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### **Review of Matthew C. Halteman's *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation* (Humane Society of the United States, 2008).**

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In *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation*<sup>1</sup>, Matthew C. Halteman offers an exciting new approach to the ethics of eating in an accessibly written and attractively illustrated, slim forty-page booklet. For Halteman, *compassionate eating* is “a collective term for various intentional approaches to eating that seek to be mindful of the flourishing of the whole of creation (human, animal, and environment) when raising, purchasing, and consuming food” (p. 13). As stated here this is a general ethical concept – something along the lines of Mark Bittman’s term “conscious eating”<sup>2</sup> – but Halteman argues for compassionate eating from within what he calls “a *distinctively Christian framework* for coming to appreciate the moral and spiritual significance of ... deep concern for animals and the environment” (p. 36-7). It is this approach that makes Halteman’s book important, because conservative Christians remain – despite Matthew Scully’s similar work<sup>3</sup> – the group most staunchly opposed to environmentalism in general and animal compassion in particular, and only a “distinctively Christian” approach to

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<sup>1</sup> Halteman, Matthew C. *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation* (Humane Society of the United States, 2008), available online at [http://www.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/religion/ar-halteman\\_book\\_lowres2.pdf](http://www.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/religion/ar-halteman_book_lowres2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Bittman, Mark. *Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating* (Simon and Schuster, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Scully, Matthew. *Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (St. Martin’s, 2002).

these issues has any chance of influencing such attitudes.<sup>4</sup>

To reason within a distinctively Christian framework is to base one's philosophical arguments on theological commitments as grounded in Christian scriptures and traditions. This is the method defended by evangelical Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff (formerly on the faculty at Halteman's Calvin College) in his *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*.<sup>5</sup> More to the point, this is the method used by most conservative Christians in everyday moral thinking. The average evangelical, for example, is not much concerned about which principles a rational being would agree to behind Rawls's veil of ignorance. Instead she wants to know what Jesus would do, and she wants to be convinced about Jesus's viewpoint from Biblical evidence.

Following Wolterstorff's evangelical philosophical approach, then, Halteman is not attempting along Enlightenment lines to argue from (allegedly) neutral principles acceptable to any rational being; rather Halteman is arguing from Christian scriptures and traditions. This approach distinguishes Halteman both from utilitarians like Peter Singer and Kantians like Tom Regan who take the Enlightenment approach.<sup>6</sup> Halteman obviously has predecessors among theologians – those whose job it is to reason from within a religious tradition. Andrew Linzey, Jay McDaniel, and Stephen Webb are recent standouts here.<sup>7</sup> But these theologians tend to work with “liberal” theological terms and categories that are off-putting to many traditionalists who tend to see modern academic theology as heretical, impious, or otherwise deficient. What

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<sup>4</sup> Halteman doesn't address his argument specifically to conservative Christians. On the contrary, he claims his approach to creation care is “inclusive of the interests of a wide variety of people, including different types of Christians” (p. 37). My claim is that, as a philosophy professor at Calvin College, one of the largest and most influential evangelical universities, Halteman is especially positioned to recommend animal and environmental concerns to evangelicals and other conservative Christians.

<sup>5</sup> Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eerdmans, 1984). It is not clear whether or not Halteman is consciously adopting Wolterstorff's methodology, but he does cite *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* on p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*, New York: Harper Collins, 2002; Regan, Tom. *The Case for Animal Rights*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (University of California, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Linzey, Andrew. *Animal Theology*. (University of Illinois, 1995); McDaniel, Jay. B. *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Westminster John Knox, 1989); Webb, Stephen H. *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (Oxford, 1998).

conservatives need is someone who can start from a general obligation to environmental stewardship grounded in the Bible and Christian tradition and then argue toward a particular responsibility to prevent animal suffering. This is precisely what Halteman attempts to do, as reflected in the title of the booklet which links “care of creation” with “compassionate eating”.

