

Creation Care

▼ Click on a study title you'd like to see ▼

2

Study 1: **RESPECT FOR THE MAKER**
Article 1: The God Who Can't Be Tamed

9

Study 2: **OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS CHRISTIANS**
Article 2: Are We Our Planet's Keeper?

18

Study 3: **A BIBLICAL VIEW OF ANIMALS**
Article 3: Animal Lib



Respect for the Maker

What does creation tell us about the Creator?

In “The God Who Can’t Be Tamed,” Philip Yancey challenges us to live like we believe that God uses his creation to point us to himself. He suggests that if we continue to destroy the world around us, we will take away opportunities for people to see evidence of who God is.



Scripture: Genesis 1:20–25, 27–30; 2:17–18; Psalm 8:3–8; 104:13–32; John 1:1–3; Romans 8:19–23; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:13–17; Hebrews 1:1–3

Based On: “The God Who Can’t Be Tamed,” by Philip Yancey, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, October 1987



Part 1 Identify the Current Issue

Note to Leader: Before meeting, provide each person with the article “The God Who Can’t be Tamed” from CHRISTIANITY TODAY, included at the end of this study.

That 16-ounce honey bear in your pantry exists only because tens of thousands of bees flew some 112,000 miles in a relentless, unquestioned pursuit of nectar gathered from 4.5 million flowers. Every one of those foraging bees was female. By the time the life of each ended—they live all of 6 weeks during honey-making season—each bee flew about 500 miles in 20 days, the span each lives outside the hive.

As these bees were flying themselves to death, production inside the hive continued with stupendous efficiency, in the following sequence: Bee brings nectar to hive, carried tidily in her “honey stomach.” Bee is greeted (cheerfully, one suspects) by a younger, homebody receiver bee who relieves her of her load. Receiver bee deposits nectar into a cell and proceeds to reduce its water content and raise its sugar level by fanning it with her wings and regurgitating it up to 200 times, killing microbes along the way. More bees surround this cell and others nearby and fan them with their wings 25,000 times or so, thus turning nectar into honey. When the honey is ripened, wax specialists arrive to cap off the cells. And that is how every single ounce of every single honey pot, bottle, or jar in the world—hundreds of thousands of them—is brought into being.

“Every gulp of raw honey is a distinct, unique, unadulterated medley of plant flavor; a sweet, condensed garden in your mouth,” writes Holley Bishop, an awed amateur beekeeper trying her level best with ordinary English to capture a miracle.¹

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Describe a time when nature inspired you to worship God. Where were you? Why did you feel that way? How did you respond to your feelings? How has your life been affected by this experience?

[Q] How might our concept of God be affected by a disregard for his creation?

[Q] Philip Yancey says wild animals “bring us down a notch.” Explain what he means.

- Do you agree? Why or why not?

[Q] Personal conservation is fairly simple. It can involve turning down (or up) our thermostats, carpooling, volunteering to pick up litter, recycling, and so on. Why do you think so few of us make such sacrifices?

¹ Eric Miller, “Shock and Awe,” BOOKS AND CULTURE (September/October 2006).



Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: God loves his creation.

The fine tuning of the universe is evident in the precise strengths of four basic forces. Gravity is the best known of these forces, and the weakest, with a relative strength of 1. Next comes the weak nuclear force that holds neutrons together inside an atom. It is 1,034 times stronger than gravity, but works only at subatomic distances. Electromagnetism is 1,000 times stronger than the weak nuclear force. The strong nuclear force—which keeps protons together in the nucleus of an atom—is 100 times stronger yet. If even one of these forces had a slightly different strength, the life-sustaining universe we know would be impossible.

If gravity were slightly stronger, all stars would be large, like the ones that produce iron and other heavier elements, but they would burn out too rapidly for the development of life. On the other hand, if gravity were weaker, the stars would endure, but none would produce the heavier elements necessary to form planets.

The weak nuclear force controls the decay of neutrons. If it were stronger, neutrons would decay more rapidly, and there would be nothing in the universe but hydrogen. However, if this force were weaker, all the hydrogen would turn into helium and other elements.

The electromagnetic force binds atoms to one another to form molecules. If it were either weaker or stronger, no chemical bonds would form, so no life could exist.

Finally, the strong nuclear force overcomes the electromagnetic force and allows the atomic nucleus to exist. Like the weak nuclear force, changing it would produce a universe with only hydrogen or with no hydrogen.

In sum, without planets, hydrogen, and chemical bonds, there would be no life as we know it. Besides these four factors, there are at least 25 others that require pinpoint precision to produce a universe that contains life. Getting each of them exactly right suggests the presence of an Intelligent Designer.²

[Q] How do the intricacies of nature point to a Creator? When you look at nature what points you to a creator God?

[Q] Read Genesis 1:20–25 and Psalm 104:13–32. According to these passages, what does God think of his creation?

[Q] Read Genesis 1:27 and Psalm 8:3–8. In what way is man a part of nature?

² Charles Edward White, "God by the Numbers," CHRISTIANITY TODAY (March 2006).



[Q] Read Genesis 1:28–30. In what way is man apart from nature? What did God say was man's responsibility in regard to creation?

Teaching Point Two: Creation suffered in the Fall.

In Nikos Kazantzakis's novel *Christ Recrucified*, there is a scene in which four village men confess their sins to one another in the presence of the Pope. One of the men, Michelis, cries out, "How can God let us live on the earth? Why doesn't he kill us to purify creation?"

"Because, Michelis," the Pope answers, "God is a potter; he works in mud."³

Optional Activity:

Break into groups of three or four. Provide each group with a magazine that includes a lot of photos. Ask them to find at least one photo that demonstrates how creation is tainted by sin. Then ask them to discuss if there is anything we can do about that problem, or if it will be solved only when Christ restores Earth.

Teaching Point Three: Jesus Christ, who interprets God for us, is also the Creator.

When you plant a seed, its growth is a reminder of the new life Jesus brings. In fact, Jesus used that illustration in the Gospels. He is the Creator, and continues to hold all things together.

[Q] Read John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:13–17; and Hebrews 1:1–3. What is Christ's involvement with creation?

[Q] Read Philippians 2:5–11. How has Christ demonstrated his dominion over all of creation?

