an animal. Our culture has no such rituals, nor is it even aware that rituals are required for killing animals in order to eat them. What does it do to the human soul to have so much blood on our collective hands?

In order to understand the value of pets, we must acknowledge the value of all animals.

In order to understand the value of pets, we must acknowledge the value of all animals. Every animal in the world has value because it enjoys its own experience of being alive. We forget that human beings have animal bodies, and that we emerge from the natural world. It is this very fact that places us in a highly relational world, where we are brothers and sisters, fellow companion creatures, with the whole of the natural world.

The created world belongs to God, not to human beings. We are given the responsibility to care for creation on behalf of God, not to abuse it or destroy it.

Animals and the Bible

I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the human spirit goes upwards and the spirit of animals goes downwards to the earth? So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them? Ecclesiastes 3:18-22

Historically, in the Christian West, we have valued human beings as of infinite worth, and animals (and creation) as only of instrumental worth, instrumental to us. Traditional Christian theology has created a chasm between human beings and the rest of creation. Many Christians have been taught that God is interested only in human beings and the rest of creation is seen as instrumentally valuable to human beings to use and abuse as they see fit. Our attitude toward nature has been formed by traditional Christian theology and how the Bible has been interpreted. If God is interested only in human beings as intrinsically valuable and the rest of creation as only instrumentally valuable, then why should we be interested in the rest of creation except in its usefulness to us? The claim of the divine right to use the natural world has allowed human beings to abuse creation and to destroy so much life. This theology, as in so many structures of abuse, is rooted in the (mis)interpretation of a few passages in the Bible.

"God blessed (Adam and Eve), and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Genesis 1:28).

The story of Adam and Eve and the Garden seems to give credence to the ideas of the Fall and Original Sin, which has cast a long shadow over the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation. The theology of Original Sin sees the world as "fallen," "tainted," and that God is not interested in the world as it is, but will one day remake the world. If God doesn't care about creation, why should we? Creation is to be dominated and subdued, and our primary interest as human beings is to get right with God and focus on the afterlife as our ultimate (and for some, only) concern.

A related theological problem is the idea of the Second Coming and the claim that Jesus will return to destroy and remake the natural world. Many Christians are expecting to be restored by the Second Coming. We hear of some people giving away all of their possessions and moving to a place (Idaho? Montana?) to gather with others to await this return. To these people, and others like them, there is no intrinsic value in the created world. The natural world is hostile, and the only concern is getting "over the River Jordan." If there is any salvation, it is to be delivered out of this world. If this is so, what we do to our environment, to the natural world, and to animals, is our business.

If our society treats creation with such disrespect, then how do we account for loving some of the animals as pets and treating them as if they have intrinsic value?

Traditional Christian theology ignores the creation story which describes God's creative activity as "original blessing," as described in a book by that name by Matthew Fox. In the beginning of the book of Genesis, God created all of the natural world and God said it was good. A closer reading of the Bible portrays human responsibility toward creation as that of care-taker or trusted steward. The created world belongs to God, not to human beings. We are given the responsibility to care for creation on behalf of God, not to abuse it or destroy it. "Domination" suggests having power over something. "Subduing" suggests that something powerful and dangerous (i.e., nature) must be brought under control. This interpretation of these words has been a disaster for our environment because some human beings see it as their right to use creation for their own benefit, regardless of what their activity does to creation. Creation is, therefore, seen as instrumentally valuable, but not intrinsically valuable. In fact, some believe that the more dire the state of the environment, the sooner Jesus will return. Some even pray for the destruction of the world in order to hasten the Second Coming. Of course this is absurd and not biblical.

There are many others (Christians, too) who believe that all creatures have intrinsic value, quite apart from human use. The Bible overwhelmingly supports the idea that creation is good and that God is actively involved with creation as it unfolds. Divine love defines the relationship between God and the natural world, a relationship that could be described as the Noah Contract.

The Noah Contract

The story of Noah helps us understand how God wants us to value creation. The Noah Contract is between God and all of creation, not just human beings. God wills life for all, and not death. God loves all of creation, and not just human beings. God has placed human beings in the roll of trustee of the natural world. If we mismanage creation, we incur the deadly consequences of our choices. What would happen in a just world if a steward mismanaged the owner's estate in order to profit from it? The self-interested steward would be either fired or put in jail. How does God handle this situation in Genesis?

After the creation story at the beginning of Genesis, then the Adam and Eve story, and then the Cain and Abel story, God has reached the point of being fed up with human beings. The relationship between the Creator and human creatures has reached a crisis with God. "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart" (Genesis 6:5-6). The consequences of the human condition have a direct impact on the rest of creation. "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them" (Genesis 6:7). Note that the text says God regretted making human beings and nothing is said about regretting creating the natural world.

At the end of the flood, the story tells us that the only character who changed was God.

This story begins with a crisis in God's own heart. Noah is the new human being who will be a fresh start for God. Noah, along with representatives of all of creation on the ark, becomes a promise for newness beyond destruction. All of creation suffered because of human activity. God carries through with the divine resolve to destroy. At the end of the story, after the flood, God makes a new covenant, a new promise, and new contract between the Creator and all of Creation that could be called the Noah Contract.

At the end of the flood, the story tells us that the only character who changed was God. What God learned was that "the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (Genesis 8:21). It's as if God says, "There has to be better way than anger and destruction to deal with stubborn human beings." God promises to not deal with human beings by destroying everything. After all, this story is a short distance from the Cain and Abel story which is a cautionary tale about anger and how not to use it; that is, solving a problem with violence. God thought that violence was the solution to the human problem and learned that it is not.

Here is the divine resolution: "As for me, I am establishing, my covenant (contract) with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you" (Genesis 9:9). This promise is repeated at least four times in this passage. It's as if the one who wrote these words wanted to make sure we got the point of the story. It's as if the writer repeats it and underlines it and makes the announcement bold: "DON'T MISS THIS." It's as if the writer is afraid we will forget, but more, the writer is afraid that God will forget. The rainbow is a sign for God not to forget the contract. "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and every living creature of all flesh" (Genesis 9:13-15). The story ends with God saying

"This is the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth" (Genesis 9:17). "Got it?" "Are we clear?" "Don't forget this, God." This is the Noah Contract.

The contract between God and creation implies that animals have value to the Creator apart from their value to human beings. Animals have intrinsic value because they have life, they feel, and they suffer. Animals also have what we might call, a psyche, that is, a mind that functions as a center of thought, emotion, and behavior.

Respect and the Value of Animals

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" Matthew 6:25-31*

This text from the Sermon on the Mount speaks of value, a relative value. Yes, human beings are more highly valued than animals, but the text affirms that God loves and cares for lilies and birds and all creatures.

All of Jesus' (and other wisdom teachers') teachings can be summed up by the Golden Rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Or another version: "Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself." The word "love" is misleading; "respect" is a much better word. The idea is to treat God with respect, and to treat your neighbor with respect in the same way that you want to be treated with respect. But who is our neighbor? If taken literally, that would be a small group of people living in my part of the neighborhood, which is an absurd interpretation of "neighbor." In a larger interpretation, the neighbor is all other creatures. The Golden Rule most certainly applies to all human beings, but it also applies to all other living creatures. The mandate that Jesus set forth can be logically expanded to treat all living creatures with respect. If everything is connected to everything else, and all of life is a web of interrelationships within all of creation, then the biblical mandate is ultimately to treat the environment with respect.

One of the basic ethical guides in the Bible is the rule of hospitality, which can be simply expressed as welcoming the stranger as a friend. But to whom does the principle of hospitality apply? Who is the stranger? Anyone we don' know. The most basic expression of hospitality is to welcome the stranger, which can be theologically extended to include all creatures. We are called to treat animals with respect, because they are also the other, the stranger, the neighbor.

We are called to treat animals with respect, because they are also the other, the stranger, the neighbor.

As human beings, we have a fiduciary responsibility that is mandated by our Creator to care for ourselves and for others; we hold, in trust, the relationship between Creator and creation. We speak for the earth and on behalf of creation.

Treating our neighbor with respect certainly does not involve abusing them, but to treat them according to what is in their best interest, or the same way that we expect to be treated. Furthermore, the earth (and the cosmos?) is filled with life. The biblical mandate is to regard all of life as intrinsically valuable. All of creation is sacred; the environment is a sanctuary. There are places in the Bible where all of creation rejoices with God and sings to the Creator. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:10). "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy" (Psalm 96:11-12). Of course, these are metaphors, but these metaphors can guide us in establishing a proper and sustaining ethical guide to the human relationship with the world. If we live in an interconnected world, then the well-being of all is important to the well-being of the individual.

How can we treat all life with respect and yet destroy it because we must eat in order to live? Alfred North Whitehead said that "Life is robbery and the robber requires justification." This is the simple acknowledgment that in order to live, others must die. How do we eat animals and yet acknowledge their intrinsic value? This is a true dilemma, and we must not disregard it by going to one extreme (all of life has equal value) or the other (nothing in life is of value, except human beings).

Instead of a simple theology of assigning intrinsic value only to human beings and only instrumental value to the rest of creation, we can take a more nuanced view of a hierarchy of values. Some Christians believe that we can relate to the natural world with a different way of valuing. The value of creatures is based on a scale defined by the intensity and complexity of experience. Dogs, for example, certainly have intensity and complexity of experience. The more that an animal is capable of intensity and complexity of experience, the more value the animal has. As a species, human beings have a highly developed nervous system that allows us probably the greatest capacity for rich experience. Being the smartest kid on the block, though, does not make us the only kid on the block. The Buddhists have regard for all sentient beings, that is, having sense perception, consciousness, awareness. Human beings are of great value, but they are not the only creatures who have value. We live in a world that is inhabited by many other creatures that have intrinsic value quite apart from human interest.

What are some of the qualities of animals that are intrinsic to them? A dog, for example, is present in the moment, an ideal that is difficult for humans. They are intuitive, another quality that humans strive for. Dogs can be tuned into a human's emotions, intentions, and acts. They are sensing creatures. They love unconditionally, which is difficult for human beings. Dogs can sense illness in a person. They can sense anger or fear. They respond to positive feelings and negative feelings. Dogs can be happy or sad. Some animals develop friendships not only with humans but with animals of other species, like dogs and cats. To love a pet is to be in the present moment with them. In those moments of enjoyment our minds are neither pulling us toward fear of the future nor guilt from the past. The present moment is a gift from our pets.

Mutual transformation takes place between two loving creatures. No one who loves animals will deny that they have the capacity to transform the ones who love them.

When a beloved pet dies, and someone remarks to the owner that it was "only a pet," it is a powerful way to undermine the value of the relationship between the loving human and the loving animal, and it degrades the intrinsic value of the animal's own experience.

Part of treating others with respect is to contribute to the other's intensity and complexity of experience. When we are in a loving relationship with either another person or with an animal, we both contribute to the other's experience in either a negative or a positive way. Mutual transformation takes place between two loving creatures. No one who loves animals will deny that they have the capacity to transform the ones who love them.

In many places, the Bible assumes that everything in the world is related to everything else. In this more relational view, God is related to the world in a similar way that we are related to our own bodies. Our bodies work in harmony to support our experience of personal life. We are more than just our bodies, yet we depend upon our bodies for the life of our psyche or spirit. We often forget that humans have animal bodies, too, and that we are part of the created order with everything else. Treating God with respect is to contribute positively to the divine experience. If the world is God's body, then to treat God with respect is to treat the natural world with respect. Our pets are important not only to us, but to God.

Therefore, the very act of taking seriously the intrinsic value of a pet as a fellow creature is to challenge the fundamental social value of the practice of violence against animals. Valuing pet love can lead to valuing all of creation. By loving and caring for a pet, we can express the larger issue of our love and care for the natural world. Who would think that loving a pet could be a theological statement about human responsibility and the God who created everything and called the natural world good? Pet love is a theological issue.

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For educational materials developed to accompany the Noah Contract that are geared to children, see page 38

The Animals Called Noah, Too

by JAY MCDANIEL

Noah returned to earth many years ago as Rachel Carson. Her book Silent Spring *has been an invitation for people all over the world to remember the voices of animals and the earth and to recognize that our springs will indeed be silent unless we listen and respond to them with respect and care. This listening – call it the listening side of love – is sometimes neglected by muscular and zealous Christians who want to go out and save the planet. There is something presumptuous, but also something right, about wanting to save the planet. It's not a bad idea.*

Still there is something insufficiently receptive about this gregarious approach to life: insufficiently Buddhist. The animals and plants do not want to be saved; they also want to be listened to. Without this listening even the most prophetic of actions become a will-to-mastery, trapped by our own good intentions. Let's imagine, then, that Rachel Carson has now returned to our planet as a local pastor who is preparing a sermon on the occasion a Blessing for the Animals. Let's say that she has been reading some process theology, too. What would she say? Here is one possibility:

In the beginning is not the word. It is the listening. Families cannot live happily as families, and friends as friends, unless they listen to one another. Neighbors cannot live peacefully as neighbors, and nations as nations, unless first they hear one another's concerns. Farmers cannot till the soil, and poets cannot stir our minds, unless they listen to the sounds of creation: to the rhythms of the seasons, the songs of the birds, the howling of the wolves, the music of the spheres.

Even God must begin with listening. God cannot respond to the cries of the world, or the laughter of children, or the songs of whales, unless God first listens. Otherwise how can God hear prayers? How can God know how to respond to what happens? Of course some people who believe in God will reject the notion of a listening God because they think that God does not need to listen. From their perspective God knows all things in advance, because the script of history is already written in God's mind. Nothing can surprise God. To bolster their case that God is invulnerable, they add that there was a time, some thirteen billion years ago, when there was nothing for God to listen to, because the universe did not yet exist.

But the creation story in Genesis suggests the contrary. This story suggests that during this time there was a watery chaos, a creative energy, from which God called the universe into existence. If this is the case, then God had to listen to the potentialities with the chaos in order to call the chaos into existence. Still more poignantly God had to listen to a yearning within the divine heart: a yearning for the chaos to evolve into the heavens and the earth. What was this yearning? Did God seek companionship? We really do not know. What we do know is that from the very beginning, even in God, there had to be a listening.

Let's say that we are made in God's image and that our calling in life is to live in a way that is inwardly inspired by God's listening. The New Testament invites us to walk in love as Christ walked in love. Perhaps this is to walk in the listening. If this is true then there is something very radical about this idea. Our calling in life is not to be rich, powerful, and famous. It is not to make our mark in history or receive flattery. It is not even to claim our Christian identity, like a flag we want to want to wave in other people's faces. Instead it is to accept the momentary nature of life and walk through life as best we can by dwelling lightly on the earth and gently with others, day by day and moment by moment. It is to live with integrity not ambition.

