

Human and Animal Relations in the Theology of Karl Barth

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Abstract: This article presents a theological approach to human and animal relations by way of engagement with the theology of Karl Barth. Barth's specific discussion of the ethical status of the killing of animals and his theological presuppositions are critically assessed. The author argues that Barth's theological framework, especially his use of the concept of "secondary responsibility" and the implications of God's covenantal relationship with human beings for animals, is morally problematic. A theology of human relationships with animals is inextricably linked to christology, eschatology and ecclesiology. Barth's account is persuasive, though limited, in the first two categories, but is wanting in ecclesiology. An ecclesiological account of human relationships with animals is proposed by means of an engagement with Barth's eschatological ecclesiology.

INTRODUCTION

Karl Barth presents a short but insightful discussion of human and animal¹ relations in his doctrine of creation, volume three part one of the *Church Dogmatics*. In this article, I critically assess Barth's account and relate it to his broader theology of creation, christology, eschatology and ecclesiology. I will argue that Barth's theology of human relationships with animals is lacking in an account of the church and its provisional eschatological character. In section one, Barth's discussion of the ethical status of killing animals is outlined. Section two assesses the presuppositions of Barth's account of this topic. In section three, I position human and animal relations within the practices of the Christian community by making use of Barth's eschatological ecclesiology. Section four brings together the themes for a theology of

1. I will use the term "animal" in its colloquial usage to refer to mammals other than human beings. The issue of other life forms such as insects and fish will not be considered in this study because Barth does not discuss this topic. However, this topic is certainly worth consideration in another context.

human relations with animals derived from the first three sections. Finally, I conclude this article with a modest proposal for the church in relation to the treatment of animals.

1. BARTH'S ETHIC OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL RELATIONS

1.1. The Killing of Animals

The first task before us is to consider the content of Barth's discussion of human relations with animals. Barth asks the question: does human lordship or dominion extend to the killing of animals? His answer is that the killing of animals is significantly different from the harvesting of plants and vegetative life. To kill an animal is to annihilate a unique single living being, while harvesting plants is the "participation in the products of a sprouting nexus of life ceaselessly renewed in different forms".² Barth says that because of the closeness of animals to human beings, the killing of animals is very close to homicide.³ This is because the annihilation of an animal threatens to disturb the peace of creation. The slaughtering of animals was not part of God's original creative Word and is therefore a serious moral act.

Barth then describes three eras in creation. The first episode is the pre-fall original creation in which human beings and animals have vegetable food allotted to them (Gen 1:29-30). At this stage of creation, there is peace between human beings and animals, which is not threatened by any form of killing. Barth also notes that in the witness of Scripture it is permissible to kill animals only after the fall. This is the second episode of creation in which it is permissible to kill animals (Gen 9:3 in contrast to Gen 1:29-30) only as part of the struggle for existence resulting from a post-lapsarian order of creation. The final episode is the consummation of creation which marks the restoration of the primeval creative order and an end to the disruption of peace between human beings and animals (Hos 2:18; Isa 11:6-9; 65:25). Creation's original peacefulness is now an eschatological promise. Barth's argument is summarised in the following statement:

The history of the creature fashioned by the Word of God begins with the great episode in which the peace between God and itself is broken by man [*sic*]. The interim period which follows is the only time when the peace between creature and creature is broken and replaced by the struggle for existence. Only now can the animal become the enemy, disturber and destroyer of man and *vice versa*.

2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Trans. G. Bromiley and T. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), Vol. III/IV, 352 (hereafter referred to as C.D.)

3. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 353.

Creation and consummation are the boundaries of history, and therefore of this interim period, and therefore of the time when man's lordship over the animals can and must also mean that the animal threatens man and that man slays the animal in order to live.⁴

Barth is noncommittal about what this redemptive state of animals will look like, but simply confesses it as the testimony of Scripture. He is more concerned with the ethical question of the human treatment of animals resulting from the redemptive inclusiveness of Christ's salvific work.