[Q] How does creation then point to Christ?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

There are two sides to Allen Johnson. On the one hand, he is a conservative, evangelical Christian living in the mountains of West Virginia. On the other hand, he is an environmental activist and cofounder of Christians for the Mountains, a group of like-minded stewards that

³ Rick Ezell, *The 7 Sins of Highly Defective People* (Kregel, 2003).



have demonstrated against coal companies and participated in Rainbow Family gatherings. Does Allen see a contradiction between these two sides of his personality? No. In fact, he hopes that environmental stewardship will quickly become a unifying, not a dividing, issue for Christians across the nation. “God has called all of us seriously,” he says, “and we should agree on one thing: to take care of his Earth.”

Allen's passion for environmentalism began in 1993 while visiting Haiti with a Christian Peacemaker team. It was there that he saw desperate farmers cutting down grapefruit trees in order to make a cash crop of charcoal. “I just started sobbing,” he recalls. “It really hit me that impoverishment is so closely tied to environmental destruction.”

Since that day, Johnson has been a pioneer in a growing movement called “Eco-Christianity,” yet his biggest challenge has been convincing other Christians to join him in the fight instead of labeling him a “New Age wing nut” or a liberal. “My identity is not as an environmentalist,” says Johnson. “It's as a Christian. Because I am Christian, I should be involved with social justice—the poor, the needy. Environmentalism is one thing in my circle, but it's not my center.”⁴

[Q] What kind of balance did Allen Johnson find? What kind of balance do you seek on this topic?

Action Point: Set aside time this week to contemplate God's creation. Pick a place that will help you see the work of his hands.

⁴ Vanessa Juarez and David Gates, “A Shepherd Protects His Own Backyard,” *Newsweek* (9-5-05).





The God Who Can't Be Tamed

Could we be losing more than the land when we destroy it?

By Philip Yancey, for the study "Respect for the Maker"

In what she later called "the most transporting pleasure of my life on the farm," Isak Dinesen went flying across the unspoiled plains of Africa with her friend Denys Finch-Hatton. In the film version of *Out of Africa*, the character playing Denys first invited her by saying, "I want to show you the world as God sees it." Indeed, the next few minutes of cinematography come close to presenting exactly that. As the frail Moth airplane soars beyond the escarpment that marks the beginning of the Rift Valley in Kenya, the ground falls abruptly away and the zoom lens captures a glimpse of Eden in the grasslands just below.

Great herds of zebras scatter at the sound of the motor, each group wheeling in unison, as if a single mind controlled the bits of modern art dashing across the plain. Huge giraffes—they seemed so gangly and awkward when standing still—gallop away with exquisite gracefulness. Bounding gazelles, outrunning the larger animals, fill in the edge of the scene.

The world as God sees it—does that phrase merely express some foamy romantic notion, or does it contain truth? The Bible gives intriguing hints. Proverbs tells of the act of Creation, when Wisdom "was the craftsman at his [God's] side ... filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world." The seraphs in Isaiah's vision who declared "the whole earth is full of his glory" could hardly have been referring to human beings—not if the rest of the Book of Isaiah is to be believed. At least God had the glory of Nature then, during that very dark time when Israel faced extinction and Judah slid toward idolatry.

God makes plain how he feels about the animal kingdom in his longest single speech, a magnificent address found at the end of Job. Look closely and you will notice a common thread in the specimens he holds up for Job's edification:

- A lioness hunting her prey
- A mountain goat giving birth in the wilds
- A rogue donkey roaming the salt flats
- An ostrich flapping her useless wings with joy
- A stallion leaping high to paw the air
- A hawk, an eagle, and a raven building their nests on the rocky crags

That's a mere warm up—Zoology 101 in Job's education. From there God advances to the behemoth, a hippo-like creature no one can tame, and the mighty, dragonish leviathan. "Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?" God asks with a touch of scorn. "The mere sight of him is overpowering. No one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who then is able to stand against me?"

Wildness is God's underlying message to Job, the one trait his menagerie all hold in common. God is celebrating those members of his created world that will never be domesticated by human beings. Wild animals bring us down a notch, reminding us of something we'd prefer to forget: our creatureliness. And they also announce to our senses the splendor of an invisible, untamable God.

Several times a week, I run among such wild animals, unmolested, for I run through Lincoln Park Zoo near downtown Chicago. I have gotten to know them well, as charming neighbors, but I always try mentally to project the animals into their natural states.

Three rock-hopper penguins neurotically pace back and forth on a piece of concrete that has been sprayed to look like ice. I envision them free, hopping from ice floe to ice floe in Antarctica among thousands of their comic-faced cousins.

An ancient elephant stands against a wall, keeping time three ways: his body sways from side to side to one beat, his tail marks a different rhythm entirely, and his trunk moves up and down to yet a third. I struggle to imagine this sluggish giant inspiring terror in an African forest.

And the paunchy cheetah lounging on a rock shelf—could this animal belong to the species that can, on a short course, out accelerate a Porsche?

It requires a huge mental leap for me to place the penguin, the elephant, and the cheetah all back where they belong, in “the world as God sees it.” Somehow, God’s lesson on wildness evaporates among the moats and plastic educational placards of the zoo.

Yet, I am fortunate to live near the zoo. Otherwise, Chicago would offer up only squirrels, pigeons, cockroaches, rats, and a stray songbird. Is this what God meant when he granted Adam dominion? It is hard to avoid a sermonic tone when writing about wild animals, for our sins against them are great indeed. The elephant population alone has decreased by 800,000 in the last two decades, mostly due to poachers and rambunctious soldiers with machine guns. And every year, we destroy an area of rain forest—and all its animal residents—equal in size to the state of California.

Most wildlife writing focuses on the vanishing animals themselves, but I find myself wondering about the ultimate impact on us. What else, besides that innate appreciation for wildness, have we lost? Could distaste for authority, even a resistance to the concept of God as Lord, derive in part from an atrophied sense? God’s mere mention of the animals struck a chord of awe in Job; what about us, who grow up feeding peanuts across the moat to the behemoths and leviathans?

Naturalist John Muir, who never had a vision for “the world as God sees it,” reluctantly concluded, “it is a great comfort ... that vast multitude of creatures, great and small and infinite in number, lived and had a good time of God’s love before man was created.”

The heavens declare the glory of God, and so do breaching whales and bouncing springboks. Fortunately, in some corners of the world, vast multitudes of creatures can still live and have a time in God’s love. The least we can do is make room for them—for our sakes as well as theirs.

—*Philip Yancy*

“The God Who Can’t Be Tamed,” by Philip Yancey, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, October 1987



Our Responsibility as Christians

We need to consider what God would have us do.