Conservative Christians have not typically been receptive toward arguments for animal compassion. Halteman takes the essence of the conservatives’ objections to be this: environmentalism in general and animal compassion in particular are incompatible with a Christian worldview, because (a) advocates of such issues place nature (rather than God) at the center of our ethical concern and (b) they place humans on the same level as animals whereas Christianity teaches that God gave humans “dominion” over animals (p. 37). Halteman’s distinctively Christian approach attempts to avoid these objections by showing how a commitment to environmentalism and animal compassion are consistent with (perhaps even entailed by) a view according to which our ethical obligations and ideals are grounded in a God-given role of dominion (here interpreted as “care” or stewardship rather than domination) over nature. Halteman structures his essay around a call to “honesty, conviction, and imagination” (p. 3). Building on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Halteman calls us to imagine God the Creator’s purpose for the world; to commit ourselves with conviction to imitating Christ the Redeemer; and to listen honestly to the Holy Spirit’s guidance (p. 14; cf. p. 22).

Halteman saves *honesty* for last. This is the “bad news” section (p. 19) in which he details the “hidden costs” (p. 21) or “unintended consequences” (p. 2) of industrial animal agriculture with respect to human, animal, and environmental wellbeing. This is the most familiar section of the book, rehearsing the same sort of research brought into mainstream consciousness by recent bestsellers like *Fast Food Nation*, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, and *Food*

*Matters*.<sup>8</sup> The *imagination* section (the section with which Halteman begins) is more philosophically interesting. In this section Halteman sets out the Biblical vision of the “peaceable kingdom” which God promises to establish (p. 5), detailing the Christian narrative of the world’s creation, fall, and redemption as follows. God created human beings for the purpose of promoting the flourishing of creation. This is a purpose we have failed to fulfill but to which God (through Jesus Christ) calls us to return. God promises that one day all creatures will indeed flourish and live in harmony with one another under the rule of Christ. Halteman concludes:

Whether we interpret the relevant passages literally or figuratively, our creation and redemption narratives make it abundantly clear that God’s highest aspiration for creation is the institution of a cosmic harmony in which human beings created in God’s image promote the flourishing of the whole of God’s world to God’s eternal glory. (p. 5-6)

For Halteman this vision has normative force, since, as Christ-followers, Christians are committed to “living toward the peaceable kingdom” (p. 7) – i.e., living “in faithful anticipation” of God’s ideal world (p. 5) by living “as though the kingdom of God has already arrived, grounding our present attitudes and actions toward all of God’s creatures in the hope of honoring the dignity that will be theirs when God’s redemptive work is complete” (p. 9). Here Halteman is attempting to provide a theological alternative to the “dispensationalism” characteristic of many evangelical Christians. According to traditional dispensationalism, the world will be destroyed at Christ’s Second Coming and then replaced with an entirely new creation.<sup>9</sup> Halteman instead follows the traditional “Reformed” view according to which the world will be “renewed” but not

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<sup>8</sup> Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. (Harper Perennial, 2001); Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin, 2006); Bittman, Mark. *Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating* op cit.

<sup>9</sup> This is the view taught by Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of the influential dispensationalist institution Dallas Theological Seminary. See Chafer’s *Systematic Theology* Vol. 5-6 (Kregel, 1993; a 4 volume reprint of the original 8 volume edition published by Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-8), p. 362-5. Chafer bases his view on Biblical language that says “heaven and earth will pass away” (Matthew 24:35) and God will create a “new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17). The best passages in support this point are 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Revelation 21:1.

completely replaced.<sup>10</sup> Thus on Halteman's view there is continuity between our current world and the coming peaceable kingdom. The renewal of the earth has already begun, and we are called to be "witnesses, agents, and evidences" to this renewal (p. 15).<sup>11</sup> As Halteman explains: "As witnesses, we are called to proclaim that God is working to renew the world; as agents, we are called to do what we can to bring this renewal about; and as evidences, we are called to provide indications in the present of what the coming kingdom will be like" (ibid).