After considering these three eras of creation, Barth concludes that the killing of animals is a serious ethical issue. It cannot be understood as a normative right or natural part of human existence. This is indicated in the following:

If that of his lordship over the living beast is serious enough, it takes on a new gravity when he sees himself compelled to express his lordship by depriving it of its life. He obviously cannot do this except under the pressure of necessity. Far less than all the other things which he dares to do in relation to animals, may this be ventured unthinkingly and as though it were self-evident. He must never treat this need for defensive and offensive action against the animal world as a natural one, nor include it as a normal element in his thinking or conduct.⁵

Barth presents a serious critique of many of the presumptions of the West, where animals are killed for food, clothing, sport and scientific research under the presupposition that this is a normative right for the fulfilment of human pleasure or need, rather than an act of serious ethical consequence. He calls into question the unthinking assumptions of many people who understand animals to be industrial objects to serve human consumption, economic products to be manipulated as efficiently as possible, and experimental objects for scientific research. This has become the teleology of many animals in the West. Barth pointedly asks the question: "Who are you, man, to claim that you must venture [the killing of animals] to maintain, support, enrich and beautify your own life?"⁶ For Barth, if an animal is to be killed, and we will see below that he does not completely rule this out, it requires justification, rather than a simple assertion of a divine given human right to take the life of an animal. Overall, Barth calls into question many of the pre-

4. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 353-354.

5. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 354.

6. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 354.

suppositions of the West and it is good to remember that he did this well and truly before the growth of the animal rights movement! This alone is a significant contribution to a theology of human relationships with animals.

Even though Barth presents a strong argument in support of the non-killing of animals, he refuses to rule it out categorically. He concludes his argument by relating the killing of animals to the covenant of grace. At this point, Barth's argument is quite dense and obscure, and so I will quote him at length.

Slaying of animals is really possible only as an appeal to God's reconciling grace, as its representation and proclamation. It undoubtedly means making use of the offering of an alien and innocent victim and claiming its life for ours. Man must have good reasons for seriously making such a claim. His real and supposed needs certainly do not justify it. He must be authorised to do so by his acknowledgement of the faithfulness and goodness of God, who in spite of and in his guilt keeps him from falling as He saved Noah's generation from the flood and kept it even though it was no better as a result.... The killing of animals in obedience is possible only as a deeply reverential act of repentance, gratitude and praise on the part of the forgiven sinner in face of the One who is the Creator and Lord of man and beast. The killing of animals, when performed with the permission of God and by His command, is a priestly act of eschatological character. It can be accomplished with a good conscience only as we glance backward to creation and forward to the consummation as the boundaries of the sphere in which alone there can be any question of its necessity. It can be achieved only in recollection of the reconciliation of man by the Man who intercedes for him and for all creation, and in whom God has accomplished the reconciliation of the world with himself.⁷

Barth thinks that the killing of animals is ultimately not part of the original creative order constituted by the Word of God, and likewise it will not be part of the ultimate future of the cosmos. In this time between the times, however, it is possible only as a reverential act anticipating the new aeon, while acknowledging the provisional character of this time between. As a concluding statement to his discussion, Barth says the following about vegetarianism:

It may well be objected against a vegetarianism which presses in this direction that it represents a wanton anticipation of what is described by Is. 11 and Rom. 8 as existence in the new aeon for which

7. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 354-355.

we hope. It may also be true that it aggravates by reason of its inevitable inconsistencies, its sentimentality and its fanaticism. But for all its weaknesses we must be careful not to put ourselves in the wrong in face of it by our own thoughtlessness and hardness of heart.⁸

Barth is clearly sympathetic towards the vegetarian cause and the non-killing of animals, without fully endorsing vegetarianism as an ideology. At the same time, he continues to argue that the killing of animals is not normative and requires serious justification. His fear of a Christian vegetarianism is that it may lead to people living as if they were already at the end time. This could result in all types of legalism, self-righteousness and utopianism.

2. THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

2.1. Secondary Responsibility

The next task before us is to examine in detail the theological presuppositions of Barth's discussion. Barth describes the human responsibility towards animals as a "secondary responsibility". The primary ethical responsibility of human beings is to our own species, *vis-à-vis homo sapiens*. In this prioritising of ethical responsibility, he has in mind Albert Schweitzer who argues that ethics is responsibility towards *all* life without limit.⁹ This is an important decision by Barth because it results in the subordination of the interests of animals to the interests of human beings. Despite this, Barth argues that this secondary responsibility is a serious responsibility and he avoids any idea that the priority of human beings excuses the abusive treatment of animals. The primacy of human interests over animals is indicated in Barth's definition of human lordship or dominion over animals. Human lordship over animals is the "requisitioning, disciplining, taming, harnessing, exploiting and making profitable use of the surplus forces of nature in the animal world".¹⁰ Within this definition, respect for animal life means "gratitude to God for the gift of so useful and devoted a comrade, and this gratitude will be translated into a careful, considerate, friendly and above all understanding treatment of it, in which sympathetic account is taken of its needs and the limits of its possibilities".¹¹ These two definitions of lordship and respect for animal life highlight the tension in Barth's theology. On the one hand, he defines human lordship in terms of the

8. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 355-356.