Christians not only have a stake in what happens to planet Earth, but their voice on ecological issues is currently being heard by people who have ignored the Christian view in the past. What should Christians say about God's creation? What is an appropriate biblical concern for the environment? And what should be done to preserve it?



Scripture: Genesis 1:1, 31; 2:15; 3:17–19; Leviticus 25:8–12; Luke 4:17–21; 2 Peter 3:8–13; Revelation 21:1

Based On: "Are We Our Planet's Keeper?" by William A. Dyrness, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, May 1991



Part 1 Identify the Current Issue

Note to Leader: Before meeting, provide each person with the article "Are We Our Planet's Keeper?" from CHRISTIANITY TODAY, included at the end of this study.

Pastor Matt Woodley shares this story:

When I was about ten years old, my dad, a medical doctor, received a special gift from one of his patients: a beautiful globe with shiny sequins. The globe spun around on its base and played one of my dad's favorite songs. My dad proudly demonstrated how it worked: grab it by the base, slowly wind it counter-clockwise, and then release it, letting it spin clockwise while playing beautiful music. He told us, "You can touch it, but don't wind it, because you might break it."

A week later, while my dad was at work, I found the globe and brought it to my room. Although I heard my dad say, "Don't wind it up," I decided to wind it up anyway. I gave it a little twist and let it play. It played, but only for five seconds. So I gave it another twist and another twist and five more twists and then—snap! The globe separated from the base. I desperately tried to fix it. I tried forcing the two pieces together. I tried gluing it. I tried taping it. Finally, as I stared hopelessly at the two pieces of the globe, I realized it was broken beyond repair. So I went into my closet, shut the door, and hid.

It was Genesis 3 all over again.

Our world is like the broken globe: it's been twisted too far, and we can't put it back together again. Relationships break, our sexuality breaks, we're slowly breaking the Earth. Our hearts break, nations break down and go to war, our health breaks, our politics break. All the glue, tape, and positive thinking can't put it back together again.⁵

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Do you think human survival depends on the well being of the environment? If so, what environmental issues do you think demand immediate attention? If not, what do you think will happen to humanity if environmental issues are ignored?

- According to William Dyrness, why should Christians care for the earth?
- In what ways do you think the earth reflects the goodness of God?
- When the earth is harmed, do you think God grieves for it? Explain your answer.

[Q] Why is Dyrness critical of secular ecologists who want to sustain life and preserve the planet? Do you think their solutions to environmental problems can never work? If so, explain why.

⁵ Matt Woodley, from the sermon "The Story of Our Broken World," PreachingToday.com.



Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Sin has marred Earth and its inhabitants.

Annie Dillard, in her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, writes:

At the end of the island I noticed a small green frog. He was exactly half in and half out of the water. He was a very small frog with wide, dull eyes. And just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent. ...

An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog; then the shadow glided away. The frog skin bag started to sink.

I had read about the water bug, but never seen one. "Giant water bug" is really the name of the creature, which is an enormous, heavy-bodied brown beetle. It eats insects, tadpoles, fish, and frogs. Its grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes a victim with these legs, hugs it tight, and paralyzes it with enzymes injected during a vicious bite. Through the puncture shoots the poison that dissolves the victim's muscles and bones and organs—all but the skin—and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim's body, reduced to juice.

Sins sucks the life out of us.

Read Genesis 1:1, 31; 2:15; 3:17–19.

[Q] What effects did God's curse of the ground have on the earth and humanity?

[Q] In Genesis 1, why is God's creation repeatedly called good?

[Q] What charge does God give to Adam and Eve concerning the earth?

- Do you think that charge is still in effect? Why or why not?

[Q] What are the long-term effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience on the earth?

[Q] Why must people realize their own spiritual illness before they can solve the problems of the environment? If sin has caused global disorder, why must people first be right with God before the earth can be made right? How does God's redemptive plan transform both people and the environment?

Teaching Point Two: In the Old Testament, God set up a Year of Jubilee.

God set up the Year of Jubilee as a sort of super-Sabbath—a time for the nation of Israel to realign its priorities.



Nineteenth-century British hymn writer and theologian Frederick W. Faber said:

There is hardly ever a complete silence in our soul. God is whispering to us well-nigh incessantly. Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul, or sink low, then we hear these whisperings of God. He is always whispering to us, only we do not always hear, because of the noise, hurry, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on.

Read Leviticus 25:8–12.

[Q] What is the biblical principle of jubilee?

- Why does Dyrness say that at first glance many will think the biblical principle of jubilee is wildly impractical or dangerously revolutionary?
- Dyrness applies the jubilee principle to animals. What reasoning do you think he would offer to support this application? Why does the jubilee apply not only to people, but also to animals and the land?

[Q] According to Dyrness, what are God's three instructions in this passage concerning the jubilee?

- Why do you think God wanted his people to follow each instruction?

[Q] Do you agree or disagree with Dyrness that by redistributing the land and canceling all debt, people will be relieved from poverty? If you agree, how will it work? If you disagree, what reason do you think God had for giving this command?

[Q] With our modern technology, do you think the land needs more rest than every 50 years? Why or why not?

[Q] Why do you think God regarded this event as a celebration? Can Christians celebrate this event today? If so, how? If not, why not?

[Q] Read Luke 4:17–21. In what ways is Jesus' proclamation a fulfillment of the promises implied in God's instructions concerning the jubilee?

- Why do you think Jesus is anointed to preach the good news specifically to the poor? Why would they have special reason to rejoice?
- In verse 21, why does Jesus say this Scripture is now fulfilled? How do you think the fulfillment of this Scripture affects the earth?

[Q] Read 2 Peter 3:8–13 and Revelation 21:1. What is the "new earth"? If a new earth is promised, why be concerned with the present earth?



Optional Activity:

Ask the group to name the environmental problems they think are the worst. List these on a whiteboard or poster board. When the list is complete, point to each one and ask what they think we as Christians can and should do about it.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

"We won't have a society if we destroy the environment." —Margaret Mead

"The ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed." —Alan Paton

Action Points:

- **List three things that you are not doing now that you would like to do to be a better steward of the Earth. Share these with the group and ask them for suggestions on how best to do them.**
- **End by praising God for the good Earth he has given us.**





Are We Our Planet's Keeper?

Our problems with the environment are not merely technical; they are spiritual.