Beyond a generic call to "renewal", Halteman also believes that the Biblical vision of cosmic history implies specific ethical principles. For example, according to the Biblical narrative, "the entirety of creation belongs to God" not to human beings and is therefore not "ours to dispense with as we please" (p. 7). Likewise, Halteman claims that "God's call to high dominion is fundamentally incompatible with cruelty to animals, indifference to their suffering, and the conceit that they are here for us to do with as we please" (p. 8). Thus without assuming that animal suffering "is on a moral or psychological par with human suffering" (p. 32), Halteman can still conclude that "a great many of the billions of animals raised and slaughtered for food every year by the industrial agricultural complex are enduring lives unbefitting creatures of God" (p. 31).

The greatest strength of Halteman's discussion lies not so much in his argument but in his rhetoric. His irenic style is more likely to win converts to the cause of animal compassion than some of the other, more strident, appeals on offer. In particular, Halteman is careful to avoid the sort of self-righteous rigorism exhibited by some vegan activists. He does this in three ways.

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<sup>10</sup> This view was taught by Louis Berkof, former president of Calvin College's seminary. See Berkof's *Systematic Theology*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Eerdmans, 1939), p. 737; cf. 177-8. The best passage in support of this view is Romans 8:19-21.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth pointing out that Halteman need not have challenged the dispensational view in order to defend environmentalism. David Neff, editor of the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, argues that even if God will someday replace the earth with a new one, we don't know how long we're going to need this earth but we do know that environmental destruction makes it less pleasant to live here in the meantime. See Neff, David. *Christianity Today*, "Second Coming Ecology" 52:7 (July 2008), available online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/july/23.35.html>.

First, Halteman understands compassionate eating “as a form of engaged Christian discipleship” (p. 3), by which he means both that compassionate eating is a way of imitating Jesus (p. 14) and that it is an ideal toward which Christians can grow through daily practice (p. 13). In this way Halteman’s approach avoids what he calls the off-putting “legalism” of many Enlightenment forms of animal rights theory. Compassionate eating “begins not with a code of laws to which we are obliged to conform but with the vision of an ideal toward which we are called to strive” (p. 38).

Second, compassionate eating is a holistic concept (p. 37). Halteman is starting from a concern for creation as a whole: “human, animal, and environment,” as he says. Thus the concept of compassionate eating does not focus only on animal suffering; it takes into account human suffering and the destruction of the environment as well. In this way it does not make the extremist mistake of assuming that one’s own pet issues (forgive the pun) reflect the only values worth taking seriously. Rather Halteman admits that, in the real world of our everyday lives, animal compassion is only one of many values which must be balanced against one another in a complex judgment of practical reasoning.

Finally, unlike many other positions on the ethics of eating, the concept of compassionate eating is, in Halteman’s terms, philosophically “ecumenical” (p. 12). Halteman’s target is factory farming (p. 1), but unlike many critics of industrial agriculture, Halteman does not make the dubious leap directly to an obligation of veganism. Instead, allows that there are different ways to respond to his arguments, ranging from reformism through agrarianism and vegetarianism to veganism. Officially he argues only for a minimal reformism: “eating less meat, supporting less intensive farming methods, or adopting a greener diet” (p. 19; cf. p. 38). He does not insist upon the more rigorous interpretations of compassionate eating. From a purely rhetorical point of

view, such a minimal thesis is much easier to defend and is likely to be met with less hostility from the general public than all-out veganism.

Despite all these strengths, however, Halteman's argument falters at one key point. It is difficult (perhaps impossible) to deny the reasonableness of Halteman's conclusion that the practices of the industrial agricultural complex are immoral. But Halteman has not set himself the goal of simply establishing the intuitive reasonableness of affirming an abstract ethical proposition. He has set himself the stronger goal of showing that the immorality of industrial agriculture follows from the Biblical vision of the peaceable kingdom. This is what constitutes Halteman's "distinctively Christian" argument. Yet Halteman does not seem to have succeeded in this stronger goal.