This life of integrity will involve creativity as well as listening. But the creativity will be constructive rather than destructive, compassionate rather than violent, helpful rather than harmful. Listening and Creativity—these would be the yin and yang of the callings we receive from God. We Christians believe that Jesus was the listening incarnate. We see his healing ministry as a revelation of divine listening and his improvised responses a revelation of divine creativity. He was true to his callings, to the best of his abilities. We have no need to place him on a pedestal and say that he always lived up to them. Surely, if he was human, he fell short of his callings sometimes. He was like us in all respects. Still he is for us a window into a love supreme.

The callings need not come from outside us as a particularized voice from heaven. They come to us every time we encounter the face of another person, or another animal, or a landscape. In their very presence to us we experience a calling, an invitation, to pay attention and to care. We are ordained by them. Not just the humans. The animals ordain us, too. If we are priests it is from the animals that we receive our blessings.

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This is how it worked with Noah. God commanded him to create an ark to protect the animals. But let's be honest. The animals called Noah, too. God's call was, first of all, a call to listen to the animals and be ordained by them. We can well imagine that the divine calling originated out of God's own listening: a listening to the sufferings and their joys, their playfulness and their wisdom. And we can imagine that in listening to the animals God was changed as was Noah. After all, listening changes the listener. It is from this listening that God decided to establish a covenant with the animals and to invite Noah to live by this covenant. It is from this listening that we are called even today.

So let's put down our Christian flags for a moment. Let's let go our own impulses to save the planet lest we reduce it to an image of our own making. Let's recognize that our calling in life is to allow the other animals to be who they already are: creatures made in the image of God. And let's recognize that God—the ongoing activity of deep listening—is made in their image, too.

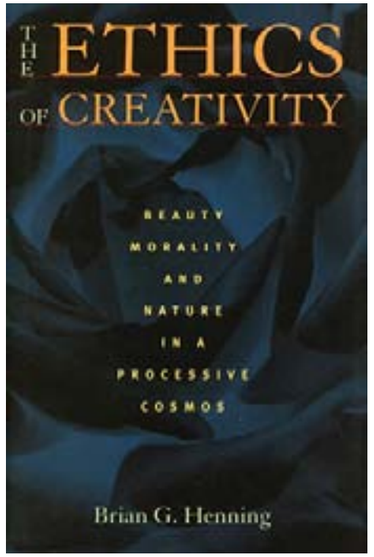
The philosopher Whitehead put it beautifully but abstractly: "The consequent nature of God is composed of a multiplicity of elements of individual self-realization. It is just as much a multiplicity as it is a unity." (PR 350) We can put it more simply. The face of God is found in the face of each animal, each plant, and each person. The voice of God is in their callings. Everything we see is a sacred song and story, if only we have ears to hear.

the robbery of life and the ETHICS of EATING animals

Brian G. Henning

From Chapter 6 of *The Ethics of Creativity: Beauty, Morality, and Nature in a Processive Cosmos* (U Pitt 2005).

A raft of largely popular books decrying the industrialization of food production has reached a new high-water mark, led most vocally and eloquently by the journalist Michael Pollan.[1] Unlike the philosophers and activists of an earlier generation who, inspired by the work of Peter Singer and Tom Regan, fought against industrial farming because of the excessive suffering caused to animals, this "new agrarian farming movement" is focused more on the human and environmental costs of industrialized food production.[2] Though the movement is diverse, it is largely characterized by a return to more "natural" methods of producing food and raising animals, including local, organic produce and free-range, grass-fed animals. Thus, there is a hue and cry for a movement away from factory farms, not necessarily because of the pain and suffering that they undeniably cause to the animals, but because of the human and environmental damage they inflict. While a complete analysis of the new agrarian movement is not possible here, it is important to consider whether and how a move away from *intensive*, factory farming and toward *extensive*, pasture-based methods would address the significant human and environmental harms currently caused by livestock production.



I join those in the new agrarian movement in recognizing that the act of eating (whether plants or animals) is a fundamentally ecological act. The consumption of one organism by another is perhaps the most basic form of ecological relation. Through the act of consumption, the other literally becomes part of my very being. Indeed, it is important to recognize that *every* organism destroys others that it might live and thrive; such destruction is at the very heart of the act of living. As Alfred North Whitehead once noted "Life is robbery." Every organism takes from others to sustain itself. This view is consistent with an appropriate, ecological view of our world. Ecologically speaking, the destruction of life is a vital part of the flow of energy through natural systems. The very act of living involves the violent destruction of other forms of life. And yet while life does indeed involve robbery, as Whitehead rightly recognized, "the robber requires justification."[3] As moral agents, our robbery of life must be justified.

Let us approach this topic by means of the following question: In regard to our (human) relationship to plants and other nonhuman animals, in general, what would affirm the most inclusive, complex, and unified whole possible? Put more simply, when, if ever, are we justified in robbing from others to sustain ourselves? Limiting our attention to the organic entities involved, there are four different courses of action possible: (1) for humans to eat neither plants nor other animals;[4] (2) for humans to eat both plants and animals; (3) for humans to eat only animal life; or (4) for humans to eat only plant life. Let us consider each of these options in terms of their relationship to the [Whiteheadian] obligations of beauty, self-respect, love, peace, and education.

To affirm the first option—that is, for humans to eat neither plants nor other animals—would essentially be to conclude that the most beautiful whole would be one in which humans starved so that plants and other animals could thrive unmolested. However, I submit that a world lacking the deep beauty and value of humans could not possibly be the most harmonious and intense possible. To be specific, it would violate the obligations of beauty, self-respect, and peace. The extinction of humans would be a glaring instance of the evil of anesthesia or the interposition of lower forms of experience for greater. It is worth noting, however, that rampant population growth is, at least in part, responsible for, among other things, the diminished quality of life for both human and nonhuman animals and for the degradation of the environment. Thus, the Ethics of Creativity finds that achieving the most beautiful whole would require a gradual decrease in the human population.[5] Nevertheless, given the (current) lack of viable alternatives, it is (currently) necessary for humans to eat either animals or plants (or both) in order to sustain themselves.

Given that it would be morally inappropriate to sacrifice humans for the sake of plants and nonhuman animals (option 1), what is our appropriate moral relation toward plants and nonhuman animals? The key to answering this question is found in the obligation of peace, which requires that we avoid destroying or diminishing the beauty and value achieved by others, unless it is *necessary* to do so in order to achieve the most intense and harmonious, i.e., beautiful, whole possible. Therefore, the appropriate relationship toward plants and nonhuman animals depends on whether our consumption of them is necessary in order to achieve the most beautiful whole. In the context of the second option, this is to ask, "Is it necessary for humans to eat both animals and plants in order to flourish?" The fact that for millennia hundreds of millions of people worldwide have lived long and fruitful lives without eating animals would seem to be indisputable evidence that it is not *necessary* for humans to eat both plants and animals (option 2).[6] In addition to the number of vegetarians, there is a wealth of recent evidence that suggests that a plant-based diet is in fact more healthy than a diet including animal flesh. For instance, for more than a decade the American Dietetic Association has endorsed vegetarian diets as "healthful and nutritionally adequate."[7] However, it is not necessary to examine such evidence in detail. The burden of proof is on the shoulders of those who would attempt to maintain that humans cannot be healthy without consuming both animals and plants. Thus, we are left with two options, a carnivorous diet (option 3) or a vegetarian diet (option 4). In general, which of these two options would achieve the most inclusive, complex, and organizable whole possible?

I contend that, insofar as the complex organization of animals makes possible an intensity of value and beauty greater than even the most complex plant, the most inclusive, diverse, and complex whole, i.e., the most beautiful whole, could not be one in which humans exclusively consumed animals (option 3). First, in that the destruction of the deep intrinsic value of nonhuman animals is unnecessary for humans to flourish, this option violates the obligation to always act in such a way so as to bring about the greatest possible universe of beauty, value, and importance which in each situation is possible. In that annually over 100 million cows, pigs, and sheep and over 5 billion chickens in the United States alone are raised and slaughtered, this is no small matter.[8] Not only is the affirmation of this less complex whole an instance of anesthesia, but the unnecessary destruction of these beautiful individuals is a paradigmatic example of violence.

Secondly, substantial arguments from efficiency can be made regarding the raising of nonhuman animals for consumption. Although over twenty years ago the powerful book *Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé refuted the myth that hunger is caused by scarcity, many still tenaciously hold that the consumption of animals is necessary. Yet as she notes in her 2002 sequel, *Hope's Edge*, coauthored with her daughter Anna Lappé, "For every human being on the planet, the world produces two pounds of grain per day—roughly 3,000 calories,

> *The act of eating is a funamentally ecological act.*

and that's without even counting the beans, potatoes, nuts fruits, and vegetables we eat, too. This is clearly enough for all of us to thrive; yet nearly one in six of us still goes hungry."[9] The United Nations World Food Program corroborates Lappé and Lappé's assessment,

> There is enough food in the world today for every man, woman and child to have the nourishment necessary for healthy and productive lives. And yet, more than 800 million people on earth today suffer from chronic malnutrition. . . . The hunger statistics for children are the most horrifying. An estimated 183 million children below the age of five are underweight and at high risk of dying within a year. Each day malnutrition is a significant factor in the deaths of 18,000 of these children, one child every five seconds.[10]

Accordingly, the problem is not in the *quantity* of food available, it is in *how* we use it. "Worldwide, we're feeding more and more of this grain, now almost *half* to livestock, but animals return to us in meat only a tiny fraction of the nutrients we feed them. To get just one calorie of food energy from a steak, we burn 54 irreplaceable fossil-fuel calories, so producing one pound of steak—providing less than 1,000 calories—uses up 45,000 fossil fuel calories."[11] Thus, as the authors go on to note, the question is not in fact "Why hunger?" but "Why hunger in a world of plenty?" This provides a second very considerable argument against an animal-flesh based diet (option 3). To continue the grossly inefficient raising and consumption of animals is a tragic instance of frustrating greater possibilities by the interposition of lesser achievements; it is as tragic as it is ugly.

Thus, in general, that is, abstracting from the particularities of any given situation, to the extent that it is not necessary for a human to consume animals in order to flourish, the obligation to always act in such a way so as to maximize the harmony and intensity of experience possible requires us to adopt a plant-based diet (option 4). That is, for most people in our contemporary society, a vegetarian diet is morally required.

For most people in our society, a vegetarian diet is morally required.

This conclusion follows directly from the obligation of peace, which requires that we avoid the destruction or maiming of any individual, unless not to do so threatens the achievement of the greatest harmony and intensity which in each situation is possible. To continue the unnecessary and wasteful consumption of animals is at once the destruction of achieved values (violence) and the interposition of lesser values for greater ones (anesthesia); it is an example of ugliness. However, it is important to qualify this conclusion in several ways.

First, although our robbery of the life of plants may, under certain conditions, be justified, it is important to note that this does not mean that plants have purely instrumental value which we may use with impunity, nor does it mean that a plant's destruction is not tragic. The loss of any form of beauty is tragic. Accordingly, our obligation to respect and protect their beauty and value does not change just because it may (currently) be morally appropriate for us to destroy plant life in order to sustain our own. Thus, in our agricultural practices we must devise some way of meeting our obligation to maximize the harmony and intensity of the experiences of plant cells and of whole plants, to the limited extent to which whole plants experience. Accordingly, we must move away from farming methods which, for instance, cause or encourage soil-erosion, desertification, pollution of the air and the water, or habitat destruction, and move toward a system which respects and protects the beauty of the land and the biotic community.

Secondly, many take issue with the claim that a vegetarian lifestyle may be morally obligatory by noting that other animals are not so kind as to limit themselves to vegetation. It is at this point that our earlier discussion of tragedy, ugliness, and discord is helpful (see chapter 4, section B). The destruction of one nonhuman animal by another, while a tragic loss of a beautiful individual, is not wholly evil. For instance, in the United States, before top predators such as wolves were reintroduced into some areas, it was often necessary for governments to manually decrease the population of grazing animals so that they would not overburden an ecosystem. For, if left unchecked, the decimation of an ecosystem's plant life would not only disrupt the balance of the system as a whole and the multitudes of individuals which depend upon it, it would ultimately lead to the death of the grazing animals themselves. Although the reintroduction of such predators results in the violence of a painful death to individual animals, it does not diminish the overall beauty achieved. On the contrary, in helping to restore the stability and vitality of the ecosystem, it enriches the experience of the system as well as every individual within it. Accordingly, unlike many other positions, the Ethics of Creativity is able to affirm the importance of predation to the healthy functioning of natural systems, while arguing for moral vegetarianism.

While some critics might find such an assessment to be unfeeling of the violent death of an individual, such a position is in fact life-affirming. Contrary to many contemporary moral philosophies, I would contend that an objection such as this is often based on the invalid assumption that pain and pleasure are equivalent to good and evil. In this respect, I would join J. Baird Callicott in arguing that, from the perspective of ecological biology, "pain and pleasure seem to have nothing at all to do with good and evil." Pain is not a *prima facia* evil, it is a critical form of information. "In animals, it informs the central nervous system of stress, irritation, or trauma in outlying regions of the organism."[12] Accordingly, while the pain suffered by an individual is often relevant to a moral agent's moral decision-making, its presence or absence does not cleanly point to the morality of an event. Our aim, therefore, is not to eliminate all pain. Rather, our aim, like the aim of every process, is always to affirm the most beautiful whole possible. It is a particular strength of the current position that it is able to justify the moral obligation to avoid the unnecessary consumption of animals on the part of moral agents, while not having to also require the end of predation in nature. As Whitehead noted, life is robbery. The question is, is that robbery justified? In the case of predation, the violent death of an individual may at once be tragic and justified.

There is an additional problem with pointing to predation in nature in order to avoid the obligation of vegetarianism. Namely, it fails to recognize the distinction between a moral agent and a moral patient. Though extremely complex and beautiful, most nonhuman animals are not complex enough to be both free and responsible, while most healthy adult human animals are. In other words, most nonhuman animals do not possess sufficient freedom to be able to choose not to prey on other forms of life in order to sustain themselves. Most humans have no such excuse.[13]

Finally, it is important to note that we are not advocating an absolute prohibition on the consumption of animals or the view that animals, human or nonhuman, have absolute value. The Ethics of Creativity is a situated ethic; it does not trade in the currency of absolutes. Although it *may* be appropriate to rob from other forms of life, it is not *always* appropriate to do so. Accordingly, if a human were in an environment in which animal life were in abundance, but plant life was unavailable, say, in an arctic tundra, then it is possible that the destruction of an animal would be morally appropriate. Similarly, if the plants or animals involved were endangered or if at some point it becomes feasible for humans to flourish without eating either plants or animals, then the morally appropriate action would be significantly altered. Thus, as I discuss in detail in the final chapter, in the Ethics of Creativity, morality does not amount simply to giving preference to those individuals which are more complex. Ultimately, the only justification open to any action is that it maximizes the beauty, value, and importance which in each situation is possible.