By William A. Dyrness, for the study "Our Responsibility as Christians"

Christians have had a mixed record when it comes to concern for the environment. Some have felt the deterioration of planet Earth is a sign of the last days, while a growing number—citing the biblical principle of stewardship—are working hard to care for their created context. The real question is this: How serious is the "crisis" the media speak about? And more crucial, what is an appropriate biblical concern?

We might conclude from news reports that, since the first "Earth Day" in 1970, things have continued to grow worse. Rain forests in Brazil, according to UN estimates, are disappearing at the rate of 50,000 acres a day; tons of topsoil are lost each year in the American Midwest; the movement of the Sahara down into Africa is measured in miles per year.

This last devastation struck me in a personal way while living in Kenya. There I often watched Kikuyu women bent under great loads of firewood weighing as much as 50 pounds. My wife, an anthropologist, discovered these women would walk for hours each day to find firewood in order to cook for their families. Looking down from the air, we saw giant, barren circles surrounding villages where women had scraped the ground clean in their frantic effort to eke out a living. There we saw clearly a struggle between human life and care for the Earth. Were we to work to preserve the landscape or to help the people in their struggle for survival?

Since coming back to America, we have been struck by the ease with which we can bemoan the population or environmental problems of people in the Third World. Meanwhile, our 8 percent of the world's population continues to use 40 percent of Earth's resources, glibly assuming that our technical prowess will somehow solve these global inequities.

Hopeful signs

More and more, however, these problems are seen as not merely technical, but religious in character. We will not find the answers in laboratories (though more time should be spent on these issues there), but in the depths of our national soul.

On this score, there are hopeful signs. Primary among them is the growing recognition of the seriousness of these issues and the necessity of addressing them on several levels. A *New York Times* poll indicated that 84 percent of Americans see these concerns as a serious national problem; 71 percent are willing to increase their taxes to solve them; 56 percent are even willing to see jobs lost (presumably not their own) to address the problem.

And progress has been made. Since the early 1970s, we have reduced the emission of carbon dioxide (the pollutant mainly at fault for the so-called greenhouse effect) from our cars by 85 percent; we have cleaned up many lakes and rivers, as well as many other areas polluted with toxic waste. But what progress have we made in addressing the religious dimension?

Here I find the most cause for encouragement. More and more, ecological concerns are being addressed in the context of values and religious commitments. Unfortunately, many are proposing "new age" types of answers. But at least people are beginning to acknowledge that the underlying problem is a religious one. Christians are more frequently being invited to address these questions.



This is encouraging because Christians have not always been welcome at ecology conferences. In 1967 ecologist Lynn White published an article blaming the environment crisis on the Christian view of Creation. Since then, Christians have been on the defensive, hiding out on the fringes of the ecology movement. But with the revival of interest in religion, Christian perspectives on these things are being given a new hearing. In what follows, I would like to lay out four biblical principles of Christian concern for the Earth that may win a new hearing in our post-secular era.

God's good creation

The first principle is that *the Earth is God's good creation*.

One of the most basic questions the environmental movement faces is why we should care for the Earth. Most discussions assume that care for the Earth is necessary for human and global survival. But the Christian has a far more comprehensive answer: We care for the Earth because its value reflects the goodness of God himself. Its beauty and value are not accidental, but built in by its Creator. In a sense, then, any attack or injury to this goodness reflects on God—it has an overtone of blasphemy to it.

We human beings are put here to “work” and “take care of” this goodness (Gen. 2:15). Notice that we do not create its fertility, but we can encourage and protect it; and sadly, we can injure it. So there is a good order, in which humans play a key role, but it is an order that serves a higher purpose: to glorify God.

Ecologists talk a great deal about this “good order,” but they come at it another way. Holmes Ralston, for example, in his book *Philosophy Gone Wild*, argues that we have a duty to the Earth to “stabilize the ecosystem through mutually imposed self-limited growth.” This imperative is based on the assumption that we ought mutually to preserve life. Pioneer conservationist Aldo Leopold put it this way: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and the beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

Now this is all good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough in two directions. On the one hand, *sustainability*, while a worthy goal, is ultimately unachievable. In his book, *Entropy: Into the Greenhouse World*, Jeremy Rifkin points out that current conservation measures should be seen as “transitional adaptation” along the road to a far more radical transformation of values. The quest for “stability” or “homeostasis” (and the recycling that supports it) is important, but in the end it is not nearly radical enough.

But there is an even more serious limitation of the “sustainability” thesis. Behind our Western discussion of ecology and natural order lies a massive assumption: Life as it is on the Earth is good and so must be preserved. But what if life is not good, but brutish and mean? Balance is easy for us to endorse after a good dinner in a heated building, but what does it mean to the woman hauling 50 pounds of wood several hours a day?

The problem with our search for stability of the ecosystem is that something has gone dreadfully wrong with the system. It is sick unto death, a sickness that is narrated in the early chapters of Genesis. Adam and Eve's disobedience had immediate and long-term ecological effects: “Cursed is the ground because of you,” Adam is told (Gen. 3:17). Moreover, the problem, the Bible makes clear, is not only—or even mainly—in the environment, it is in us, all of us. As Isaiah put it: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (53:6).

Liberation

It appears we are stuck in a deteriorating situation, desperately in need of the second biblical principle: *liberation*.

There is a sober realism to the biblical account of human life on the planet. After the Earth is cursed, Adam and Eve are put out of the garden, and soon after, Cain kills his brother Abel. What is wrong with the Earth issues in a loss of paradise and great human disorder.

To address this disorder, God did not use half measures. When Israel became enslaved to Egypt, he did not merely give them the law with provision for weekly recycling. He smashed the powers that held them in bondage, delivered them from Egypt, and planted them in the fertile Land of Canaan.

In the New Testament, God intervened in a final way in Christ's life to bind the powers that hold the world in slavery and to deliver the prisoner. "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). And Paul elsewhere tells us that "creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed ... in hope that the creation itself will be *liberated* from its bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:19–21).

If the cosmic disorder is caused by sin, the most important ecological principle is liberation from bondage to sin. What might this mean for the environment? I think it will mean different things for different parts of the world.

For us in the West, it will mean liberation from what Robert Bellah calls our "advanced poverty." We are in bondage to a way of life that is destructive not only to our environment, but to our families, our friends, our health, even our souls. We need to be set free. And no talk of the environment will make much progress apart from this fundamental recognition.