In his discussion of the peaceable kingdom, Halteman appeals to the Biblical "images of children playing amidst venomous snakes, leopards and lambs lying down together, and lions eating straw" (p. 6). These images of a redeemed creation come from the prophet Isaiah.<sup>12</sup> Less explicitly, Halteman seems also to rely on the images of a pre-fall creation in the book of Genesis which describes the Garden of Eden as a vegan paradise where both humans and animals eat only plants.<sup>13</sup> These idyllic scenarios are the bookends of the Biblical story as Halteman narrates it. On Halteman's view, the Biblical narrative is a "cosmic tragicomedy" in which an initial harmony is disrupted due to human selfishness but is eventually restored by the redemptive work of Christ (p. 6). Thus the images of humans and animals living peacefully together are the ideals of perfection with which we are called to fill our moral imagination.

Now, in an admirable attempt to be religiously inclusive (cf. p. 37), Halteman claims that it is beside the point "whether we interpret the relevant passages literally or figuratively" (p. 5).

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<sup>12</sup> See especially Isaiah 11:6-9, but see also 65:25; cf. 43:20.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:29-30; cf. Genesis 9:3.

But this is a mistake. If the images of the peace between humans and animals are not taken at least somewhat literally then it is hard to see how they are relevant to the argument for animal compassion. To interpret the passages figuratively is to interpret them as not really being about lions and lambs at all. For example, we might read the passages about straw-eating lions as only making a point about the safety of God's people (viz., in paradise, God's people have nothing to fear from any enemy, human or animal).<sup>14</sup> But this sort of reading is not open to Halteman, because it would undermine his ability to ground his argument for animal compassion on a vision of God's peaceable kingdom. If the point of the straw-eating lions is only that God's people can live without fear – indeed, if the point of the images is anything other than literal peace between carnivorous animals and their prey – then these passages do not obviously commit the Biblical author to any view about the ethics of eating.

The fact that Halteman is thus committed to a literal reading of Isaiah's straw-eating lion image yields other problems for his argument. First, a literal reading would seem to imply that, in order to be "agents" of the kingdom, we ought to domesticate all animals and attempt to prevent wild lions from eating lambs.<sup>15</sup> If the Christian calling "to stand with the weak against

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<sup>14</sup> This sort of reading is given by Ronald E. Clements in his essay "The Wolf Shall Lie Down with the Lamb: Reading Isaiah 11:6-9 Today" in *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millennium*, ed. A. Gelston, P. J. Harland, and Robert Hayward (Brill, 1999). Clements shows how the vision of the Messianic kingdom in Isaiah 11:1-9 is reprised in Isaiah 65:17-25 and how both passages must be read in light of Isaiah 43:16-21 (p. 92-3). Clements points to a similar passage about peace between humans and animals in Hosea 2:18 and argues that in both Isaiah and Hosea "the primary emphasis is upon the abolition of human warfare. The ending of violence and the removal of the threat of premature death from the animal kingdom is essentially regarded as an illustration of this" (p. 97). Clements summarizes his conclusions: "There is undoubtedly an element of hyperbole in Isa. 11:6-9, as also in Hos. 2:20 (English translation 18), which appears to have arisen out of a concern to outlaw human warfare. The aggression shown in the natural world was not to be used to excuse the predatory and violent behavior which appears to prevail so extensively on earth. In these passages it is human violence which is the primary target, and the examples of animal conduct are excluded from the picture so that they can no longer serve as an excuse for human aggression. Even the age-old example of the lion -- so widely employed as a symbol of military might and power throughout the ancient Near East -- is brought into the shelter of peaceful domesticity" (p. 99).