9. Albert Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967) 214-222.

10. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 351.

11. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 352.

language of economics: efficient and profitable use of animals. This can only result in an unhelpful framework for an ethic of human and animal relations. On the other hand, he forcefully speaks of a comradeship between human beings and animals that opposes the exploitation of animals and continues to understand the treatment of animals as a serious ethical responsibility.

It is important to note that Barth does not base this differentiation in responsibility on any factual difference between human beings and animals. For instance, he does not accept Aquinas' argument that the lack of rational capacity of animals means that they cannot be the recipients of human charity or the argument of Augustine that animals do not have reason.¹² This is an important move by Barth. To follow down the path of a factual differentiation as the basis for prioritising responsibility would lead to many ethical dilemmas. For example, if the rational capacity of human beings is the basis for subordinating the interests of animals, this would result in problems for the treatment of human beings with a severe intellectual disability or infants who have a lesser reasoning power and rational capacity than certain animals.¹³ In other words, once you state a factual difference as the basis for ethics you inevitably face borderline cases for both human beings and animals. For Barth, the justification of a secondary responsibility towards animals requires a *theological* justification and not a factual difference between the species. In his use of the concept of secondary responsibility, Barth's primary concern is to avoid the reduction in human life, which he believes will result from espousing an equal responsibility for all life forms. This is understandable in the context of the dehumanising treatment of Jewish people and others during the Second World War. Barth is concerned that Schweitzer's responsibility to all life forms has the potential to equate human beings with animals in a way that diminishes the treatment of human beings. While Barth avoids the mistreatment of human beings and recognises the differences between human and animal interests, his theology does very little to ameliorate

12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Part II, Question 65, Article 3*. See Gillian Clark, "The Fathers and the Animals: The Rule of Reason", in Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (eds.), *Animals on the Agenda* (London: SCM Press, 1998) 67-79.

13. Peter Singer shows well the consequences of a factual equality which asserts that we ought to treat species according to various capacities. He claims that equality is a moral idea and not an assertion of fact. If we develop a non-species factual equality, there are situations in which animals have many more factual capacities than a severely disabled person or an infant. The question then, for Singer, is not species specific, which he calls "speciesism", but is the capacity of a life to experience pain. This means that animals and humans have a non-species specific "interest". Singer's develops his argument about animals within a utilitarian philosophical framework. See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990).

the long history of the abusive treatment of animals that he clearly wants to avoid.

2.2. Covenant and Animals

What then is the theological basis for this secondary responsibility? Unsurprisingly, christology is at the centre of Barth's theological account of creation and therefore human relationships with animals. Creation "sets the stage" for the covenant of grace enacted in the eternal election of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ The divine work of creation is grounded in this eternal decision of God for covenantal relationship with human beings and therefore grounded in the being of God, who is by nature the electing God. Ontology and election are inextricably linked to Barth's christological doctrine of creation. Barth succinctly defines creation as the *external* basis of the covenant of grace and the covenant as the *internal* basis of creation. Creation is the external basis of the covenant insofar as it is the formal presupposition for the fulfilment of the covenant. "Creation is one long preparation, and therefore the being and existence of the creature one long readiness, for what God will intend and do with it in the history of the covenant."¹⁵ The covenant is the internal basis of creation since God creates according to his eternal decision to create fellowship with the creature in Jesus Christ. This means that creation is intrinsically determined for the establishment of the covenant of grace.¹⁶ John Webster puts it well by stating that for Barth creation has a "distinctly teleological character" because the "created order can be understood only in the light of God's purposes for creation enacted in Jesus Christ and made real in the power of the Holy Spirit".¹⁷ Thus, "creation is wholly ordered towards its redemptive fulfilment: its meaning lies not in its original ordering *per se*, but in that ordering as the external condition for covenantal grace."¹⁸

Within this theological context Barth states that animals form the indispensable "living background" to the living-space divinely allotted to human beings and placed under their control. "Animals and plants do not belong to him; they and the whole earth can belong only to God. But he takes precedence of [*sic*] them. They are provided for his use.

14. C.D. Vol. III/I, 44.

15. C.D. Vol. III/I, 231.

16. C.D. Vol. III/I, 231-232.

17. John Webster, *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000) 97-98. See also W. Whitehouse, "Karl Barth on 'The Work of Creation'", in Nigel Biggar (ed.), *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth* (London: Mowbray, 1988) 43-57.