For the rest of the world, the cry is for liberation from the crushing weight of economic poverty. The World Bank reports that 80 million people live in what it calls "absolute poverty"—that is, having a per-capita incomes of less than \$200 per year. In our generosity, we are anxious to help them stop their slash-and-burn farming, their having large families, their scouring the land for firewood. What they need is liberation from the poverty that drives them to scrape clean the Earth to survive.

The fundamental liberation for all of us is from our sin, that rebellion against God that keeps us in bondage. But this rescue will lead to transformed lives and communities. Moreover, I believe the transformation called for in the West and in the Third World are profoundly related. Notice that it is precisely that from which we both need liberation—we from our wasteful lifestyles, they from their grinding poverty—that is most destructive to the environment. Could it be that apart from our deliverance from our bondage to affluence they will not be freed from their poverty?

It is significant that Jesus struck this note of liberation in his first sermon at Capernaum: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19).

Jubilee

In fact, Jesus is quoting from a passage in Isaiah that many believe relates to the third principle of Christian ecology: *jubilee*.

All the realities we have considered come together in the biblical principle of jubilee. The jubilee is an extension of the sabbath principle, that one in every seven days or years should be set apart for rest and refreshment. Interestingly, the principle applies not only to people but to animals and even the land itself.

Every 50 years Israel was called to celebrate a supersabbath called the jubilee: "You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be jubilee for

you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family ... [In this year] you shall neither sow, nor reap what grows of itself. ... For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you" (Lev. 25:10–12).

As this is explained in Leviticus, there are three components to this event. First, to relieve poverty, the land is redistributed and all debt is released. Second, the land is meant to lie fallow so that its fertility can be restored. Finally, the human family and community is celebrated and strengthened.

Jesus announces the presence of this jubilee reality in Luke 4 and when he urges: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). His Earth-shaking work is meant to include the devastation of the environment as part of the ravages of sin in its purview. But the question immediately arises as to what this means for us.

At first blush, such reordering seems either wildly impractical or dangerously revolutionary. Even if we might understand what this means in an agrarian economy—everyone understands something of the benefits of land reform in Central America and the Philippines—what could this mean in a modern industrialized nation?

In *Tikkun*, Jewish scholar Arthur Waskow proposed that the jubilee model be used to develop strategies for dealing with economic inequality and environmental issues. First, he proposed that through taxation, capital be made available for financing Third World projects. Second, he urged periodic sabbaticals on research and development to assess the impact of projects on economic inequality and the environment. Third, he suggested we make regular and inclusive celebrations of community and family empowerment a high priority of our political life.

While we may have questions about some of these proposals, they do suggest there may be some industrial equivalent to the biblical "land reform" policies. Land reforms have proven possible and helpful in some places, but other reforms are also necessary. Obviously, much thought and planning must still be done. But if we are to preserve our Earth, this work must be given a high priority.

Repentance

These momentous changes can only come about if we take our fourth and final principle with sufficient seriousness: *repentance*.

If the problem is not in creation alone but in us as well, in our abuse of the land and of our neighbors, then things will not change apart from a radical spiritual change in our hearts and our communities. The Bible describes the radical response that is appropriate in a single word: *repentance*.

We must turn our lives around and inside out. The death and resurrection of Christ put before the world the only chance for real deliverance. To follow Christ, then, is at the same time to respond to the Earth's ecological crisis.

In the end, it is not only encouraging that Christians have become more concerned about the future of Earth, it is essential that they continue in this path. For it is finally only the gospel that frees people from their sins and will one day free the Earth.

—William A Dyrness is dean and professor of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and the author of *Learning About Theology from the Third World*

"Are We Our Planet's Keeper?" by William A. Dyrness, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, May 1991

A Biblical View of Animals

Despite silliness and fanaticism on both sides, the animal-rights debate remains an inherently religious issue.

When a mosquito lands on your arm, do you want to smash it? Or do you respect its life as a creature of God? These questions may seem silly, but many Christian animal-rights activists are demanding that we address this issue: Is every living creature so sacred that as humans we have no right to harm them—much less kill them?



Scripture: [Genesis 1:20–28](#); [2:18–20](#); [3:21](#); [4:4](#); [Isaiah 11:6–9](#); [Matthew 6:26](#)

Based On: "Animal Lib," by Tim Stafford, [CHRISTIANITY TODAY](#), June 1990



Part 1 Identify the Current Issue

Note to Leader: Before meeting, provide each person with the article "Animal Lib" from CHRISTIANITY TODAY, included at the end of this study.

"What we need is progressive disengagement from our inhumanity to animals."

—Andrew Linzey, Christianity and the Rights of Animals

"Whenever an animal is in any way forced into the service of man, every one of us must be concerned with the sufferings which for that reason it has to undergo."

—Albert Schweitzer, Civilization and Ethics

Discussion Starters:

[Q] How are we different from other creatures? In what ways are we the same?

- Do you recall ever having acted cruelly to an animal? If so, how did you feel? Discuss why these feelings accompany such behavior and why they might lessen if we continued to be cruel.
- What do you think it means to be human? Although a person may act inhumanely, does it make that person any less human? Explain your answer.

[Q] According to Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation*, speciesism is the allegedly bigoted contention that human beings are more important than other animals.

- What does Michael Fox mean when he says, "Humane treatment [of animals] is simply sentimental patronage"? Do you agree or disagree that treating animals kindly but as inferiors is no different from slave owners being nice to their slaves? Why?
- What does Gary Francione mean when he says, "It's not better cages we work for, but empty cages"? In concrete terms, what do you think animal-rights activists mean by freeing animals from all human control and domination? Do you think this goal is practical or impractical? Why?

[Q] Do you think medical researchers should be allowed to hurt animals if the research benefits humanity? Why or why not?

- According to Stafford, what are the philosophical and pragmatic reasons that medical researchers conduct laboratory experiments on animals?
- Do you believe it is morally permissible to sacrifice weaker beings if humans derive medical benefits? What if those weaker beings are also benefiting their own kind—that is, what if one monkey were sacrificed in a laboratory experiment so that thousands of other monkeys could be spared a fatal disease?



- Can you think of ways of testing cures for diseases other than animal experimentation? If not, do you think animal activists could ever persuade society to abandon this type of medical research? Why or why not?

[Q] According to Tim Stafford, why is the debate over animal rights inherently and fundamentally religious?