Given the ecological standpoint adopted here, the morality of one's diet is ultimately determined not merely by *what* is eaten, but *how* what is eaten is produced. That is, the question is not *whether* one's diet is environmentally destructive, but *how* destructive it is. While there are morally relevant differences between plants and animals, vegetarians and vegans should not be seduced into thinking that their hands are clean because they don't eat animals.[14] Once we appreciate the embedded nature of our ecological existence we realize that no living being has "clean hands." Every living organism must destroy others in order that it might sustain itself. Humans are no exception. It is not possible for humans—or any other living being—to sustain themselves without destroying other beautiful and complex forms of life. Such a moral position resists the temptation to reduce the moral life to simplistic binary states of "good" and "bad." In the final analysis, there are only ameliorative grades of better and worse relative to that ever-evolving moral ideal. The problem, as William James eloquently put it, is that "The actually possible world is vastly narrower than all that is demanded; and there is always a *pinch* between the ideal and the actual which can only be got through by leaving part of the ideal behind."[15] We should feel this moral "pinch" at every meal, whether we are eating plants or animals. The act of eating is an inherently moral act; our robbery of life must be continually justified.

Every 5-10 days hunger kills as many people as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Endnotes

1. See, for instance, Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2007) and *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Schlosser and Wilson, Chew on This (New York: Houghton Miflin, 2006); Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009); Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food Nation* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007); Karl Weber, ed. *Food Inc.* (New York: Participant Media, 2009).

2. I use "new agrarian movement" to refer to the loose collection of popular writers and scholars who seek to move society away from industrial food production. This phrase is inspired by the book series created by The University of Kentucky Press, *Culture of the Land: A Series in the New Agrarianism*. My thanks to Lee McBride for bringing this to my attention.

3. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality.* 1929. Corrected Edition. Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 105.

4. For brevity, I will occasionally refer simply to "humans" rather than to "human animals" or "animals" rather than to "nonhuman animals." This is merely for ease of use and is not meant to imply that humans are nonanimals.

5. For a more developed discussion of this important topic from a process perspective, refer to John B. Cobb, Jr., "Palmer on Whitehead: A Critical Evaluation," *Process Studies* 33 (2004): 4-23, esp. 18f.

6. In this country alone, "The U.S. 2000 census found that there are 209 million people 18 and older in the U.S. If we subtract 4 million institutionalized of all ages, based on 2.8 percent vegetarians, we calculate there are about 5.7 million adult vegetarians in the U.S." ("How many vegetarians are there? A 2003 national Harris Interactive survey question sponsored by The Vegetarian Resource Group," *Vegetarian Journal* May-June 2003).

7. For a detailed treatment of this aspect of the debate refer to section two of Steve F. Sapontzis, ed. *Food for Thought: The Debate Over Eating Meat* (New York: Prometheus, 2004), 36-69.

8. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 95.

9. Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine, 1991), 15.

10. "Fighting to Eradicate World Hunger," United Nations World Food Program, (accessed October 14, 2004).

Henning, continued on page 43

Human uniqueness, human distinctiveness, and EVOLUTION

by LESLIE A. MURAY

This paper builds on previous work I have done arguing against human uniqueness in favor of "human distinctiveness."[1] In my view, the notion of human uniqueness is hopelessly anthropocentric. Hence, I express preference for "human distinctiveness" because, while it differentiates between humans and non-humans, that difference is not absolute; it is of degree not of kind. At the same, the concept also allows me to claim that all species are distinctive.

Philosophically, metaphysically I defend this contention by using Whitheheadian process thought. In process thought, anything actual at all, from the tiniest energy event to amoebas to dolphins and human beings have a capacity to feel at however a rudimentary a level. The capacity to feel, to experience varies according to the degree of the complexity of self-organization. However, these variations are differences of degree and not of kind; they are not absolute.[2]

In theology, I seek to avoid anthropocentrism, including the at least implicit anthropocentrism of the language of human uniqueness by extending the doctrine of the *"imago dei"* to nonhuman creatures. I make use of Alfred North Whitehead and Bernard E. Meland's concept of the "individual-in-community" as the *imago dei* that is in all creatures, human and nonhuman alike.[3]

I elaborate on these previously developed concepts and give them scientific backing by bringing in the works of Donald Griffin, Marc Beckoff, and Nancy R. Howell. Griffin has done extensive work to show that nonhuman animals think in some fashion, resembling the contentions of process thought in this regard. Beckoff has sought, in a manner resembling process thinkers, to extend the notion of personhood to nonhumans, claiming that nonhumans think, feel, and have culture at some level. Nancy R. Howell has shown the similarity between humans and chimpanzees in seeking empirical grounding for seeking to extend the *imago dei* to nonhumans.

I pull the philosophical, theological, and scientific strands together in developing my preference for the notion of human distinctiveness as I endeavor to overcome anthropocentricism by situating humans in the nonhuman natural world and seeing them as kin to all creatures even as I affirm the specialness of humans along with the specialness of all creatures.

Process thought and human distinctiveness

In process thought, the most basic unit of reality is the "actual occasion of experience" or "actual entity," a throbbing, dynamic "energy event" which I prefer to call the momentary experiencing or experience of the moment. The things that appear to be solid objects are energy events (there are no substances, just the momentary events), interrelated and interdependent, extended in space and time, with varying degrees of complexity of organization, culminating in animals with an organizing center of experience. While the only experience that we know we know from "the inside" is human experience, Whiteheadian process thought, in seeking to be consistent, coherent, and adequate, maintains that whatever we say about human beings needs to be applicable to anything actual at all, at no matter how rudimentary level.

A momentary experiencing self-creative subject constitutes itself as it "prehends," appropriates, internalizes data from the past. The past flows into the present and is constitutive of the present. The present cannot help but take account of, take into its very self-constitution the past. And that is **all** of the past—not just my own but that of the entire the universe! Thus, **all** of the past cannot help but be part of my very becoming.

However, what the we do with past in the present, **how** we take the past into account, **how** we allow it to enter the present is up to us. Repetition of the past typifies the experience of simple organisms or actualities while a greater capacity for novelty is evident in organisms with more complex degrees of organization.

The immediacy of all moments of subjective experiencing perishes. Objectively, all actual occasions, with the loss of immediacy, become data in the becoming of future occasions of experience. They are the matrix of interrelationships out of which a moment of subjective experiencing arises and which, i.e. the past of the entire universe, the becoming occasion "prehends."

Not only are we free as to **how** we prehend the past, we are also free as to **how** we respond to the possibilities of the future. The momentary experiencing seeks fulfillment as it creatively synthesizes data from the past, not as an isolated, atomistic, self-sufficient substance but in relation to the fulfillment of everything actual at all.

Fulfillment in the Whiteheadian scheme involves the idea that all creatures, all actualities drive towards the experience of beauty, richness of experience. Beauty involves two components: harmony and intensity. In order for there to be intensity, a pattern of contrast needs to be present. However, the contrast and consequently the intensity may be so great as to create disharmony. In similar fashion, harmony may be so great as to make contrast negligible, leading to the trivialization of experience. Thus, we might say, beauty is a balance between harmony and intensity.

Our greatest challenge today is the environmental crisis, and to meet that crisis we need to develop values that are non-anthropocentric.

In Whiteheadian process thought, the drive toward fulfillment, the experience of beauty, is characteristic of anything actual at all—from the tiniest energy event to atoms and molecules to animals with central nervous systems. Consequently, perhaps the most important metaphysical claim a Whiteheadian understanding of nature can make is that **experience is the locus of value**. In the Whiteheadian scheme, any subjective experiencing, however rudimentary, is of **intrinsic** value. To be sure, the immediacy and intensity of all subjective experiences "perish," becoming "objective data" in the becoming of other momentary experiencing subjects. Thus, while any experience is of **intrinsic** value in the immediacy and intensity of the moment, it is also of **instrumental** value as it contributes to richness of experience of consequent moments of experience.

Although all experiences are of **intrinsic** value, this not to say that all experiences are of equal value. There is an incredible variety in the capacity for "richness of experience," for "intensity of feeling." The capacity for richness of experience depends on the degree of complexity of organization as "actual occasions of experience" come together, extended in space and time.

Positing the locus of value in momentary experiencing is not to be understood in a substantialist, atomistic but rather in a relational way. That is to say, as we have seen, as the moment of subjective experiencing prehends data from the past, the past of the entire universe, it arises out of a fundamental web of relationships. This holds true from the tiniest energy event to the complex experiencing of the human self. In the relational universe of Whiteheadian process thought there is neither *absolute* distinction nor *absolute* identity between the self (or any subjective experience) and "the other," no *absolute* boundary between the self (or any subjective experience) and the world. If that is so, the difference between humans and nonhumans is best described *not* in terms of the absolute connotations of the word uniqueness but the more contextual and relational implications of distinctiveness.

The web of relationships is the nurturing (or obstructive) matrix for the richness of experience of the becoming moment. The nurturing web of relationships is perhaps the most appropriate place to introduce the Whiteheadian notion of God. In Whiteheadian process thought, always seeking consistency and coherence, God is not an exception to metaphysical categories but their chief exemplification. God is not a "supernatural" God "over" or "beyond" the world, intruding "from the outside" but a God within the world (or nowhere), "naturalistically" conceived.

Like all actual entities, God has an active and a receptive side. On the active side, what Whitehead calls "the primordial nature," God provides order to the universe without violating the fundamental creativity and freedom of all actualities—thus leaving room for the role of "chaos." In a certain sense, God is "cosmic orderer" of the universe. God provides order in the universe by, first of all, envisaging all possibilities, and, second,

ordering those possibilities in order of graded relevance. Thus, the relevant possibilities God offers every moment cannot obliterate the cumulative effect of past decisions. Nevertheless, God does offer novel possibilities every moment. God does not act coercively but always persuasively "beckoning," "luring" us with the best or ideal possibility to realize ourselves every moment, not in splendid isolation but in our fundamental interdependence and interrelatedness with all creatures, human and nonhuman.

Not only does God have an active side, she/he also has a receptive side as well, what Whitehead call the "consequent nature" of God. In this dimension of the divine, God receives all experiences, human and non-human, into her/his experience and preserves them with no loss of immediacy. Thus, it is equally true to say that the world is in God as it is to say that God is in the world. As Whitehead says movingly, "God is the great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands."

Thus, this fundamental web of relationships, of which God is the chief exemplification, is the nurturing matrix that empowers the no less fundamental creativity and freedom of all things. It is the nurturing matrix for becoming moments of subjective experience, which are the loci of intrinsic value. It provides, in the most basic way, a sense of rootedness, of belonging in the nonhuman natural world, the earth, the cosmos that overcomes our most fundamental alienation from the universe. And because of this sense of rootedness and belonging in the fundamental interrelatedness of all things, we are empowered to overcome our alienation from ourselves and our fellow creatures, human and nonhuman, and from the sacred. This is the transformative vision of a Whiteheadian concept of nature.

Extending "Imago Dei" to nonhumans

Our greatest challenge today is the environmental crisis and to meet that crisis we need to develop values that are non-anthropocentric. In this regard, I consider the doctrine of the *"imago dei"* to be crucial. The doctrine of the *imago* has been, at least in the Western tradition, one of the sources for establishing the dignity of human beings simply by virtue of being human. It is time to extend the notion of dignity to nonhumans as well. Within the Christian tradition, one step in doing so is to extend the *imago dei* to nonhumans, which is possible only if we see the difference between humans and nonhumans not in terms of uniqueness but distinctiveness, in terms of degree and not of kind.

For much of the Christian tradition, the image of God has been understood in terms of the rational faculty, attributed strictly to human beings. We need to see the rational faculty, mentality, freedom present in anything actual at all, at no matter how rudimentary a level.

In 1993, I gave a paper at the St. Andrews conference (sponsored by the Highlands Institute for American Religious Thought) on "Religious Experience and Ecological Responsibility. There I delineated the manner in which I would do this. Appropriating the process conceptuality of Alfred North Whitehead and Bernard E. Meland, I argued for a conception of the *imago dei* as that of the "individual-in-community." Describing the individual, human and nonhuman, as an individual-in-community is to claim that the self is a relational self, internally related to its environment, human and nonhuman.

The word "community" includes the whole of the environment, human and nonhuman, of any individual event. The individuated event is part of the whole of that community and the community is a part of the individuated event—the communities of communities of the entire universe entering the self-constitution of a momentary experience (the preeminent model for the individual-in-community). Thus, in Meland's words, any individuated event is the "creation in-miniature,"[4] meaning that our very selves as unique individuals, human and nonhuman, include the earth, the universe of which we, human and nonhuman alike, are the creatures. This is the way I like to put it, to quote from my St. Andrews paper, "the web of interrelationships is the nurturing matrix of creative freedom; the exercise of creative freedom is empowered by God, the supreme instance of relatedness, the all inclusive matrix of relationality; all creatures, all actualities are 'made' in the divine image, instances of the relationality that empowers creative freedom."[5]

Thinking, feeling, communication, and culture among nonhuman animals

The argument for human uniqueness in the evolutionary process is usually made in terms of the rational capacities of humans, our ability to use language, and the fact that we have culture(s). These are typically seen as characteristics that provide an absolute boundary between humans and nonhumans.

To process thinkers like myself, this parallels the notion of a *"deus ex machina"* and contradicts evolutionary theory in fundamental ways. If the complex forms of life emerged from the simple, then mentality, freedom, language, and culture were not an evolutionary version of *"creatio ex nihilo"* but needed to be present in however a rudimentary form in the simplest actualities (even if one grants Stephen Jay Gould's point that there have been huge leaps in the evolutionary process). While I would grant that biological evolution and cultural development are different, I contend that they are **distinct** yet **interrelated**. I would assert that not only does cultural development interact with biological evolution but that it has biological roots as well. For example, I would contend that there is such a thing as animal culture, with subcultures. While it may be a different form of art than the Paleolithic cave paintings, birdsong, for example, is a rather sophisticated form of nonhuman art, performed not just for the sake of attracting mates but for the sheer enjoyment of singing.[6] I would contend that while language may be **distinctive,** it is a distinctive and highly complex form of communication, something that is common to humans and nonhumans alike.

To be sure, this panpsychist or panexperientialist point of view is not widely shared in the scientific community. However, an increasing number of scientists are finding evidence that indeed nonhuman animals are capable of some level of conscious thought, communicate their thoughts and feelings, and have their own culture.