18. John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 64.

They are his 'means of life'.¹⁹ The important point is that human beings are the central actors in the divine drama of God's covenant of grace, and this is the reason for a distinction between the primary and secondary responsibility of human beings. Barth's reasoning for this is that in the history of human beings God reveals himself, binds himself and assumes human flesh in the enactment of the covenant of grace as the internal basis of creation. This confers a "higher necessity" on the life of human beings.²⁰ Barth summarises this position earlier in his doctrine of creation:

The reason why God created this world of heaven and earth, and why the future world will be a new heaven and a new earth, is that God's eternal Son and Logos did not will to be an angel or animal but a man, and that this and this alone was the content of the eternal divine election of grace.²¹

There are several problems with Barth's presuppositions. First, by framing human and animal relations within a secondary responsibility Barth subordinates animals, and by implication all other life forms, to human beings. In the present environmental crisis facing the world, a theology that subordinates the interest of all life forms in the cosmos to the interest of human beings is morally problematic. Creation has a God-given integrity and purposefulness and is not simply a stage for the drama between God and human beings. Secondly, Barth does not adequately acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms within the cosmos. All creaturely life makes possible the universe as the *sine qua non* of human existence, not the other way around. Thirdly, animals and creation are not simply the background to the primary purpose of God's covenantal relation with human beings. If this is the case, then God has certainly taken a long time to achieve this aim, with *homo sapiens* a very late comer in the evolutionary process. Did God have a relation with creation for the billions of years of the evolutionary process that preceded the emergence of *homo sapiens*?²² All these concerns result from Barth's tendency to narrow the focus of God's

19. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 351.

20. C.D. Vol. III/IV, 351.

21. C.D. Vol. III/I, 18.

22. Ruth Page makes the point that unless we say that God had no connection with creation for almost all of its history, we have to say that God had a relationship with creation and animals prior to the relationship with human beings and without reference to human beings. God and creation and later God and animals were related without human beings and therefore human beings are not a necessary part of their communion with God. Ruth Page, "The Animal Kingdom and the Kingdom of God" in Ruth Page et al., *The Animal Kingdom and the Kingdom of God* (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 1991) 1-9.

creation to human beings and this has the potential to lead to disastrous ecological consequences.

2.2. Microcosmic Covenant

The questions that the above discussion raises include the following: is the subordination of the interests of animals and creation to those of human beings the *sine qua non* of the particularity of God's covenantal relationship? Does this confer a higher necessity on the life of human beings and therefore justify this prioritising of ethical responsibility? Is it possible to maintain the fundamentals of Barth's doctrine of creation, while not subordinating the interest of all life forms to human beings? If the particularity of God's covenantal relationship with human beings in Jesus Christ is pushed too far, which Barth tends to do, then we are on dangerous theological ground. For instance, what are the implications of the Word becoming *male* flesh for females? Does this mean that females are subordinate to males? The church throughout its existence has and continues to make use of this type of theology to exclude women from the ordained ministry and from becoming bishops. We can go further to ask about the implications of the Word becoming *Jewish* flesh. Are non-Jewish ethnicities subordinate to the people of Israel because of the particularity of God's covenant with Israel? This also applies to the church as God's chosen witnesses to God's covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. Does this mean that the world is subordinate to the church? This is of course an over simplification of Barth's more sophisticated theological account of creation. However, it may be asked whether these postulations are logically different from the argument that the interests of animals are subordinate to those of human beings *because* of the particularity of God's covenantal relationship with human beings. These conclusions may be a weak form of *reductio ad absurdum*, but they are sufficient to raise doubts about the theological implications that Barth draws from God's eternal decision for covenantal relationship with human beings.

At this point, it is tempting to dismiss the concept of the particularity of the covenant by universalising God's relation to creation outside of this story. This would ultimately lead to a religious framework in which Jesus Christ does not make any practical difference. It would also universalise an ethic of human relationships with animals, rather than grounding it in the particular life of the Christian community. We will see below that ecclesiology is essential to an ethic of human relationships with animals. What then are the implications of the particularity of God's covenant and the Incarnation for human relationships with animals? Without going into the details of the Scriptural basis for a