- What are some of the long-held Christian assumptions that animal-rights leaders have attacked? Human immortality is one example.
- What does Stafford mean when he says both animal-rights activists and medical scientists argue from religious sentiments, but their feelings have lost their foundation? How does lack of faith ultimately affect the animal rights issue?
- According to Stafford, why should Christians encourage animal-rights activists to continue to prod society into facing this issue? Why might Christians answer these ethical questions better than scientists?

[Q] Do you think animals were created to serve humans, or that God placed humans in the world to care for his creation—including animals—or is the relationship between humans and animals reciprocal? Explain your answer.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Humans were created above the animals and given the unique role of caring for them.

In the summer of 2005, the London Zoo posted a sign in front of their newest exhibit, reading, “Warning: Humans in Their Natural Environment.” The exhibit featured eight *Homo sapiens* in a sealed enclosure adjacent to another sealed enclosure of various primates. The human “captives” were chosen from an online contest, and spent their time sunning on a rock ledge, playing board games, and waving to spectators. A signboard informed visitors about the species’ diet, habitat, worldwide distribution, and threats.

The goal of the exhibit, according to Zoo spokesperson Polly Wills, was to downplay the uniqueness of human beings as a species. “Seeing people in a different environment, among other animals,” said Wills, “teaches members of the public that the human is just another primate.”

Tom Mahoney, one of the participants in the exhibit, agreed. “A lot of people think that humans are above other animals,” he said. “When they see humans as animals, here, it kind of reminds them that we’re not that special.”⁶

What a contrast to the biblical premise that human beings are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.

Read Genesis 1:20–28; 2:18–20; 3:21; and 4:4.

[Q] What is the relationship between humans and other creatures before and after the Fall? If there was a change, explain how the Fall affected the other creatures.

[Q] What do you think God meant when he told humans to “subdue” every living thing?

[Q] Why do you think God created other living beings?

- Why did God appoint Adam to name all the animals?

[Q] Why do you suppose God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins?

[Q] Why was God pleased with Abel’s sacrifice of an animal?

Teaching Point Two: Scripture prophesies an idyllic picture of our future relationship with animals and points out that they are valuable to God.

Read Isaiah 11:6–9.

[Q] According to Isaiah, who makes such harmony possible among different animals? How is this harmony made possible?

[Q] Do you think this imagery should be taken literally? If not, what indicates to you that this prophecy is only figurative? How are we then to regard specific references, such as the “root of Jesse”?

- If you do take this literally, does that mean there will be creatures in the new creation?

[Q] What is the point of Isaiah 11:6–9?

Leader’s Note: *It is that the Messiah redeems not only humanity, but creation as well.*

[Q] Read Matthew 6:26. How is God involved in the lives of his creatures? Does God actually meet their needs? Explain.

⁶ “Humans Are Ones on Display at London Zoo,” yahoo news (8-26-05), contributed by Sam O’Neal, PreachingToday.com.



[Q] Why do you think Jesus exalts the value of humans over other creatures?

Optional Activity:

Ask the question: What things can you do to lessen the suffering of animals?

List answers on a whiteboard or poster board, then ask the following questions:

[Q] *Which answers does everyone in the group approve? Which answers generate a mixed reaction? Why?*

[Q] *Why do Christians have different beliefs and feelings on this issue? What does the wide range of positions on animal rights among Christians say about the significance of this issue in the church?*

[Q] *Do you think Christians need to take a particular stand on animal rights? Why or why not?*

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

[Q] What do you think about the actions of animal-rights activists who taunt people coming out of garment stores and destroy property in medical laboratories in order to make a point?

- Do you think this type of activity will win the support of society? Does it win your support? Does this type of activity help animals in any way? If so, how?

[Q] Why do you think activists were able to successfully change the tuna industry's policies concerning the killing of dolphins? What do you think the animal-rights activists can learn from this success?

[Q] What can you learn about persuasion by looking at the activities of the animal-rights movement?

[Q] In what ways do animals enhance your relationship with God?

[Q] Why do you think many people have pets? Why do you think there is such a wide variety of pets? What kinds of relationships do people have with their pets? How do pets remind us of how God cares for us?



- Discuss how animals reflect the magnificent handiwork of the Creator. How does the beauty and order of nature enrich our lives and make us thirst for God?
- What animals do you think show the humor of God?

[Q] In Exodus 20:10 and 23:12, why do you think God extends the Sabbath, a day of rest, to animals as well as to his people?

Action Point: After this study, what position do you take on this issue? How would you sum up the balance between caring for animals and putting them on the same level as humans? What will be the practical implications of this in your life?



Animal Lib

Despite silliness and fanaticism on both sides, the animal-rights debate remains an inherently religious issue.

By Tim Stafford, for the study “A Biblical View of Animals”

The animal-rights movement raises questions about more than animals. Ultimately, it raises the question of whether a secular society can make sense of itself.

An image: I am 11-years-old, and on a bright, spring day I stand on the banks of an irrigation ditch that runs near my school. Someone has caught a frog, and two boys are taking turns throwing their pocketknives at it. I can catch only occasional glimpses of the frog through the legs of my peers, who are crowding around, eager to see.

After many tries, a knife finds its target, and the crowd lets out an admiring groan. I press closer. The frog, split open, is leaking its guts. Still living, it scrabbles weakly in the dust. I turn away feeling sick and guilty. I know without a shadow of a doubt that what I have seen is wrong. This should never be done to a frog.

Another image: I am 31-years-old, and on another bright, spring day I watch a goat die. I am in Kenya, and as is traditional in East African celebrations, a goat is being slaughtered for a barbecue. I have eaten meat right out of the cellophane all my life, but I have never seen a mammal die. So I stand with a huddle of African friends, watching the deed with horrified fascination. It is done quickly, without cruelty. The neck is slit and blood spurts out. The goat bleats, struggles, and then lies still. It is gutted, skinned, cut apart. Nothing is wasted. The intestines are cooked; the head goes into a pot for soup. The meat, even after it is cut into pieces for the grill, has a habit of twitching.

I feel a little shaken by what I have seen. I do not feel ashamed, but I do feel solemn. It is not a light thing to take an animal's life.

Confronting Speciesism

Almost everyone would accept what my 11-year-old mind concluded about the needless death of a frog: It was wrong.

About the death of the goat, not all would agree. Most people have thought that as long as the goat was killed for food, and did not suffer more than necessary, its killing was justified. A persistent minority, however, has questioned our right to use animals for our own ends, as though they were merely “things.”