<sup>15</sup> C.S. Lewis comes close to this suggestion in his discussion of the resurrection of domestic animals in *The Problem of Pain* (HarperCollins, 2001), p. 142-147; cf. p. 73. See also Lewis's fictional illustration of his view the novel *That Hideous Strength* (Scribner, 1996), p. 303-5 where he represents the character Ransom (a Christ-figure) as convincing a wild bear to become herbivorous.

the tyranny of the strong” (p. 15) includes protecting non-human animals from the suffering inflicted on them by the industrial agricultural complex (p. 31), then why wouldn’t this calling also include protecting weak animals like lambs from the suffering inflicted on them by the tyranny of strong animals like lions? It seems that the only way to block this implication is to argue either that the image of straw-eating lions is not literal (in which case the image ceases to be relevant to the ethics of eating) or that it is God’s job, not ours, to bring about this peaceful state of affairs (which would be to give up our role as “agents” of the kingdom). Halteman might reply that, as humans, we are only morally accountable for the actions of human society and are thus excused from intervening in the affairs of wild animals. But this move would conflict with his appeal to human “dominion” or stewardship over non-human animals. Moreover, even if there were a good reason for humans not to domesticate all animals (say, because we would likely do more harm than good in attempting such global environmental intervention) the fact remains that a literal reading of Isaiah does imply the bizarre thesis that there is something *wrong* with the carnivorous behavior of lions.

Second, a literal reading undermines Halteman’s ethical ecumenism since it implies that veganism is the ideal. Merely “reducing our collective meat consumption bit by bit while pushing simultaneously for reforms in the ways that animals are treated on industrial farms” (p. 12) must be judged as being at best an admirable but incomplete first step. Isaiah describes perfect peace between predator and prey, but if this is the ideal toward which human beings are called to “strive” (p. 13), then veganism is the only perfectly ethical alternative. Halteman is careful to allow that not everyone will be able to make an immediate switch to veganism – that’s why he conceptualizes compassionate eating as a spiritual discipline – but the unacknowledged implication of his argument is that any form of meat-eating is a concession to our “fallen” human

nature. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Halteman thinks all forms of meat-eating would cease if the peaceable kingdom fully arrived in its promised form.

The view of meat-eating as a concession to sinful human appetites does have some Biblical evidence. Compare God's blessing on Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with God's similar blessing on Noah after the Flood.

God blessed them [i.e., humankind], and God 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 upon the earth." God said, "See I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. (Genesis 1:28-30)

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Genesis 9:1-3)

Notice the differences between these passages. In the Garden of Eden passage, God commands humanity to (1) be fruitful and multiply, (2) fill the earth, (3) subdue the earth, (4) have dominion over the animals, and to (5) eat plants. The most striking difference in the post-Flood passage is that God commands Noah (or at least permits him) to eat animals in addition to plants. The fact that God does not permit meat-eating until after the "fall" might suggest that meat-eating should be read as a concession on God's part to humans' sinful appetites – a less than ideal state of affairs.<sup>16</sup> On this view, consistent with Halteman's reconstruction of the Biblical narrative, since sinless human beings are portrayed as living in harmony with the animals in the Garden of Eden, this sort of non-carnivorous harmony is normative for Christians who are attempting to live as

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<sup>16</sup> Compare what Jesus said about divorce: "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery" (Matthew 19:8; cf. Deuteronomy 24:1).

witnesses, agents, and evidences of a redeemed creation.