Donald R. Griffin has been a pioneer in this endeavor. In Animal Thinking, *he maintains that the mechanistic, reductionistic—the bias of much of modern science—has been a barrier to raising the issue of animal thinking and feeling.*

Donald R. Griffin has been a pioneer in this endeavor. In *Animal Thinking,* he maintains that the mechanistic, reductionistic—the bias of much of modern science—has been a barrier to raising the issue of animal thinking and feeling.[7] He writes:

> At issue here is whether animals are mechanisms and nothing more. Most biologists and psychologists, tend explicitly or implicitly, to treat most of the world's as mechanisms, complex mechanisms to be sure, but unthinking robots nonetheless. (9)

Appreciative of the panpsychism or panexperientialism of Whiteheadian process thought, particularly as expounded by John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, he argues that even assuming a materialist perspective, nonhuman animals communicate with each other and that they communicate feelings. The very attempt to communicate feelings suggests conscious thought, at some level. It also suggests that such conscious thought among effects behavior. Griffin analyzes laboratory experiments as well as electrical activity in the brains of nonhumans that provide scientific evidence for the presence of conscious of thinking. A recurring thread in his argument is that the capacity of nonhuman animals to respond to and adapt to novel situations and challenges would not be possible without some level of conscious thinking.

Frans de Waal, professor of primate behavior at Emory University and director of the Living Links Center, has written extensively about the results of research showing that apes have a form of culture. For example, he alludes to a story told by Ramona and Desmond Morris about young chimpanzees at the London Zoo who had been trained to use eating utensils, a teapot, and table manners. As part of the entertainment for their audience, the chimps would start to break cups and dishes, drop things, and drink through the spout just as their keeper turned his back, which of course was the signal that they had been taught to start misbehaving! Although the human audience was laughing at the chimpanzees, was it the chimps who had the last laugh?[8]

De Waal also demonstrates that non-humans are capable of inventing and using tools, one of the characteristic features of culture. He describes how chimpanzees in Bossou, New Guinea, use tools of their own making for nut cracking. These tools are sufficiently sophisticated so that a lack of coordination can cause injury to the user and/or escaping nuts.[9] These are a small sample of the vast body of evidence de Waal provides for his contention that nonhumans have culture.

Mark Bekoff, professor of biology at the University of Colorado, is another important scientist who argues for the presence of feeling, thinking, and culture in nonhumans to the point of attributing personality"[10] to them. In *Minding Animals*, he analyzes a variety of animal emotions, ranging from anger to sadness to love. For him, the presence of emotions in nonhumans seems so self-evident that the real question is how emotions evolved and what adaptive purpose they serve. Beckoff is appreciative of Donald R. Griffin's work, but he believes the contemporary study of animal thinking is barely scratching the surface. He maintains that we need greater clarity about what we mean by "self-consciousness" and "consciousness" even as we recognize the presence of mentality in nonhumans.

Bekoff gives numerous examples of some form of language and communication, of animal culture. Perhaps the most intriguing is his exploration of play as providing the basis for a sense of fairness that is inseparable from empathy and that may provide insight into the origins of social morality.

Finally, I need to mention the innovative work of Nancy R. Howell. An ecofeminist process theologian with a background in biology who has been deeply immersed in the religion-science dialogue. Her research on the linguistic capacities of bonobos have provided scientific evidence for the claim of continuity between humans and nonhumans as well as providing empirical grounding for extending the *imago dei.*

The contemporary study of animal thinking is barely scratching the surface.

Conclusion

I have argued on philosophical, theological, and scientific grounds against the idea of human uniqueness in favor of the notion of human distinctiveness. This notion allows one to affirm our specialness (not in an absolute way) alongside the specialness of other species, affirming our continuity with the nonhuman natural world without any claims of superiority. While this claim of human distinctiveness in place of human uniqueness stands on its own philosophical, theological, and scientific merit, it also provides the pragmatic benefit of overcoming anthropocentrism. In this regard, Marc Bekoff gets the final word:

> We must all work together, for in the end we all want the same thing—a better Life. Our better life must not come at the expense of. other beings, and it is made truly better when it includes all beings. There's nothing to fear and much to gain by developing deep and reciprocal interactions with our fellow animals. Animals can teach us a great deal about responsibility, compassion, caring, forgiveness, and the value of deep friendship and love. Animals generously share their hearts with us, and we should do the same. Animals naturally respond to each other because we are all feeling and passionate beings. Let us embrace us embrace our fellow animals as the kindred spirits they are.[11]

Endnotes

1. See my " Human Uniqueness vs. Human Distinctiveness: The *Imago Dei* as the Kinship of All Creatures," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 28.3 (September 2007), 299-310 (paper presented at the conference on Wentzel van Huyssteen's Gifford lectures, *Alone in the World?* sponsored by the Highlands Institute for North American Religious and Philosophic Thought, Highlands, N.C., June 2006).

2. See my "Explorations in Personalistic Organicism," in George Allan, and Merle F. Allshouse, eds., *Nature, Truth, and Value: Exploring the Thinking of Frederick Ferré* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005) 39-52].

3. See my "Meland's Mystical Naturalism and Ecological Responsibility," Crosby, D., and Hardwick, C., editors, *Religious Experience and Ecological Responsibility* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 257-75; (paper presented at Second International Conference on Philosophical Theology, August 1993, St. Andrews, Scotland).

4. Bernard E. Meland, *Faith and Culture* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illnois UP, 1953) 140.

5. Muray, "Meland's Mystical Naturalism and Ecological Responsibility," 267.

6. See Charles Hartshorne, *Born To Sing: An Interpretation of Bird Song* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1973).

7. Donald R. Griffin, *Animal Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984) vii.

8. Frans de Waal, *The Ape and the Sushi Master: Cultural Reflections of a Primatologist* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) 3-4.

9. Ibid., 241-42.

10. Mark Bekoff and Jane Goodall, *Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart* (Oxford UP, 2002) 14.

11. Marc Bekoff, *The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2010) 209.

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Stop this BOAT . . . NEOW!

by PATRICIA ADAMS FARMER

You can never step into the same river twice, for new waters are always flowing on to you. ~ Heraclitus

If my cat, Monet, were on Noah's Ark, he would probably hide in the pocket of a kangaroo and never come out. Cats don't like moving boats or moving cars—or moving anything. They particularly don't fancy moving water. Cats like dry, solid ground. They prefer sameness and routine, too, along with familiar places, faces, and voices. You might say that cats are the ultimate conservatives, the very definition of convention with all their little habits and eating rituals and familiar sleeping places. And don't even think about messing with their schedules.

Recently we moved to a new home. Monet, needless to say, did not take well to the change. Being forced into his cat carrier—or boat, to stick with the metaphor—and being hauled (or paddled) across town to an unknown location was alone worth protesting at the top of his lungs. Then there were the odd smells, the unfamiliar sounds, the new bathroom facility, all complete terror. Like sea monsters rising out of a primeval ocean, every new thing threatened. *Where to hide?*

On the second day, finding the bottom drawer of my dresser not closing properly, I bent down. Peeking out from behind the drawer, imploring green eyes peered into mine as if to say, "How could you?"

Monet would not get on swimmingly with Heraclitus who, with his moving water metaphors, believed that change is reality, the one thing in life that you can count on. For cats—and ourselves—too much change is downright discombobulating.

So, where is God in all of our daily discombobulations?

God knows all about the vagaries of reality—oh, yes—because God is ontologically part of the evolving, flowing, churning universe; the part that knows, that feels, that responds and suffers with us—our "great companion." In God, the flow of change is cradled by the constancy of love. Bruce Epperly calls this "the never ending holy adventure of love."[1] *The never ending holy adventure of love:* this is where change meets meaning, where fear flows into faith, where destiny is made in the wake of our daily becomings. And it never stops, this loving, flowing, adventure-filled journey. Not even if the worst should happen.

In my novel, *The Metaphor Maker*, I refer to the boat-like architecture in the ceiling of the ballroom at the Ambassador Hotel, where in 1968 Bobby Kennedy fans celebrated his win in the California presidential primary. My protagonist, Madeline Prescott, filled with hope, "looked up at the grand wood ceiling, slightly arched like a boat, as if they were on Noah's Ark, safe and sure in the stormy sea of 1968." Yet, hours later, Bobby Kennedy was fatally shot in that very safe and sure place.

But the story doesn't end there, not my story, not the Big Story. In the Big Story, on our voyage of adventure, with its bumps and jolts and threatening squalls, we (humans, cats, kangaroos, etc.) need to hold on to one shining assurance: we can never really sink or drown or be hopelessly lost at sea because God is not just the boat upon the water; God is in the water, too. And still deeper than our fear and grief, beneath that terrifying rush, is solid ground: the solid ground of never ending love.

Monet, my cat, does not understand all this theology, or the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus (who himself believed in an undergirding Logos). But what Monet does understand is love, and that is why he no longer hides behind the drawer.

Notes

1 Bruce Epperly, *Holy Adventure: 41 Days of Audacious Living* (Upper Room, 2008) 196.

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. . . and ALSO many animals:

reflections on Jonah 4:9-11; Genesis 2:4-7, 18-19; Romans 8:19-23

by RONALD L. FARMER

I recently enjoyed a "mini-sabbatical." The duration was considerably shorter than the traditional academic sabbatical; nonetheless, I had the luxury of uninterrupted time to read and write—and most importantly, to think. And what did I think about? For a number of weeks I pondered biblical texts that mention animals. Rather than try to share my conclusions in this brief article, what I propose is to invite you into my study where you can peer over my shoulder mid-process as I wrestle with three provocative biblical texts.

Provocative text #1. No doubt you're familiar with the story of Jonah. If so, I'm sure your mind immediately jumped to the "great fish" that swallowed the recalcitrant Galilean prophet. But that's not the animal text that captured my attention. To prepare you for the Book of Jonah's unexpected and thought-provoking "punch line," let me summarize the story.

Jonah was a prophet of God; that is, he was a spokesperson for God. His "job" was to help people understand their world, and their lives in that world, from the divine perspective. As the story opens, God comes to Jonah with a mission impossible: he is to travel to the city of Ninevah and proclaim that, unless the people repent, their wicked ways will soon bring the city to ruin. Now you need to recall that Ninevah was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire that destroyed the northern kingdom, Israel, in 722. Why on earth would God ask Jonah to call his enemies to repentance? Jonah *wanted* Ninevah to fall. He *hated* the Assyrians. They were The Evil Empire!

So Jonah rejected God's mission impossible, but he didn't just remain in Galilee. Oh, no! Rather than heading *east* to Ninevah, he boarded a ship bound for Tarshish in southern Spain, i.e., as far to the *west* as he could go. One thing the Bible discloses, in story after story, is that God is persistent. God never *forces* us to do anything, but God never gives up on us either. God constantly *woos*, and *lures*, and *persuades* us to do what is best in each moment. And that's where the great fish figures into the story. The fish serves as the world's first submarine, if you will, transporting the runaway prophet back to Israel, where the fish spits up Jonah on the beach.

While sitting on the beach still reeking of fish, Jonah is again summoned to the mission. Reluctantly, Jonah travels to Ninevah and proclaims God's call to repentance. Then Jonah's worst fears materialize: the evil city repents. Angry that the Ninevites repented, Jonah climbs a hill and sets up camp in the shade of a bush God causes to grow for Jonah's comfort. There he sat for twenty-four hours, hoping against hope that the capital city of his enemies would be destroyed in spite of their repentance. At sunrise the next day the shade bush dies, leaving the sulking Jonah beside himself with anger to face the scorching heat of the sun and a sultry east wind. At this pregnant moment in the story, God speaks the provocative words found in Jonah 4:9-11.

Jonah the prophet learns a lesson that we still have trouble comprehending today. God's concern extends to every creature in the universe. Every human being—even our enemies. Every living creature—and yes, that includes every animal.

Provocative text #2. The creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, understood as powerful religious myth, are foundational to the Christian understanding of the world and of our place in it. Unfortunately, some of the most salient features of the creation stories are misinterpreted or overlooked entirely, both by those who read them figuratively as well as by the so-called "creationists" who mistakenly read them literally. One common misreading concerns the expression in 1:25 typically translated "have dominion over." I wish I had space to address the misreading in some detail, but let me simply say that the Hebrew text clearly discloses that human dominion should be understood as *benevolent* and *peaceful*, corresponding to God's dominion. Moreover, human dominion is clearly limited: for example, human dominion is exercised on God's behalf—i.e., humans are merely *God's stewards* or managers, who are held accountable for their stewardship of the planet. A second limitation on human dominion is that it is *non-violent*. In Genesis, humans are vegetarians until after the Noah story—but more on that later.

The aspect of the Genesis creation stories that I want to call to your attention is a Hebrew expression that occurs in the older of the two creation stories, Genesis 2. In vv. 4-7 and vv. 18-19, the very same Hebrew words are used to describe both humans and animals: *nephesh chay*. *Nephesh* is typically translated "soul" or "life force." *Chay* means "living." Hence, both humans and animals alike are living souls; they are animated by the same life force—the breath of God.[1]

The implications of these verses are profound. Is it any wonder that most English translations have chosen to render *nephesh chay* in 2:19 (and other verses where it refers to animals) by some expression other than "living souls"? For example, the normally bold New Revised Standard Version cautiously renders the Hebrew as "living creatures." The more accurate translation, "living souls," inevitably raises the question, How then should we treat animals if they are living souls who share the same life principle that we do?

Provocative text #3. The eighth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans contains many beautiful and comforting verses. As the climax of Paul's lengthy description of God's redemptive activity,[2] chapter eight merits special attention. For eight chapters Paul focused on God's gracious, salvific activity, stressing that God's redemptive activity is for Gentiles as well as Jews. As the old hymn proclaims, "There's a wideness in God's mercy / like the wideness of the sea . . ." But as the hymn laments, "But we make God's love too narrow / by false limits of our own . . ."[3] Paul's major concern was to proclaim that Gentiles were included in God's circle of concern, right alongside Jews. And then, in the middle of this chapter, Paul dropped a golden nugget that we still haven't grasped today: vv. 19-23. God's redemptive activity is wider than the Jews; it's wider even than the Gentiles; it's nothing less than cosmic in scope!

Throughout the long history of biblical revelation there are provocative statements about the wideness of God's mercy, but sadly these statements have not struck home with many people. For example, consider God's covenant with Noah *and* the animals (Gen. 9:8-11 cf. 9:8-17). And then there's the lament in Isa. 24:4-6 concerning human sin polluting the earth. Boy, does that passage have a contemporary ring to it! For months we watched with horror as BP's oil well polluted the Gulf of Mexico. Not surprisingly, we have heard accusations that criminal negligence lies at the heart of the incident. In Rom. 8:19ff Paul reminds us that the circle of God's concern is *cosmic* in scope, in spite of the anthropocentric, speciesist glasses God's people have so often worn.