Despite such differences of opinion, virtually all Western people have worked from the Christian premise that human beings were set apart by God for a special purpose and for special responsibilities. We are worth more than the animals, and we must act better than animals—so we have believed. Those who wanted to protect animals from suffering worked from this assumption, as did those who justified using and eating animals.

But no more. Today, the most visible animal-rights activists speak out against the belief that humankind has been put in charge of creation. This presumption, they claim, has led to the overwhelming slavery and abuse of animals. They scoff at the Christian requirement that we treat animals kindly. It is, they say, like the requirement that slave owners treat their slaves kindly. The activists' goal is to set the animals free—free from all human control and domination.



“Humane treatment is simply sentimental, sympathetic patronage,” says Michael W. Fox, a veterinarian who directs the Center for the Respect of Life and Environment at the Humane Society of the United States.

Tom Regan, another well-known activist, puts it this way: “The animal-rights philosophy is abolitionist rather than reformist. It’s not better cages we work for, but empty cages.” Gary Francione, a law professor who litigates animal-rights cases, would not allow an animal to suffer even if the research led to a cancer cure: “I don’t believe it is morally permissible to exploit weaker beings even if we derive benefits.”

In a *Harper’s* magazine forum on the morality of animal experimentation, the theoretical possibility of implanting a pig’s heart to save a human baby’s life was raised. One animal-rights activist, who is sternly against such a possibility, said that the baby’s parents should be made to care about the pig. When another participant exclaimed, “I don’t want to change [the parents’] reaction. I want human beings to care about babies,” Ingrid Newkirk, head of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, retorted, “Like racism or sexism, that remark is pure speciesism.”

Speciesism, a term invented in Peter Singer’s foundational text, *Animal Liberation*, is the allegedly bigoted contention that human beings are more important than other animals. “It can no longer be maintained by anyone but a religious fanatic that man is the special darling of the universe,” Singer wrote, “or that other animals were created to provide us with food, or that we have divine authority over them, and divine permission to kill them.”

That makes animal rights one of the first social movements to claim an explicitly non-Christian point of view. Not all its members share this ideology, but the most publicized leaders speak against long-held Christian assumptions. Michael Fox, quoted in *The Washingtonian*, put it succinctly: “There are no clear distinctions between us and animals. Animals communicate, animals have emotions, animals can think. Some thinkers believe that the human soul is different because we are immortal, and that just becomes completely absurd.” Humane Society literature, according to writer Katie McCabe, has claimed since 1980 that “there is no rational basis for maintaining a moral distinction between the treatment of humans and other animals.”

Sputtering and Fuming

It is tempting to focus on the abrupt twists and turns in the logic of animal-rights activists. They point to science’s inability to document absolute differences between human and beast. But this hardly suggests that we should treat animals well. It should be instructive to note that animals eat each other: that is, whales eat seals, seals eat fish, all without evident taint of “speciesism.” Clearly, to animal-rights activists, human beings are special—special in their responsibility to treat animals better than many animals treat each other. The animal-rights movement would like to raise animals to the moral status of humans. It would be just as *logical* to lower humans to the moral status of animals.

But why hold animal-rights activists to a higher standard of logic than their opponents? The philosophy of animal rights does not seem coherent, but as a number of thinkers have noted, a secular philosophy of human rights has yet to prove coherent, either.

This is quite noticeable in the back-and-forth between animal-rights activists and the scientists, government officials, and journalists who confront them. Both sides argue fervently from a position firmly planted in the air. The activists ask: What gives humankind the right to decide an animal’s fate? Why should a monkey lose its life to save a child? In response, the sages of our society sputter and fume.

Scientists have been amazed and outraged as the protests of what they regard as a lunatic fringe have disturbed the sanctity of their laboratories. Although typically not philosophically inclined, scientists do have a solemn sense of purpose in what they do. This gets expressed in various ways. At the high end is the philosophical: We are pursuing the truth, they say. At the low end is the pragmatic: We are saving lives through medicine.

It is at the low end that scientists usually try to meet the animal-rights activists. John Kaplan, writing in *Science*, suggests that scientists show photos of “human burn victims or of quadriplegics to offset the pathetic pictures of the animals used in the research.” He assumes that people will favor the suffering of animals over the suffering of human beings, and he is probably right about that.

But as far as the activists are concerned, this begs the question. What right have we to make an animal suffer in our place? We would not consider it right to treat another human being that way. Why an animal? What makes us think we are so special?

Ironically, the biologists proclaiming urgently that every delay in their experiments may cost human lives are members of the discipline that has been at pains to show there is no dramatic difference between humans and other animals, that different species are merely different products of evolution. By their own criteria, one is not “better” than another.

But now scientists have made a different discovery: In their heart of hearts they believe that human beings are morally different from animals. Only they cannot say why they think so. They can only sputter with outrage that anyone would put a human being on the same level as a pig.

Dangerous Thinking

A *Newsweek* cover story ended with these remarks on vivisection:

The question is whether the practical benefits of vivisection constitute a moral justification for it. If mankind’s interest in finding a better treatment for AIDS doesn’t justify conducting lethal experiments on individual humans, an ethicist might ask, why does it justify performing them on monkeys? Why doesn’t a monkey deserve moral consideration? What is the relevant difference between a human subject and an animal subject?

To reply that the human is human and the animal isn’t only begs the question....

Another possible answer is that we humans enjoy certain God-given prerogatives. We are, after all, the only creatures the Bible says were made in God’s image....

It may be a difference, but it’s not an empirical, observable one. It has to be taken on faith....

Maybe *there is no reasoned moral justification* [italics added].... Whatever the answer, scientists can no longer afford to pretend that their critics’ moral concerns are frivolous. Profound questions are being raised, and ignoring them won’t make them go away.

On that uncertain note, the long article ended. On a similar note, a *New Republic* article by Robert Wright essentially accepted the argument that no moral distinction can be made between animals and humans. The belief that humans are in a special category, wrote Wright, “is a perfectly fine thing to believe, but it’s hard to argue for. It depends much more on religious conviction than on any plausible line of reasoning.” And of course, Wright assumed, religious conviction was ruled out of reasonable discussion.

Unfortunately, Wright also showed where his assumptions can lead: “Human rights ... isn’t some divine law imparted to us from above or some Platonic truth apprehended through the gift of

reason. The idea of individual rights is simply a non-aggression pact It's a deal struck for mutual convenience."