But notice that the commands to “subdue” and “have dominion” are also lacking from the latter passage. In their place is a description of animals’ “fear and dread” of humans. Thus God seems to give different commands to pre-fall humanity and post-fall humanity. Since the pre-fall command to “have dominion” does not appear in the post-fall passage, one might argue that this command is no longer binding on those of us who live after the fall. Instead we are told “into your hand [the animals] are delivered”. In Hebrew to say that God has “delivered” or “given” someone “into your hand” is idiomatic for a military victory and the ability to kill someone.<sup>17</sup> So even if Halteman is correct that the command to have dominion implies that we cannot treat animals any way we want to (p. 8), one might object that the command to have dominion was replaced with a declaration that God has given the animals over to us, a declaration which does imply that we can treat them badly.<sup>18</sup>

One problem with both of the interpretations given so far is that they draw too stark a contrast between the Garden of Eden passage and the post-Flood passage. The only real difference between the passages seems to be that in the second passage God permits humans to eat meat and says that animals will be afraid of humans. The language of animals being delivered into human hands does not seem intended to *contrast* with the language of humans having dominion over animals. On the contrary, the declaration that God has delivered the animals into our hands seems to be intended as a *parallel* to God’s command to have dominion over them. God’s second blessing replaces the language of dominion over animals with the

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<sup>17</sup> See Exodus 23:31, Numbers 21:34-35, Deuteronomy 2:31-36, Joshua 21:43-44; cf. Deuteronomy 32:39, Judges 20:13, 1 Samuel 11:12, 2 Samuel 14:7.

<sup>18</sup> I take this to be the view expressed by Randall Beck of Collierville, TN in a letter to the editor of *Biola* magazine (Winter 2009) in response to Brett McCracken’s article “The Greening of Evangelicals” *Biola* (Fall 2008), available online at <http://www.biola.edu/news/biolamag/articles/08fall/greening.cfm>.

language of animals being delivered into human hands, but this change might be merely linguistic. The two phrases seem to have the same meaning. To have dominion over something just is to have that thing given into your hands. This leads to a third interpretation of post-Flood passage. One might argue that since the second passage explicitly permits killing animals, then we should reject Halteman's claim that the original command to have dominion is incompatible with animal cruelty. On this view, those over whom we have dominion have been given into our hands to treat in any way we please. This interpretation, however, does not take into account Jesus's interpretation of leadership as requiring selfless service of those under one's authority.<sup>19</sup> As Halteman argues, dominion does seem to require protecting rather than despoiling the natural world. So even if dominion over the animals is compatible with eating meat, it does not follow that cruelty toward animals is acceptable. All that follows is that we are permitted to kill animals humanely.

This brings us to a fourth interpretation of the Genesis narrative. On this view, we might concede that having dominion means caring for animals and preventing cruelty toward them, but then, on the basis of the post-Flood passage, deny that caring for animals is incompatible with eating them. This view notes that the Biblical description of animals' "fear and dread" bears no hint of condemnation toward humans. We might interpret animals' fear and dread as a natural result of being given to humans for food. Indeed, both the description of animals' fear and dread and God's gift of animals to humans for food seem to be part of the *blessing* God gives humans. In other words, there is no textual suggestion that meat-eating is a concession to sinful appetites. Meat-eating is not, then, portrayed in the post-Flood passage as less than ideal and the Genesis

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<sup>19</sup> "So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'" (Mark 10:42-45).

narrative does not confirm Halteman's literal reading of Isaiah.

In support of this fourth interpretation, we might add two further objections to Halteman's reading of cosmic history. First Halteman argues that Jesus "provides lucid evidence of the coming kingdom right here and now, allowing us a glimpse of what the world will be like when God's redemptive work is finished" (p. 14), but he doesn't seem to notice that Jesus (at least as portrayed by the Biblical authors) was not interested in animal compassion.<sup>20</sup> Not only did Jesus eat animals<sup>21</sup>, he is also portrayed as killing a herd of two thousand pigs simply to make a theological point.<sup>22</sup> Ex hypothesi, Jesus was the perfect embodiment of the peaceable kingdom, but Jesus was not interested in avoiding unnecessary harm to animals. It seems that Jesus did not understand Isaiah the way Halteman does. Likewise, God is portrayed as commanding the Apostle Peter to "kill and eat" a variety of animals to make a theological point about the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God.<sup>23</sup> Apparently the authors of the New Testament did not understand the coming of the peaceable kingdom to exclude the killing of animals for food. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that conceptions of animal compassion such as Halteman's are based on Romantic sentimentality and were not shared by the ancient authors of