My kindergarten teacher used a delightful expression when she wanted us to engage in a time of contemplation: "time to put on our thinking caps." I now invite you to put on your thinking cap as I pose a host of questions. You may not have a sabbatical to devote to pondering these questions, but perhaps you could take a few hours for some serious reflection—a micro-sabbatical, so to speak.

The overarching question: How should we treat animals if they are living souls who share the same life principle that we do? This overarching question needs to be held in creative tension with the overarching realization: As Alfred North Whitehead so pointedly stated, "But whether or no it be for the general good, life is robbery. It is at this point that with life morals become acute. The robber requires justification."[4] By the simple act of being alive, you make a claim on the planet. For any living soul to exist, it must take in "food" of some sort. Thus, life is robbery. This realization interjects ethics into the equation. You are alive and therefore you must justify each "robbery."

A first group of questions, regarding sustainable development

(To leave space for the other two groups, I'll summarize as one complex question.) How do we engage in sustainable development that meets legitimate human needs while balancing the need to preserve natural habitats for wild animals?

A second group of questions, regarding compassionate eating

Should I consider becoming vegan, abstaining from all food and other products derived from animals? Should I consider becoming vegetarian, abstaining from all flesh? If I choose to eat meat, which animals will I eat? If I choose to eat meat, will I make certain that the raising and slaughtering of the animals I eat is done in as humane a manner as possible?

As you will recall, the mythic creation stories portray all creatures as vegetarian "in the beginning."[5] After sin entered the picture, people were "allowed" to eat flesh (Gen. 9:1-6), but even then strict guidelines were established: the laws of *Kashrut*. Rabbis suggest that among the things these laws were instituted to teach is the value of life, including animal life. The taking of a life, *any* life, is a serious thing. Interestingly, in the mythic portrayal of the coming messianic age, all creatures will again be vegetarian. The centrality of non-violence in creation and re-creation is significant and merits reflection.

People from all religious traditions who have pondered these questions—whether they are vegans, vegetarians, or meat-eaters—agree on the need to end concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), more commonly known as factory farms. This practice, developed in the last sixty years, is (1) *exceedingly cruel* (Do you have any idea what life is *really* like inside those

shiny metal barns for 10 billion U.S. farm animals annually?); (2) *utterly destructive to the environment* (Factory farms are the worst single factor in the degradation of the environment.); (3) *responsible for a host of social injustices* (Think Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* on steroids!); and (4) *profoundly dangerous to human health* (Consider the recent recall of a half-billion eggs, or the Swine Flu, or the Avian Flu, or the spinach recall from e-coli contaminated runoff, or the development of "super bugs" because of the massive use of antibiotics in livestock feed . . . need I go on?).

I'm convinced that animal compassion is one of the next great spiritual awakenings. I want to be a part of it.

California and a handful of other states have taken the first baby steps in the gradual elimination of this cruel, destructive, unjust, and dangerous agricultural model. What role will you play in this revolution? How addicted are you to factory farming's "cheap food" that externalizes much of the true costs of production? Are you willing to pay more for food as we shift to more sustainable, healthful, compassionate, and honest methods? Remember, the abolition of slavery required a new economic model. Economic decisions are *not* value neutral. Should our actions be governed by expediency or ethics? Should we be concerned for short-term profit or long-term sustainability?

A third group of questions, regarding the use of animals

What do you think about the ethics of having animals in captivity? Do zoos serve a greater good by raising human consciousness about the need for preserving species and habitats? What about animals used for entertainment, as in aquatic parks, rodeos, and circuses? What about animals raised for the fur industry? And then there's the issue of animals used in scientific and medical research. Animals cannot sign a consent form, as is required for any research involving human subjects. And finally, what about our beloved companion animals—not just obvious concerns like puppy mills and dog fighting, but the whole concept of viewing animals as property? Slaves were once viewed as property. If animals are "living souls," . . . ?

Enough questions. Clearly the subject of animals is a topic to which the church has turned a blind eye. Being awakened to this long-ignored topic is disturbing, especially when you consider how many billions of "living souls" we are contemplating. I'll be honest with you; I don't have all the answers. I'm struggling with the enormity of the issue myself. A group of like-minded people of different faiths have created a "think tank," for lack of a better word, to explore this subject.[6] As we seek to develop ideas that will contribute to the creative transformation of the current situation, we want to avoid the attitudes and tactics of some groups concerned about animals. Compassion must be exercised toward *all* living souls, including those human living souls for whom this issue is not even on the radar. But it is time to begin thinking—and acting. I'm convinced that animal compassion is one of the next great spiritual awakenings.[7] I want to be a part of it. The church needs people who feel called to devote themselves to the work of thinking through these complex issues, and then implementing compassionate solutions. We need pioneering people inspired by the spirit of St. Francis. Could it be that God is calling you to this mission? Amen.

Endnotes

1. Nephesh chay is also used four times in reference to animals in Genesis 1:20-31.

2. See Rom: 1:16-8:39.

3. Frederick W. Faber, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (1854).

4. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed., eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978) 105.

5. Remember, religious myths are "foundational stories" designed to teach some profound spiritual truth. They are not to be read as early mistaken attempts at a "scientific description" of reality.

6. Interreligious Voices for Animal Compassion.

7. In the 19th century the church wrestled with the issue of slavery. The 20th century witnessed the struggle for women's rights. Currently, the church is dealing with matters related to homosexuality. I truly think that compassion to animals will be the next huge issue.

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prayer in TROUBLING times

by MARJORIE HEWITT SUCHOCKI

The Bible knows a good deal about prayer in troubling times . . .

Just remember that ancient book of Habakkuk—not often in our lectionaries—where the prophet stands in agonizing anticipation as he watches the hordes come down to sack his beloved Jerusalem. Usually the Jewish people responded to disasters by asking what they had done wrong, that such calamity should come upon them, and Habakkuk continues the tradition. And then suddenly he notices what's wrong: the marauding hordes, presumably coming at the command of God to punish Israel for its sins, are even greater sinners! Who's punishing whom? Prayer then takes the form of "What's going on here?"

But we needn't go all the way back to a Hebrew prophet to suggest the problem with prayer in troubling times. I will give you just three illustrations—one personal, one national, one global—that have problematized prayer for me in these days. The first might actually annoy you a bit: why on earth should one worry about a squirrel getting eaten by a hawk? But truthfully, I had more than one long argument with God about this very thing. Let me explain.

one personal . . .

My daughter Cathy was out cleaning her pool in her Texas home when she heard a plop just behind her—and there it was, this little few-inch long scrawny blind hairless critter that she knew at once was a baby squirrel. The nest up above had been torn to pieces; there was no way to return him to his erstwhile home. Being a tender woman, she took the squirrel in, checked that all-knowing wizard, the internet, and learned how to care for the little thing. And care she did—she gave him tummy rubs ("he'd have rubbed up against his siblings in his nests," she said sagely) and fed him puppy formula. My grandson named him "Pope Squirrelington," and the little Pope thrived under Cathy's care. He opened his eyes, he grew hair, he became frisky, and lived happily in the spare room, sleeping in a basket lined with rags inside a cage whose door was always open. But the internet warned: squirrels are not pets; they do not tame; they must live in the wild. Truly, they could lead a miserable existence for maybe twelve years in captivity—and perhaps only two in the wild. But squirrels need the Great Outdoors once they reach the age of twelve weeks. And truly, it was clear that the spare room was NOT the place for an energetic squirrel who was literally climbing the walls.

So when twelve weeks came, in some trepidation—but wanting the best for this little creature—Cathy put a nail in the side of her house by their upstairs bedroom window, hung Pope's nest on the nail, and then built a shelf by the window, fastening a long branch from the shelf to the bush below. It took Pope just two days to discover his highway to the bushes; I watched him frolic from branch to branch, a glossy little bundle of energy seemingly overjoyed to be experiencing a natural habitat. Soon he discovered the bamboo forest behind Cathy's yard, but come twilight he'd be back on his shelf, looking for his tummy rubs and his almonds and his night inside his nest. As the months went by, he would always answer to his name when anyone called him, gazing brightly with tilted head—and he'd take his tasty almonds from anyone at all. But only Cathy was allowed to give the tummy rubs—and indeed, the Pope would turn over in her hand, golden belly-up, waiting for his tummy rub. What I can barely convey in this little story is how much Cathy loved this little creature, this wild piece of nature who responded so quickly to her touch. As the fall nights grew cold, she bought a warm baby blanket, lining his basket nest. And Pope was glossy and frisky, a healthy half/tame-half/wild little

one. Then, in early November, he did not come home for the night—and next day Cathy saw the hawk, circling the bamboo forest. She never saw the Pope again.

Now I told you that you might think my tale of the ways of nature a rather minor worry in the world—and I reckon that it is, for it is the nature of hawks to hunt for healthy little squirrels. But Cathy loved this little squirrel, and grieved mightily. She is no stranger to grief—in 1989 her infant daughter died of multiple birth defects; in 1993 her husband died of leukemia. Surely the loss of a wild squirrel does not compare with these tragedies; clearly, these earlier griefs far more truly own the title of "troubling times." We are marked forever by such losses. What was the death of the little Pope against such pain? Is it not just a rather benign instance of the normal losses of time? Why should I have railed at God—which I did?

It simply seemed to me that if God watches over all things, surely any self-respecting God would have led that hawk to some nameless and unloved field mouse! Or God could have warned Pope, keeping him hidden in the shadow of a mighty rock. It simply wasn't necessary that this glossy, frisky, bright eyed, almond loving, tummy-rubbed Pope should be bird-food at the age of eight months—two years, maybe, but not eight months! "God," I raged, "did you have to give Cathy just one more grief? Couldn't you have saved this squirrel?" I know—how silly to yell at God over the death of a squirrel. "Harumph," I complained, noticing that Jesus says God knows when the sparrow falls, but doesn't say anything at all about God stopping sparrows from falling in the first place. Nonetheless, "was it so very hard to spare the squirrel?" I prayed. "What kind of care is that!"

"Squirrels!" you might complain back to me. "How can you worry about squirrels when there is so much human pain going on in the world?!" But that's just the point, you see. There IS so much pain going on in the world, far more senseless than the death of a little squirrel. Perhaps in the enormity of the world's pain it is easier to focus on the little pains we endure, and in questioning God about the little ones, the larger ones loom quietly like stone giants in the background. How do we pray about little personal pains given the horror multiplied by many, many griefs and pains? How do we pray in troubling times—when God does not stop the fall of a sparrow, the death of a loved squirrel, the gushing of an oil well, the horrors of rape, torture, war, genocide, dying species, wanton rape of the environment, even to the point of threatening planetary death?

For the troubles in our nation and world are strong indeed. We are torn into bitter political polarities so that winning is more important than governing. We create trade agreements that we call free, regardless of the enslavement of poverty they produce. And then we scream about impoverished immigrants trying to come north for jobs, any jobs, no matter how backbreaking or degrading, so that they might send money home to families to buy food. Troubles! We seem to be addicted to endless wars and endless terrorisms over endless controversies and endless ideologies. And to mention addiction certainly calls attention to the endless yen for drugs in the United States, along with our endless support for the murderous drug cartels by our endless moralizing as we refuse to put drugs in the same legal category as other addictive substances such as nicotine and alcohol. We send jobs overseas where the labor is cheap—women in Vietnam are rejoicing because their salaries making clothes for Walmart were recently increased to $44 per month! And then we agonize over the growing economic losses to formerly middle-class Americans who no longer have work. We take vindictive pleasure in long prison sentences that now roll in profits for the increasing prisons-for-profit industry—we live in troubling times, no matter which end of the political spectrum seems best to us—or whether neither end suits, and we struggle for a degree of sanity in some elusive middle ground. How do we pray in such times? Does one political side pray for strength and protection from the other? What sense do such conflicting prayers make—and does God, who does not seem to intervene in whatever we do, even care about the fall of these "sparrows" of our nation? What sense does prayer make?

But of course even as we are weighed down by these national problems, the global problems loom. We learn that warming ocean waters have decreased the production of plankton by 40% in the past 40 years—and plankton not only produces oxygen, but also is the primary food supply whose loss affects all species in the oceans! Warming oceans—and now ships can plow that elusive Northwest Passage, the waters above Canada between the Atlantic and the Pacific. The loss of arctic ice not only now opens further international controversies over who gets to drill for the arctic oil, it also means death for those species of animals and plants whose life cycles depend upon arctic ice. Warming oceans; warming planet—and now hundreds of miles of pine forests in the Canadian and American Rockies are dead because of pine borers that no longer die in winter, forcing grizzlies and others who depend upon the mountain forests down into habitations already colonized by their enemies, we humans. We learn that the planet Venus, about as far from the sun as we are, once had oceans, but that now they are gone, turned into the noxious gases that shroud the planet in life-denying extremes of temperature—are we in the process of repeating that planetary death? Richard Lovelock writes that the earth has gone beyond the point of reversibility, that it will not be able to recover from the ills we are inflicting upon it—and we quibble over whether or not to stop this or that many greenhouse gases, fiddling away while our Rome burns. Troubling times! Never in human history have we had problems on such a global scale, so much so that the mind numbs, retreats, refusing the evidence. How do we pray in these troubling times? Can prayer do any good against our wanton willfulness? Does God stop the sparrow's fall, the warring worlds, the planet's death?

And now, you see, you are probably glad that I began this litany with something so small as the death of a squirrel—far easier to think about the death of a squirrel than the deaths of massive numbers of people and other living creatures through oil spills, war, famine, genocide, global warming, or the death of the planet itself. But luckily for those of us convinced by the cogent pragmatism of process theologies, there are ways to think about prayer—and to go beyond thinking about prayer, by actually engaging in prayer, even in such troubling times as these—or even and especially in such times as these.

Process changes the configuration that we bring to notions of prayer. Through much of the Christian tradition, prayer has been seen primarily as either a petitioning exercise in which we ask God for the things we need or want, or a thanksgiving exercise, in which we thank God for God's favor or indeed, for God's very being. The context of such asking or thanking usually assumes that God is rather like a beneficent monarch, occupied with many things, but holding court during which "his" subjects may make their requests. I do not want to argue against petitioning or thanking God, but I do want to argue against the notion of a God "out there" to whom we pray, and to follow the implications of the process conception that God is pervasively present in the world. By changing the "out there" assumptions often brought to notions of prayer, process also changes the meaning and work of prayer and increases its importance as a resource especially in troubling times.