Wright showed the danger of excluding religion from questions that are inherently religious. Investigating animal rights through pure logic, without revelation, can easily turn against human rights, and ultimately against animals. If human rights are merely "a deal struck for mutual convenience," then anybody who doesn't buy into the deal (Stalin, say) is morally free to go his or her own way. And of course it makes no sense at all to extend the deal to animals, whose protection and care is certainly not a matter of mutual convenience. Humans will only care for animals if they believe that it is a calling, not a "deal."

As Richard John Neuhaus has put it, "The campaign against 'speciesism' is a campaign against the singularity of human dignity and, therefore, of human responsibility The hope for a more humane world, including the more humane treatment of animals, is premised upon what they deny."

Opponents of animal-rights activists also sometimes fall into logic that is inherently dangerous. Why should medical researchers sacrifice animals for human welfare? Journalist Katie McCabe suggests an answer of sorts in her *Washingtonian* exposé of animal rights activists, "Beyond Cruelty." She points out that the debate "has been framed ... as everything but what it really is—a moral argument that penetrates to the definition of humanity." She then quotes businessman Richard Kelly: The debate "is not an argument that philosophy or religion or even science can solve. ... In the end, human beings and their needs are the only argument that matters."

This is a kind of "defending my family" argument. It goes, "I don't know who's better, them or us. But I know that if I have to choose, I'm fighting for us." This is pure speciesism, if you please. Anything that enhances, protects, or increases the joy of the human race is good. Why? Because it's my team. This is a form of humanism that justifies animal experiments, but a great deal more—too much more. There is no limit to what it will justify in the name of the human race.

What we see through the lens of this controversy is a society that has lost faith in the religious view it was built on and has nothing suitable to put in its place. The religious sentiments continue—on the part of animal-rights activists, the sympathy for animal suffering and on the part of scientists, the belief in human pre-eminence—but the sentiments have lost their foundation. When someone challenges them, the response is the agitated indignation of people who are sure they are doing the right thing, though they cannot say why. Animal-rights activists cannot articulate why they care about the death of a frog, or the death of a child. Nor can scientists say why they would kill a frog to save a child. They argue from feeling—a feeling that banks on thousands of years of a faith in which they no longer believe.

The Spectrum of Christian Thought

Despite all efforts to rule religion out, the debate over animal rights remains inherently and fundamentally religious. That is not to say, however, that religion offers only one answer. Hinduism, for example, has its own view, to which some animal-rights activists are attracted. And within Christianity there is room for tremendous differences—room for the chicken farmer viewing his birds as meat-making machines, as well as for Saint Francis preaching sermons to them.

The chicken farmer claims familiar scriptural supports. According to his view, God intended animals to serve human ends, and it is no cruelty to use them for their created purpose. Genesis 1 describes how humankind was charged with ruling "over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air ... and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (v. 26, NIV). Genesis 9:3, furthermore, records how God gave all living creatures to Noah and his family for food. Biblical people—including Jesus—were

flesh eaters. They were also animal users—shepherds and fishermen and dirt farmers who used animals to plow and thresh. The Bible treats this as normal.

Another view of animals is also explicit in the Bible, however, and gives a different (though not necessarily contradictory) perspective. It is presented most vividly in Psalm 104. There, animals find their niche in creation alongside humanity, not beneath it. Some animals are of no use to humankind—may even be hazardous to human persons. Lions “seek their food from God” and go to bed when humans go out to work. In the sea can be found “leviathan, which you formed to frolic there” (Ps. 104:26, NIV). Animals, however useful they are to humankind, are supremely valuable to God, who made them in their uniqueness for his own purposes.

As Karl Barth described creation, humankind “is not set up as lord over the earth, but as lord on the earth which is already furnished with these creatures. Animals and plants do not belong to him; they and the whole earth can belong only to God.” Thus our responsibility is not to use the living creatures of the earth for our own purposes, but to rule the earth in such a way as to ensure that all God’s creatures are able to fulfill his purposes. In some cases—the whale, the lion—that surely means leaving them to be themselves. Between these two emphases—the instrumental and the ecological—there are many possibilities. On one side are the pragmatic, workaday realities of society as we know it. By this, certain animals are good for food, for wool, for experiments. If this good involves some bad—some unavoidable pain, for example—that is how life often is on a fallen planet, a tradeoff between good and bad, nurture and suffering.

On the other side is the good of the peaceable kingdom, where the lion will lie down with the lamb, and no one will hurt or destroy. So it was in Eden, so it will be in the end—and so we ought to try to make it today.

What both ends of the Christian spectrum share is as important as their differences. Both sides believe that humanity has a unique calling, and that our relationship to animals must be worked out within that calling. Christians do not share the modern uncertainty about what on earth we are here for, an uncertainty that adds a wild and flailing quality to secularized debates over animal rights.

A More Peaceable Kingdom

The animal-rights movement would like to change the world dramatically.

Some changes can be made fairly painlessly. We could do without furs, for instance. At some level, though, there is little doubt that animal rights are in conflict with human need. Nearly all scientists say, for instance, that medical research requires animal experimentation. Give it up, and you just as surely give up cures for a thousand diseases. It is difficult to imagine our society giving those up without stronger reasons than animal-rights activists have so far offered.

More likely, a goal disdained by activists will be fulfilled: Our society will try to be kinder to animals, even as it uses them and eats them.

The industrialization of food production, global pollution, and the crowding out of wilderness bring new questions about our treatment of animals. Today lions can go their independent way only if we set aside space for them to do so. Whales will survive to frolic only as we restrain our tendency to use them for our ends. God made them; we can now unmake them. One hopes that the animal-rights movement will prod our society to think seriously about such issues.

We can share another hope: Perhaps if activists keep asking questions, they will lead us to the realization that no society can be purely irreligious. We must, when asked for the reasons behind our commitments, be able to say more than “science.” Scientists who have discovered so many

wonderful secrets of the universe have yet to discover an ethic. Science has its ethical commitments, but they are inherited, assumed.

At our society's center, increasingly, is confusion. Having shed Christianity, we have no framework for thinking about ecology, suffering, life, and death—whether for animals or for humans. This void will be filled, perhaps with a resurgence of Christian humanism, or perhaps with something else. No lasting society is truly and fully pluralistic, in the sense of not having any core beliefs. If animal-rights activists accidentally bring this point home, they may do more for humans than they do for animals.

“Animal Lib,” by Tim Stafford, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, June 1990