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<sup>20</sup> Webb cites Carol J. Adams saying the historical Jesus's personal attitude toward animals is irrelevant to Christian ethics, but Halteman can't help himself to this response because he bases his argument on imitating Jesus's manifestation of the peaceable kingdom. See *On God and Dogs* op cit, p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> The New Testament represents Jesus as eating fish (Luke 24:41-43), and it is highly likely that a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jew would have eaten meat such as lamb at the sort of religious festivals, weddings, and other banquets Jesus is portrayed as attending.

<sup>22</sup> Mark 5:1-20. N.T. Wright explains the theological point Jesus was probably making through this action: "Jesus is fighting a battle against the enemies of the people of YHWH. But Rome is not the enemy; it is the satan and his hordes, who are deceiving Israel into thinking that Rome is the real enemy, so that she (Israel) will not notice the reality. Jesus is going into what he thought of as enemy territory, taking on (from the Jewish point of view) the demon of uncleanness and hostile paganism, and defeating the real enemy instead, demonstrating that victory in the acted symbolism of the death of the pigs. The story is, to be sure, strange, but all the signs are there that these are the resonances that it would have carried at the time." See Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress, 1996), p. 195-6.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 11:1-18.

the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

The view according to which dominion is compatible with killing animals is also related to a second objection to Halteman's reading of cosmic history: since he is committed to a literal reading of the Biblical narrative, Halteman's view is not compatible with evolutionary biology. Unless Halteman insists that the Biblical creation story is figurative, he will not be able to reconcile the Biblical vision with the evidence from evolutionary biology which convincingly demonstrates that animal predation has been with us from the beginning. Nature has always been red in tooth and claw, and there has never been an actual historical vegan paradise of the sort described in the Garden of Eden story. This fact of "original predation" (as we may call it) does not discredit Christianity, for, as Halteman suggests, the relevant passages can be taken figuratively. And neither does original predation discredit veganism, for the fact that nature *is* predatory does not entail that humans *ought* to be. But the fact of original predation does put Christianity and veganism in tension with one another. If God in fact created the world in an originally predatory state, then can we really read the Biblical narrative as condemning predation when it envisions straw-eating lions? Why would God create the world with a natural tendency toward a certain behavior and then condemn that behavior as sinful? Even if we read the Biblical narrative figuratively, then wouldn't we still have to read the Bible as condemning God's own creation?

This is the sort of tension that leads many scientists to reject religion and many conservative Christians to reject evolutionary science. Less conservative Christians believe the

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<sup>24</sup> Clements *op cit*, points out the Isaiah 11 vision of peace between predator and prey is "not that which prevails more generally throughout the Old Testament. That predatory animals obtain their food by the taking of other animal life is not only taken to be normal, but is quite openly presented as the designed purpose of God" (p. 94). In support of this view Clements cites Ps 104:21 and Job 38:39-41. Clements warns against our tendency toward a "genteel humanizing of the animal world and converting it into a pale, but comforting, reflection of human society" (p. 98). Clements concludes, "Perhaps the most important legacy of Isa. 11:6-9 and its use in Christian liturgy is its drawing attention to the presence of 'the wild' as a facet of creation" (p. 99).

tension between evolution and the Bible is not irreconcilable. For example, if we take the post-Flood blessing of Noah to imply that meat-eating is compatible with having dominion over animals (even in the sense of caring for the animals), and if we read the passages about straw-eating lions as only affirming an end to human warfare, then we will be able to show how a figurative reading of the Biblical narrative is compatible with evolution and original predation. But, again, this reading is not open to Halteman, because it would make the Biblical images of creation and redemption irrelevant to his argument. Halteman may still be able to generate an ethics of eating from a nonliteral reading of Christian scripture, but it will need to be more theologically subtle than the one he currently offers.