While process argues for a form of transcendence for God—a sort of "out thereness"—its main emphasis is on the radical immanence of God. Transcendence and immanence are like the two sides of a coin, each requiring the other such that neither makes sense apart from the other. In this relational world in which we live, everything by virtue of being itself transcends all other existences, and at the same time, by virtue of being itself in a relational world, includes aspects of all other existences that have preceded it within its own constitution. Everything is transcendent; everything is immanent.

We can make such notions less abstract by considering our own mode of existing in the world. Each of us is distinct, unique, so that no matter how much we may share with others, we are not reducible to those others: we are ourselves. In this sense, we transcend all others. But in our very uniqueness, we know ourselves to be radically informed by, influenced by, shaped by others. We reflect the conscious and unconscious assumptions of our race, gender, class; we make judgments and form values that are more or less typical of our nationalities and cultures and families, no matter how we might individualize them. The opinions of our friends and relatives influence our own opinions—and especially in an academic community, the opinions—we might even call it wisdom!—of respected authors affect our own developing sensitivities about this or that. We transcend all others through our individuality—but we include all others as we shape our own individuality in our various contexts! It is not an "either/or" world of transcendence and immanence, but a "both/and" world of transcendence and immanence. Process thought suggests the same thing for God. God transcends all others in the distinctness of God's own nature—but God includes all others within the everlastingness of God's own nature.

We need to take this one further step. In our own case, we can understand how the influences of others shape our lives, but by the same token, we must reckon on our own influence on the lives of others. We are not only shaped by others, we also have a part in shaping all others. What we think, what we do, who we are, has an influence on the becoming of all others in the world. Others must take account, whether positively or negatively, of the difference we make to their own contexts. This is the basis of the radical responsibility we each have relative to

the well-being of others, of the whole. And process suggests the same thing for God. God not only receives the influences of all within God's own nature, but God is also an influence on every reality in the world in the depths of its own becoming—whether that reality be a hawk, a squirrel, hidden oil, oil rigs, corporations, plants, people, nations, cultures, or even a planet as a whole.

Prayers can change the possibilities for the world.

"Holy mackerel," you might say (because, you see, you could!) "If God is immanent in all things, why aren't things better than they are?" In a process world, the answer may seem deceptively simple. Things are what they are because of the influential context in which they exist, and because of what they become and do within that context. Everything that happens does so through a complex set of causes; nothing is reducible to a single cause. A process world of intense interrelationality, including God, is a rather messy world if your preference is for a more simplified cause-and-effect world.

So what is prayer in such a world? Prayer assumes God's pervasive presence; prayer assumes that God's presence is toward the good. Prayer also assumes that God's pervasive experience of all perspectives gives God a far greater sense of what constitutes the good in any specific case. Given these assumptions, prayer is an intent to open oneself to God's own desire for the good, and to align oneself, as much as possible, toward that good—even though we can never know it precisely as God knows it.

The function of this alignment is simple in a world where God works with what is, in order to persuade it toward what might be. Prayer—our openness toward God's own care for the good—simply gives God more to work with than would be the case if we were indifferent to the good. Think of it this way: God is more than the world, and thus transcends the world, but God is immanent in the world through God's own influence, and the world is immanent within God, since God receives the world in every moment. When we are praying or in any other way opening ourselves to alignment with God's care for the good, this is what God receives into God's nature. Since God uses everything received from the world in God's own shaping of influence toward the world's next becoming, our prayers, taken into God, are used by God to strengthen what is now possible in the world-to-be. Prayers can change the possibilities for the world.

One of the dangers of prayer in a process world is that God uses every nook and cranny of existence to accomplish the good, and once we open ourselves in prayer to the divine intentions, we risk God using us to answer these prayers.

It's not that God won't act apart from our prayers—it would be impossible for God not to act. Neither is it the case that if we whomp up a huge number of people, all praying for the same thing at the same time, then God will be forced into doing what we demand. The ultimate determiner for what happens with our prayers is God, acting from God's own everlasting character. Remember, prayer is an intent to open ourselves and align ourselves to the divine character, not an intent to get God to do what we want. Prayers, given to God, are no longer in our control—they are God's, to use with as is possible within the complexities of the world.

One of the dangers of prayer in a process world is that God uses every nook and cranny of existence to accomplish the good, and once we open ourselves in prayer to the divine intentions, we risk God using us to answer these prayers. In fact, our prayers make us vulnerable to involvement for the things for which we pray. It is a risky thing to pray, for we may find ourselves answering these prayers—by the grace and power of the persuasive God, of course. In fact, for all we know, it is God who prompts us to prayer in the first place, thus already influencing us in the world toward a particular form of good.

Prayer in a process world is far more than the binary yes/no system of prayer in a universe where God is like some grand monarch of the world, dealing benevolently with our requests and petitions. I have heard persons who pray from such a binary system say, "God answered my prayers; God just said no." But in a process universe, we can never know exactly what God is doing with our prayers. It's a pretty sure thing that God will use us as much as is fitting in dealing responsively with our prayers, but that is probably only the surface of how God can use our prayers. Since God works pervasively with all becoming systems and beings in the world, it may be that our prayers are useful to God in ways we could not have imagined. Remember, distance applies to things that exist in a particular time and space. We are separated from those we care about, sometimes they are continents and oceans away. But God pervades all times and spaces; there is no distance to God. Therefore, a prayer given in Southern California might be instantaneously and effectively used by God anywhere at all for situations known or unknown to us. Prayer is action-at-a-distance.

I have suggested that prayer is an intent for alignment with God's own character; a bit more must be said about that. To exist in a process world is to receive influences from all others, and to integrate these influences within the self according to one's own emerging purposes. This integration within ourselves is the sense in which we transcend all other things, even as we take account of them. In the instant of our becoming, we then are—as we sometimes like to fancy—a force to contend with by every one of our successors. To be is to have an effect; in a process world, what we make of ourselves in every moment makes a difference far beyond ourselves. All of our successors must take some account, minute or large, of the difference we make in the world.

To be is to have an effect; in a process world, what we make of ourselves in every moment makes a difference far beyond ourselves.

Apply this kind of relational existence to God, and you will see how it is finally God who determines how to answer our prayers regardless of who or how many are doing the praying. Whitehead argued that God's character is determined by God primordially. Whitehead for various reasons speaks of this divine everlasting character as adventure, truth, beauty, zest, peace. Religious people sometime combine all these characteristics under the name of Love. In any case, as God receives the influences of the world they must be filtered through God's own character in order to yield God's new calls to the world yet becoming. Our intent to align ourselves with God's character is so that the prayers we offer to God will be, as much as possible, already reflective of God's own being, and therefore more useful to God.

This notion of aligning ourselves as much as possible to God's own character in our intercessory prayers for this troubled world can offer some insight into another form of prayer, confession. Alignment with God would mean that we, too, aim as much as possible toward truth, beauty, adventure, zest, peace. But in fact we are rather complicated creatures, necessarily working from limited perspectives and murky notions of the good. If prayer is an intent to be open to God's own character, then prayer also illumines those aspects of our becoming that are in direct opposition to truth, beauty, adventure, zest, peace—love, if you will. Intercessory prayer can become confession as well as intercession, as in our openness we become aware of ways we ourselves have impeded the good. Insofar as our attitudes and actions diminish the amount of good possible in the world, we ourselves are part of the blockage against which God must work to persuade the world toward the good. When we recognize this, naming our obstructiveness before God, we in a sense see ourselves as God sees us and as God has had to work with us. This naming can illumine us, opening ourselves to change in the direction of communal as well as personal good. For example, in praying for the ecological good of our planet, we can become aware of small and great ways in which we ourselves contribute to ecological destruction. Intercessory prayer can lead to confessing prayer which leads us back again to intercession, praying for an openness within ourselves and others that will be used by God and others toward the good for which we pray. This intertwining of confession and intercession contributes to changes that we make in how we live our lives, and our consequent influence on our communities.

Intercessory prayer can become confession as well as intercession, as in our openness we become aware of ways we ourselves have impeded the good.

Process thinking recognizes that our prayers to God occur within a deeply complex world and universe, where patterns upon patterns of intersecting and competing forms of existence are sometimes at cross-purposes and sometimes in concert, but always in webs of relationality deeper than we can fathom. Every atom of existence adds its own determinations to that which is possible for its successors in the weaving that makes up a teeming world. The role of prayer in such a complexity is to offer our own influences toward the good to God, who works with them as is possible within the matrix we call our world. And we must reckon with the reality that the most obvious arena of change within the world that we can see in answer to our prayers is within our own lives, because prayer opens us up to God's influence toward the good.

Sparrows fall; hawks eat squirrels; loved friends contract dreaded diseases; nations and persons become consumed by greed; personal and national desires overcome personal and corporate responsibility for the health of our planet; peoples' war with each other, each with the intent to fatally wound the other. All together yield troubling times, and it must be the case that every generation, perceiving with horror the troubles of its own time, reels under the conviction that it has never been worse. Charles Dickens is among my favorite authors; he's the one who said "It was the best of times and the worst of times," and perhaps what he said is always the case. In the midst of troubles we nonetheless experience the wonder of love, friendship, beauty, adventure, zest, truth, peace. We live in a both/and world.

In this both/and world, then, we give thanks with gladness for the elements of adventure, truth, zest, beauty, peace—the love—that pervades existence, glad that we count on a God whose pervasively present influence is toward infinite forms of precisely these things. At the same time, we name with a heavy heart the pressing needs peculiar to our own troubling times, not neglecting our own part in contributing to these sorrows and griefs. In doing so we offer our openness to alignment with God's own character in continuously interwoven prayers of intercession and confession. We release these prayers to God to use as God can, and in doing so we also look for the ways God might use us in partial answer to the prayers we offer.

Will all the problems we name go away because we pray, because God uses our prayers? Of course not. The world is too complex for that. But we pray in confidence that our prayers make a difference, ameliorating the conditions for which we pray. The confidence stems from our awareness of the forms of truth, beauty, adventure, zest, and peace that are interwoven with all life, and our profound conviction that these qualities are reflections of the very nature of the God to whom we pray. And so we pray, even and especially in troubling times.

Prayer for a fragile planet

by JEANYNE SLETTOM

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51).

Loving God, we seek clarity in all dimensions of our lives—our relationships, our work, our leisure. Like Jesus, who set his face toward Jerusalem in the certainty that, in so doing, he was being faithful to you, we seek also to set our faces toward the things you would have us do, that we, too, may be faithful.

With this desire for faithfulness in our hearts, we look at the precarious ecosystems of this planet, and we struggle with feelings of powerlessness and even despair.

The magnitude of the unfolding disaster is too much for our minds to hold—the loss of plant and animal life, of arable land and drinkable water; the loss of livelihood for so many people already struggling economically. And this: that the situation is not only ongoing . . . but accelerating.

Where is the clarity in this situation? What is the faithful response?

We can pray—and we do—for all the scientists and engineers and people of good will working tirelessly to protect this fragile world.

We can pray—and we do—for business practices and government regulations that respect the planetary environment on which we all depend.

But isn't there more we can do? Where is the "Jerusalem" in this—the faithful response—toward which we can set our faces?

Open our hearts and minds in this moment. *[Silence.]* Clear away the distractions that trivialize our responses.

Dismiss the hopelessness that lurks in the very enormity of the problem, that seduces us into thinking we're not involved, that this is happening to someone else.

Focus our attention today, now, and in the days to come, on specific acts we can undertake; changes we can make in our own lives, legislation we can encourage.

Teach us, as individuals and as a nation, the meaning of the word "enough"—enough profit, enough consumption, enough arrogance toward creation, enough of this racing toward our own destruction.

We set our faces toward life.

We find clarity in you, and in your clear command for justice, compassion, respect—not just for human life, but all life.

Fill us with your sacred calling, that in our responses to this eco-cide and in the choices we make every day, we affirm the mighty call to life, to the day when the morning stars sing together and all creation—creatures of air and sea and land—*all* creation—shouts for joy. Amen.

Prayer vigil for the OIL SPILL in the GULF of Mexico

by PAUL S. NANCARROW

Editor's Note: This service was created in response to the Gulf oil spill disaster and used at Trinity Episcopal Church in Staunton, Virginia. However the format may be adapted for Creation Season, Earth Sunday, or services that focus on prophetic calls for the healing of the Earth and the care of Creation.

Opening hymn: "I sing the mighty power of God"

Bidding prayer

Officiant
Dear friends in Christ: throughout the ages, people of faith have gathered to pray in times of natural disaster and emergency. We gather this day in the midst of a natural disaster that is of human origin: the explosion of an oil rig and the continuing flow of oil onto the Gulf of Mexico. We acknowledge before God our complicity in this disaster: our participation in a way of life that depends on greater and greater exploitation of the world's resources for our own comfort and security. We ask for God's forgiveness for out environmental sins. We seek God's guidance for wisdom and skill to stop the flow of oil and to engage the long and difficult work of cleaning up the Gulf.

In our prayers today, let us remember the eleven people who lost their lives in the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon.

In our prayers today, let us remember the people whose lives and livelihoods have been disrupted and harmed by the oil in the waters and washing up onshore.

In our prayers today, let us remember the fish, the dolphins, the sea turtles, the crabs, the plankton, the birds, and all the creatures of the delicate Gulf ecosystem now endangered by this oil.

In our prayers today, let us remember all those who are working to stop the flow of oil, and all those who work to clean up the oil's effects.

And, to make a right beginning of all our prayers, let us confess our sins against God, our neighbor, and our environment.

Officiant and People
God of all mercy, we confess that we have sinned against you, opposing your will in our lives. We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world you have created. We have overreached our just needs, and have exploited and endangered our fellow creatures in your earth and sea. We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf. Forgive, restore, and strengthen us through our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may abide in your love and serve only your will. Amen.

Officiant
May God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through the grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, give us the wisdom and will to walk more lightly on this earth, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.

First reading: *Genesis 1:1-10, 20-22, 26-28*

Response: "O all ye far-spreading lakes" [The Hymn Book of the Anglican and United Church of Canada]

Meditation

It all begins in water. According to the Book of Genesis, God brought the whole creation forth from water. According to modern science, life first began in water, and evolved in the sea for millions of years before it colonized the land. The great deep is both terrifying and fertile, capable of both destruction and birth. Today we turn to the ocean for resources, we drill the ocean floor for oil. Our actions can bring destruction in their wake. As we see oil gushing from the seafloor of the Gulf of Mexico, as we see oil spreading on the face of the waters, as we see oil washing ashore on marshes and islands and beaches, we are aware of God's primordial creativity in the sea, and our own recklessness and waste of God's gift. Let us pray in humility before the deep mystery of Creation.

Prayer

Creator God, in the beginning you called all things forth from water, and still from the deeps of chaos you bring forth new possibilities for order and well-being; grant us grace to see your

creative power at work even in those places where human sin has brought pain and death and brokenness, and help us to help all creatures fulfill your commandment to be fruitful and flourishing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Second reading: *Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32*

Response: "God's Grandeur," Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; Bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Meditation

The sea is a place with a life of its own, a place that is not limited or defined by human intentions. In the psalm, the sailors looked into the deep places of the sea and beheld the works and wonders of God; the knowledge was both exhilarating and overwhelming. Today we have looked into the deep places, and we have reached down into an environment that is complex and unpredictable and not limited or defined by our intentions. But we have failed to see God's grandeur in the deeps. In our ignorance we have done damage to the works and wonders of God that are beyond the scope of our understanding or control. Let us pray that God will deliver us from our distress.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its deep and inaccessible places, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we explore the mysteries of your creation, we may learn and act in all humility, so that we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third reading: *Exodus 15:22-27*

Response: "As the Deer"

Meditation

God provided Moses the means to purify the waters that had become bitter. God did not simply change the waters directly, as a single fiat from on high; but God called Moses to be a co-creator in the act, God worked through Moses to make the water pure; and in that co-creating, Moses was purified himself, made more able to listen carefully to the voice of God and to give heed to God's commandments. So too we pray that God will provide us with the wisdom and the will to purify the waters we have fouled, that God will call us to be co-creators in the cleansing work, and that in our co-working with God we may be purified as well, made more able to heed God's commandments, inspired to become better stewards and householders in the earth. Let us pray that God will guide us to purify the bitter waters.

Prayer

Loving God, in entrusting to us the house of the earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fourth reading: *Revelation 21:2-5a, 22-26; 22:1-5*

Response: "Come, thou fount of every blessing"

Meditation

John of Patmos had a vision of the holy City of God, the place where people of all nations would be reconciled, the place where a renewed humanity would live in perfected harmony with the renewed earth. The center of this garden-city was the river of the water of life, flowing from God's throne, flowing out into the world to heal and purify all things. It is God's promise to us in Christ that we may have a foretaste of this water, and that we may be renewed to be agents of God's healing and creativity in our world. Let us pray for God's grace that we may participate in God's mission to make all things new.

Prayer

Loving God, you have blessed us and made us stewards over all the earth: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the human race, that with new wisdom and determination way may make provision for our future and the future of this planet in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Litany

Leader: Let us pray to God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all the earth.

In acknowledgement that the earth is yours, and asking for your forgiveness and mercy;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In our sin and resultant grief, for human life lost, for the death of creatures of the sea and coast;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In horror at our effects on your earth;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In humility at our inability to control the damage we have begun;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In wonder and awe at the sheer magnitude of the strength of the forces of your earth;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In surrender to the size of your earth that dwarfs the human effort to control her forces;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In sorrow for our indifference to the harm in which we participate by our insatiable desire for more of everything, especially that which is extracted from your earth;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In shame for all the ways in which we mistreat your earth, its soil and air and water, and thereby mistreat our fellow human beings;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In embarrassment for our ignorance, our laziness and our selfishness regarding our responsibility to be good stewards of your earth;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In commitment to a new day wherein we will take seriously our calling to care for the earth which is yours and all its blessings and living things;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In promise to live in such a way that we celebrate and protect all your creatures and the delicate environment in which they live and move and have their being;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: In obedience to you, as stewards of your creation;

People: We pray to you, O Lord.

Leader: Merciful God, hear us;

People: Merciful God, hear us.

Leader: All-knowing God, hear us;

People: All-knowing God, hear us.

Leader: By your mercy, forgive us;

People: By your mercy, forgive us.

Leader: By your might, instruct us;

People: By your might, instruct us.

Leader: By your power, transform us;

People: By your power, transform us.

Leader: By your knowing, change our hearts and minds;

People: By your knowing, change our hearts and minds.

Officiant

O gracious God, you open your hand and fill all living things with plenty: Bless the lands and waters, the creatures and all that live therein; let your Spirit go forth, that it may renew the face of the earth; show your loving-kindness, that our land may give her increase; and save us from selfish use of what you give, that men and women everywhere may give you thanks; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Officiant

And now, in the Name of the one through who all things are created and in whom all things hold together, let us pray together in the words our Savior Christ has taught us . . .

Benediction

Officiant

Now may the God of all Creation, the God of the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the air, the seas, and all that dwell therein, surround you with a sense of the majesty of Creation, fill your mind with wonder at divine generosity, gladden your heart with the earth's beauty and diversity and dignity, and draw you ever more deeply into your calling to be a steward of this world; and the blessing of God be with you and with all creation, this day and always. *Amen.*

Closing hymn: "All creatures of our God and king,"

The Rev. Paul S. Nancarrow is rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Staunton, Virginia.

The BLESSING of the ANIMALS

by SHARON GRAFF and BETH JOHNSON

Editor's note: This service was celebrated in 2008 and 2009 at Redlands (CA) United Church of Christ, with the Rev. Dr. Sharon Graff officiating. Some of the liturgies were written by the Rev. Dr. Beth Johnson, Palomar Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Vista, CA. It is presented as written, with the understanding that readers will adapt it for their own congregations and worship format.

Welcome

Today we do something that, to my knowledge, we have never done here before. Today we do something that several of our members and friends have asked for over the years.

Today, we participate in the blessing of the animals, which is a natural and logical extension of our Celtic spirituality, which is itself a logical and natural extension of our identity as Christians who honor the created order as our sacred home.

By participating in this blessing of the animals, in the context of church, we celebrate the web of life, and we enhance our ability to see that spark of God's life in every living thing.

In this celebration, this blessing of our kinship with all life, we also acknowledge that we humans share responsibility to care for all of creation—for the biosphere, for all of the animals. So we are here to bless and to be blessed.

But what does it mean to bless? Do UCCs do that sort of thing? To bless means to declare something holy, to consecrate it, to set it apart, to praise it. To bless means to keep or protect from evil or harm. And so I would say, "yes," we here at Redlands UCC do that sort of thing. We bless one another, and we are, in return, blessed by each other.

It is fitting that we hold this blessing in the context of worship. in the space and place made sacred by our worship, by our community, by the sharing of our joys and sorrows. This outdoor sanctuary is a "holy place, set aside for worship; a place of refuge and protection; "a reservation where animals and birds are sheltered, and may not be hunted or trapped."

We gather in this sanctuary and from it I hope that we all will become what it already is—a true sanctuary where all animals are cared for, allowed to live their lives as they are created to do, safe from harm, free to love and to be loved.

Let the blessing begin!

Gathering together

All are invited to gather in the lower garden—humans, critters, all!

Gathering music [instrumental]

Responsive invocation

One: On this day, O God, we come together with joy in our hearts,

Many: Surrounded by the animals we love.

One: On this day we celebrate the interdependent web of life.

Many: On this day we honor beloved animals that enrich our lives in so many ways.

One: On this day we share . . .

Many: Our animal companions and their stories.

One: On this day we acknowledge . . .

Many: The sacred importance all living creatures.

One: On this day we affirm . . .

Many: Our role as guardians and custodians of these beings.

One: On this day we bless . . .

Many: And are blessed by these furry, feathered, scaly beings . . .

All: Who have been created by you, in love, for love—and we thank you, God! Amen.

Greeting

Good morning! If you are new to our congregation, or returning after an absence, I assure you we *have* gone to the dogs! We have gone to the dogs and the cats, the goldfish and snakes, we have gone to all of the animals that grace this planet and our lives.

October 5th is St. Francis of Assisi's day. We here at Redlands United Church of Christ are joining congregations of the UCC and other denominations that choose this month as a time to bless, to acknowledge, and to celebrate our kinship with all life, especially the lives of the other beings with whom we share our earthly home. You are ALL welcome here.

All around us is the symphony of life . . . the wind in the trees, the whisper of the breeze, the clicking of hummingbirds, the howl of owls, the barks of dogs, the caw of the crow . . . all of these sounds—and more—are the instruments in the symphony of life. Let us add our voices to the symphony. Please stand as you are able and let us sing together.

Opening Hymn: "God Is My Shepherd"

Sharing the word

A reading from Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Congregational Song, vs. 1 (#62) "Come, Share the Spirit"
[Print words in bulletin.]

A reading from Psalm 34:1-8

Congregational Song, vs. 2 "Come, Share the Spirit"

A reading from Mark 10:46-52

Congregational Song, vs. 3 "Come, Share the Spirit"

Sharing the journey

Joys and Concerns

Prayer Hymn: "Christ of Compassion" *(verse 2)*
[Print words in bulletin.]

Prayers: Silent, Pastoral, People, Lord's Prayer

Children's Circle

The blessing of the animals

Meditation: "St Francis: Building up Faithnful, Godly Relationships with All Creation" Sharon Graff

Procession & Blessing of the Animals
(All who are able are invited to process forward with your animal companion—or their photo or substitute—for blessing. Those unable to come forward and who wish a blessing are invited to please raise your hands or paws and Rev. Graff will come to you.)

Congregational Song: "All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir"

(As we sing, please collect your belongings—including your animal companions—and move into a large circle, so all may see and be seen by all the critters here today!)

Litany of Love

For the animals that we are responsible for day to day—our loving companion animals—we say . . .

We are blessed by your presence and we bless you.

For the animals that have graced our lives in the past, whose absence we grieve, and for whose love we are most grateful . . .

We are blessed by your presence and we bless you.

For the animals that live in urban and suburban areas, who we see day to day in our neighborhoods—from the spider to the crow, from the feral cats to the coyotes—we say . . .

We are blessed by your presence and we bless you.

For the animals that are lost or in shelters or confined against their will we say . . .

We are blessed by your presence and we bless you.

For the animals that live in zoos and animal parks—who bring a better understanding of the animal world to all who listen—we say . . .

We are blessed by your presence and we bless you.

For the animals we call wild—who live in their natural habitat, who we see rarely face to face, or only in books and on film, whose habitat and lives may be endangered, we say . . .

We are blessed by your presence and we bless you.

For all animals and for each living creature – fashioned by our loving God who, when they looked in God's eyes, God said, "It is good . . . it is very good . . . YOU are good . . . you are very good"—we say . . .

We are blessed by your presence and we bless you.

Going forth in service

Offering

Offertory Response

"Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow"
(Tune: Lasst Uns Erfreuen)

Benediction

St. Francis: building up faithful, godly relationships with all of creation

A SERMON by SHARON GRAFF

October 4 is the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. Today we honor that feast day with our service of the Blessing of the Animals, held in the churchyard at 10am. For a long time, Francis has been kind of the unofficial patron saint of animal lovers—statues of Francis often depict him as holding birds, or with small animals gathered around his feet. More recently, Francis has come to be seen as the unofficial patron saint of the ecological movement, the "green" dimension of our faith, the effort to bring together environmental ethics and Christian concern. All of those aspects of Francis' witness and ministry are bound up in our custom of remembering Francis by blessing the animals.

Because when we bless the animals after the example of Francis, we are doing a very particular thing. For Francis, blessing the animals wasn't just about having nice feelings for cute critters. For Francis, blessing was about creating a genuine godly relationship with the animals.

There is a story about Francis that one time he preached a sermon to the birds. He was walking along the road, on his way to preach somewhere, and he passed a stand of trees. The trees were full of singing birds, and Francis was so moved by the beauty of their song, that he wanted to explain to them what their singing meant. So he left the road and stood before the trees and he said "Sister Birds, God has given you beautiful voices, and God has given you beautiful plumage, and God gives you trees to build your nests in, and God gives you berries and fruits and worms for your food, and God gives you air to fly through, and God loves you all very much. And it is because God loves you," Francis said, "that you give back your song to God." Their song was saying "Thank you" to God, Francis told them, and they said "Thank you" to God so beautifully that human beings could learn a lot from them about how to say "Thank you" to God, too. And, the story goes, when Francis finished his sermon and went on his way down the road, the birds followed him, and the birds flew around him, and some of the birds even came and perched on his shoulders and his arms as he walked—which is why statues of Francis often show him with birds. The birds were so moved by Francis' preaching, just as Francis had been moved by the birds' singing, that they came together in this marvelous sharing of thanks and praise to God. For Francis, blessing the birds was all about building up with them a faithful and godly relationship.

There is another story about how Francis created a faithful relationship with a fierce wolf outside the town of Gubbio. The story goes that the wolf was vicious and ravenous, and the wolf often killed the villagers' sheep, and the wolf even killed some of the villagers, because his appetite was so fearsome. The villagers wanted to hunt down and exterminate the wolf, but Francis begged permission to go out into the forest and talk to the wolf first. So Francis went out, and the wolf smelled him coming, and the wolf started to run at him with his fangs bared—and Francis blessed the wolf with the sign of the cross, and the wolf stopped short in his tracks. And Francis said "Brother Wolf, why are you killing the villagers' sheep all the time?" And Francis communicated with the wolf by talking, and the wolf communicated with Francis by wagging his tail and twitching his ears and moving his head—and together Francis and the wolf came to an understanding. So Francis brought the wolf into town, and the villagers were terrified—until Francis helped the villagers and the wolf come to an understanding. Their understanding was that the villagers promised to feed the wolf every day, and the wolf promised not to hunt any of their sheep or any of their children or any of them, and he promised to keep other dangerous animals away. And every day, for the rest of the wolf's life, one of the villagers would put out food for him, and the wolf never killed another living thing in all of the forest. For Francis, blessing that wolf was all about building up a faithful and godly relationship.

And I think that's the part of Franciscan-style blessing of the animals that matters most to us. We may not ever preach to birds or make nice with wolves. But we are called to build up right relationships, faithful and godly relationships, with our neighbors—and I believe that means all our neighbors: our human neighbors, and our animal neighbors, and our plant neighbors; our neighbors in the city and our neighbors on the farm and our neighbors in the forest and our neighbors in the mountains. We carry on the godly work of Francis, we bless the way Francis blessed, when we work to build up right relationships with all our nonhuman, as well as human, neighbors.

And of course our most immediate nonhuman neighbors are our pets, our companion animals, the very animals many of us brought to the Blessing service today. When we pray God's blessing on these animal companions, we are also promising to do our best to build up faithful, godly, loving relationships with them, to take care of them for their genuine well-being. And that's where blessing and animal welfare come together: blessing the animals means not neglecting them, not mistreating them, not letting them run loose when they might get into danger or harm other people's animals, not letting them have litters of puppies or kittens that are unwanted and might end up being abandoned or killed. Blessing the animals means helping to create the kind of community where animals are cared for—not just our own pets, but all the animals in the neighborhood—the kind of work being done by the SPCA and the Mosby Foundation and Cat's Cradle, organizations that spoke to our adult Sunday School last week, and that have provided information in a brochure handed out to everyone here today. I invite you to look over that brochure and consider what you might be able to do to help. Blessing the animals means taking on our own commitment to join in that kind of work, so that we can be more like Francis' village of Gubbio, where all the human and nonhuman neighbors looked out for each other's well-being and took care of each other's needs.

Blessing the animals means helping to create the kind of community where animals are cared for.

And when we start doing that, when we start really looking out for the well-being of our nonhuman neighbors, we begin to see that the network of godly relationships talked about by saints like Francis extends wider and wider, taking in more and more of our fellow creatures in God's creation. It's not just about our pets, it's about our farm animals; and it's not just about our domesticated animals, it's about the wild animals around us; and it's not just about the wild animals in our bioregion, it's about animals all over the world, in every nook and niche in our ecosystem. And it's not just about the animals: it's about the plants and the soil and the fungi and the bacteria and the water and the air, and the cycles of day and night, and the turning of the seasons, and the movements of the sun and moon and stars, and the whole incredibly complex and intricate and robust interweaving of relationships through which God creates Life on this Earth. Francis recognized that when he spoke not only about "Sister Bird" and "Brother Wolf," but also about "Brother Sun" and "Sister Moon"—Francis understood that all of us, from the smallest to the greatest, are related to each other in the household of God's creatures.

Our Psalm this morning speaks that same truth, when it proclaims that the same law of God that drives the sun and the sky dwells also in the human heart. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork," the psalm says; but also "The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent." The commandment, the wisdom, that God gives to us to guide our lives is woven into the wisdom by which God orders the entire cosmos—and that means we human beings are woven deeply into the fabric of God's whole Creation.

And being woven by God into Creation, we human beings—especially we Christian human beings—have a special vocation, a special calling, within Creation. We can be the ones who recognize God's presence in all things. We can be the ones who know right relationships of mutual well-being in Christ, and who therefore in the Name of Christ go out to share those right relationships of mutual well-being with all the creatures we can reach. That's why Christians care about animal welfare. That's why Christians care about environmental ethics. That's why Christians care about sustainable farming. That's why Christians care about global warming and climate change. That's why Christians care about eco-justice. That's why Christians care about learning the most we can from the best that science has to teach us. Because we are called by Christ, as Francis was called by Christ, called to be instruments of Christ's peace, called to create faithful and godly relationships with all our neighbors in our widest neighborhood.

That is what we celebrate today. That's what we celebrate when we bless the animals. That's what we celebrate in the psalm, and in the Gospel call to give to God the produce of our work in God's vineyard. That's what we celebrate when we share the communion with all Creation that is given to us in Christ. That's what we celebrate when we go forth to love all our neighbors—all of them—as we love ourselves. And for that celebration, for that calling in Creation, let us give to God our thanks and our praise.

Kids, CURRICULUM, and creation season

by CATHY HOPKINS

At Brea Congregational United Church of Christ, several processes have been developing over that past couple of years with regard to our faith formation curriculum. First, thanks largely to the efforts of one of our members, we have developed an extensive library of children's literature which speaks to the major emphases of our mission statement. Second, it is the practice of the pastors to develop a thematic preaching arc for a month or a season of the lectionary year. Contributing to this process is the fact that we do not have a separate Sunday school hour. The children participate in the opening of the worship service and then move to Adventure Time, which gives us about thirty minutes of curriculum time. Every effort is made to tie the faith formation time with the children to the preaching themes and the lectionary texts, utilizing an appropriate children's book, and relating them to our understanding of who we are called to be and what we are called to do as this unique community of faith.

Enter *The Noah Contract*, written by our co-pastor Rick Marshall, followed closely by a request to have the children help create some new banners for the sanctuary for Creation Season that would feature images of endangered species. It was decided that the preaching theme would be "Let's Build and Ark", but the children already built an ark (see *Creative Transformation* 17:3, Summer 2009), so I needed a new framework to hang the curriculum concepts on.

Our library did not include a lot of material on endangered species, so I went online, and visited the local educational supply center and found some colorful, fact-filled books that would be appropriate. Among them is a little book called *I Wonder Why the Dodo Is Dead*, by Andrew Charman, which prompted me to create the BUCC Detective Agency which would solve a number of mysteries including, "Where Have All the Dodos Gone?"

I have identified four learning objectives and four mysteries through which we can share Creation Season, along with some biblical texts, some children's books, and a few other gleanings from my online wanderings that I would like to share with you. So let's pin on our detective badges and grab our clue-finding magnifying glasses and get to work.

1: The Mystery of Who Ate Who and Why

In this session we can explore our place in creation.

Texts: *Genesis 1:1, 31.* In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth…God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Psalm 24: 1-2. The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.

Psalm 36: 5-6. You save humans and animals alike.

With these texts and stories we can help children begin to look at themselves as an integral part of God's creative activity and identify the interconnectedness of all life.

The Web at Dragonfly Pond, by Brian "Fox" Ellis, is a true story of his experiences of nature as a boy of ten. At the end of the story children will be able to solve the mystery of who ate who.

This is Our Earth, by Laura Lee Benson, is a beautifully illustrated book that can be used with a wide age range. At the top of each page the story is presented simply and lyrically. At the bottom of the page is more detailed information that speaks to slightly older children.

2: The Mystery of What Happened to Pugster

In this session we delve into the heart of the Noah Contract and examine our relationship to other creatures.

Texts: *Ecclesiastes 3:18-22.* For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same.

Job 12:7-10. But ask the animals and they will teach you.

In *The Noah Contract*, Rick Marshall says, "We live in a society that is deeply ambivalent about animals . . . We love some; we eat others." During this session we have the opportunity to help children begin to understand that all creatures "great and small" need to be treated with respect.

An excellent resource for adults that is full of stories that can be used with children is *Because the Cat Purrs: How We Relate to Other Species and Why It Matters*, by Janet Lembke. In it she talks about the bargains we make with pets and domesticated animals.

Hey Little Ant, by Phillip M. Hoose, is a conversation between two creatures, one very large and one very small. It offers the opportunity to discuss how we treat creatures in the wild.

And coming to our website soon, *Where's Pugster?*, which I have adapted from *The Noah Contract*, and is illustrated by one of our youth.

3: The Mystery of Where Have All the Dodos Gone?

In this session we will investigate our impact on creation.

Texts: *Numbers 35:34.* "Don't [pollute] the land in which you live. I live here too—I, God, live in the same neighborhood." (*The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language,* trans. Eugene H. Peterson)

Isaiah 5:8. Ah, you who join house to house . . . until there is no room.

There are so many great books that deal with environmental impact, but I would recommend two here. *The Great Kapok Tree: A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest*, and *A River Ran Wild*, both written by Lynne Cherry.

4: The Mystery of the Flying Bed

In this session we will identify our role in protecting creation.

Texts: Genesis 12:8-10, 12-13, 16-17.

Genesis 2:15.

Just A Dream, by Chris Van Allsburg, speaks to the mystery of the flying bed and the transformation of one boy's understanding of his responsibility as a caretaker of the earth.

True stories of people who work to protect the planet are found in *Heroes of the Environment*, by Harriet Rohmer.

Kid Heroes of the Environment, by the Earthworks Group and Catherine Dee which lists simple things children can do to save the earth.

If you check our website at regularly, you will find a complete bibliography, a variety of games, puzzles, activities, and a few music suggestions to add to your planning. You can also email me through the church at breaucc@msn.com.

Creation Season is a great opportunity to listen to the animals in the web of life and learn how to show respect for all of the handiwork or God.

(Note: All scriptures are from the Green Bible, NRSV, unless otherwise noted).

Laminate the badge between two pieces of contact paper. and cut to shape. With another strip of contact paper, attach a safety pin to the back.

Editor's Note: Readers can find many more children's activities that will engage them in thinking about the key messages and areas of study for Creation Season on the Creation Season pages of the Brea UCC website.

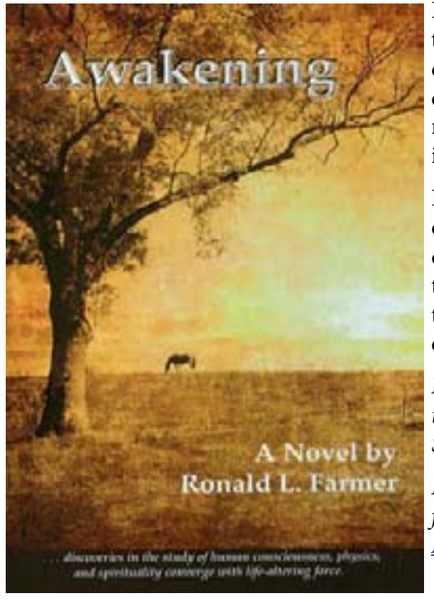
Critics corner: BOOKS

The Awakening, by Ronald L. Farmer (Scotts Valley: Estrella de Mar, 2009).

Reviewed by DAVID M. MAY

Theo Gardner, a philosophy graduate student, is haunted by a recurrent nightmare. Unlike normal dreams, vestiges of this nocturnal horror infiltrate Theo's daytime hours with debilitating effects. With the help of physiological psychologist Christine Costner, he embarks on an adventure into a strange new world where recent discoveries in the study of human consciousness, physics, and spirituality converge with life-altering force. Theo's "awakening" harbingers a profound transformation for the well-being of the planet.

Ronald Farmer has written a book on factory farming that entertains, informs, and challenges a reader. Often novels provide only cotton candy for the mind and escapism from reality. *Awakening*, however, is a cerebral novel that plunges a reader into the world of spirituality/religion, ethics, and science. And lest a person believe that a thinking novel can be dull and stodgy, think again. Like a Stephen King book, this book is a page turner, and with each turned page a reader gets caught up in the physical nightmares of the protagonist, Theo Gardner, and in the ultimate "evil" that is out there tugging him into a vortex of unexplained pain. By the end of the story, one empathizes with Theo Gardner and the transformation, both redemptive and painful, that he experiences. With playful dialogue, an eye for detail, and prosaic imagery, Farmer creatively captures and pulls the reader into a world that is grounded in reality but also the transcendent.



I might add that the selected quotes at the beginning of each chapter are wonderful in themselves. A reader will no doubt pause and spend a few minutes rereading these well chosen epigrams in order to digest.

I highly recommend this book. No one will read it and not reflect upon it days later. As the title suggests, reading this book might just awaken readers to events happening right before their eyes and in their very being.

David M. May is professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City.

Editor's note: This book is available from Process & Faith (909.447.2559 or Amazon books.

Why I wrote *Awakening*

by RONALD L. FARMER

Editor's note: Creative Transformation *asked Ron Farmer to explain what moved him to write* Awakening. *He responded as follows.*

Occasionally others have also asked why I chose to write a novel to express my deep concern about one of today's most crucial (but carefully hidden) issues: factory farming. My answer is twofold.

(1) One of the most appealing aspects of Whitehead's philosophy is his recognition of the power of metaphor and imagination. Glimpses of his theory of language are revealed in the opening pages of *Process and Reality*—for example, "Words and phrases . . . remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap" (4)—and other profound and provocative statements occur with considerable frequency in the remainder of his magnum opus. Indeed, some of his most memorable lines are beautiful expressions of imaginative writing. Yet in spite of the fundamental importance to Whitehead of his philosophy of language and his deep appreciation of the power of metaphor and imagination, most writings by Whiteheadians have relied heavily on the so-called "descriptive" and rational use of language—my own writings included.[1]

Then Patricia Adams Farmer, my companion in the adventure of life, published *Embracing a Beautiful God.* Her imaginative meditations convinced me of the power of the "'irreducible' metaphor; i.e., metaphor that is not reducible to literal expression without loss of impact and, most importantly, meaning."[2] Simultaneously, Patricia and I began studying the art and craft of the novel. Six years later we published our first novels less than six months apart, my philosophical suspense novel, *Awakening,* and her spiritual coming-of-age novel, *The Metaphor Maker.*

(2) I'm convinced that to write a novel there must be a story inside the author aching to be told, something akin to Jeremiah's "fire in my bones" (20:9). That was certainly my experience. I grew up in a rural, county-seat town in Oklahoma that has suffered the full brunt of factory farming. When I visit "back home," the pain is palpable—pain of the people, the environment, and most significantly, the animals. Like Jeremiah, I found that I must "cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!'" (20:8).

1. For example, my *Beyond the Impasse: The Promise of a Process Hermeneutic* (1997) and *Revelation* (2005).

2. D. Lynn Holt, "Metaphors as Imaginative Propositions" *Process Studies* 12/4 (Winter 1982): 252-56.

Henning, continued from page 17

11. Lappé and Lappé, 15. Although it is put in terms of fossil fuel calories, the authors' point is that we should not waste 44,000 calories of energy in any form. Evelyn Pluhar argues for a similar position, but in terms of the amount of land needed to sustain different eating habits. "A typical U.S. omnivore needs 3.5 acres of cropland per year to sustain himself or herself. An ovo-lacto vegetarian needs 1/2 an acre, while a vegan needs 1/6 of an acre. The land needed to feed one average omnivore would feed twenty-one vegans. There is an urgent need for more food as our population climbs upward from the 6 billion mark. Every five to ten days, hunger kills as many people as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Although political factors certainly play a role in this tragedy, current food production is also inadequate" ("The Right Not to Be Eaten," in *Food for Thought: The Debate Over Eating Meat,* ed. Steve F. Sapontzis (New York: Prometheus, 2004), 92-93).

12. J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1989), 32.

13. I am in agreement with Pluhar's position that, contra scholars such as Carruthers and Cohen, "Being able to *recognize* moral significance is sufficient but not obviously necessary for *having* moral significance" (103). Pluhar goes on to note that to make recognition of moral significance both sufficient and necessary would "disenfranchise legions of humans who cannot achieve moral agency." For a systematic examination of this type of argument, referred to as the argument from marginal cases, see Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Babies and Beasts: The Argument from Marginal Cases* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1997).

14. To a point, I find myself in agreement with Pollan when he chastises vegans and vegetarians who act as though their hands are morally clean. "The farmer would point out to the vegan that even she has a 'serious clash of interests' with other animals. The grain that the vegan eats is harvested with a combine that shreds field mice, while the farmer's tractor wheel crushes woodchucks in their burrows and his pesticides drop songbirds from the sky . . . Killing animals is probably unavoidable no matter what we choose to eat" (Pollan 2007, 326).

15. William James. "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy.* 1891. (New York: Dover, 1956), 202.

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