widening of the covenant,²³ Barth provides a helpful conceptual framework for thinking about this question in another part of his *Church Dogmatics*. He employs the term “microcosmic” to describe the mediatorial history of Israel as representative of human history as a whole. “Microcosmic” means that what “God wills and plans and has done and does and will do with the human world as a whole, He causes to take place on a small scale, but in a way which recapitulates or prefigures the whole, in His history with this one people of Israel”. In the unique history of Israel we see *in nuce* the history of God’s dealings with humanity as a whole. The history of God’s dealings with Israel is a paradigm for the history of all people revealing the teleology of world history. Israel’s history is Messianic history because it prefigures the history of Jesus Christ. Barth’s doctrine of election illustrates this understanding of the microcosmic representation of the history of Israel. Israel represents the rejection and therefore the divine judgement of all human beings insofar as Israel resists its election. The church, on the other hand, represents the election of God in Jesus Christ and therefore the divine mercy for all people. It is of fundamental importance to Barth’s doctrine of election that Israel is not the rejected and the church the elected, since the direct object of election and rejection is Jesus Christ. Israel’s rejection and the church’s election are microcosmic representations of the elected and rejected one, Jesus Christ.²⁴ This is because Jesus Christ is the basis, content and goal of the history of God’s covenant with *all* human beings, which is the internal basis of creation, and the history of Israel and the church represent God’s self-electing act.

Barth’s use of the concept “microcosmic” offers a theological framework for conceptualising God’s eternal decision for covenantal relationship vis-à-vis animals and other life forms. God’s dealings with Israel and the church represents on a small scale not only the fulfilment of the *telos* of humanity, but also the *telos* of the cosmos insofar as it witnesses to the reconstitution of the covenant of grace, which is the inner basis of *creation*. This means that animals and all life forms cannot be understood as the stage or background on which the divine drama between God and human beings takes place. Nor can God’s covenant with human beings result in a subordinating of the interests of all life forms to the interest of human beings. Rather, the history of Israel and the church is a microcosmic representation of God’s covenantal relationship with the whole cosmos enacted in the history of Jesus Christ. A microcosmic perspective of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel and the church

23. See Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London : Sheed & Ward, 1992).

24. C.D. Vol. 2/2, 195-213.

takes seriously the purposefulness of human beings and their unique place within creation, while not diminishing other life forms by subordinating them to the interest of human beings. God's dealings with humanity are not to be understood as authorising human lordship over creation or as a divine right to exploit animals, but as a call to servant lordship. The servant lordship of Jesus Christ and his self-emptying sacrificial love is a paradigm for the way that Israel and the church relates to the world, because Jesus Christ is the direct object of God's electing grace prefigured in the history of Israel and represented in the history of the church. The church (and Israel?) has a greater responsibility within the creative order because it is called to witness to the teleology of creation defined in the history of Jesus Christ, instead of having a right to dominate and exploit other life forms. If anything, the self-giving love of God in Jesus Christ suggests not a subordinating of the interest of animals to human beings, but at times the subordination of the interest of human beings to other life forms as a witness to God's generous self-giving love. This leads us directly to the path of ecclesiology: a people whose life is the microcosmic witness to God's creative purposes for all life forms and not only human beings. Barth's eschatological ecclesiology provides a framework for the microcosmic witness of the church vis-à-vis human relationships with animals.

3. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH

3.1. A River Moving Towards a Cataract

Barth describes the time of the church as the time between the consummation of the *telos* of creation, in reconstituting the covenant in Jesus Christ, and the final revelation of this event in the second *parousia* of Jesus Christ. This time is penultimate time: time preceding the ultimate and definitive end time.

[The time of the church] is the last time. For all its obscurity and ambiguity, for all the temptations and dangers which it entails, it is the time of penultimate happenings immediately preceding the ultimate and definitive. It is the time which derives its irresistible impetus and flow from this ultimate occurrence, like a river moving towards a cataract.²⁵

There is an inseparable distinction between the time of the church as penultimate time and the end time, as there is between a river and a cataract. Barth clearly differentiates between these forms of time, while maintaining a confluence and an inseparability. "The community which

25. C.D. Vol. IV/III.2, 937.

has this beginning behind it, which comes from Easter, has this end and goal, this consummation before it. This is what constitutes the particular dynamic of its existence and situation."²⁶ The time of the church is penultimate time because it exists in the light of Easter and at the same time it moves towards the ultimate and definitive realisation of creation's future. This time between, as the time of the church, is best distinguished by its provisional nature. It is provisional time, which means that it is "fragmentary and incomplete and insecure and questionable; for even the community still participates in the darkness which cannot apprehend, if it also cannot overcome, the light".²⁷ The existence of the Christian community is, however, still "a genuine anticipation of a future life since that future life is already man's hidden life in the present".²⁸ Barth states that the "light is shed abroad...over the events of all times, and to that extent it is the indication of the comprehensive alteration of the human situation which has already taken place".²⁹ This light, however, is not yet "the light of the altered world itself which we can expect on the ground of this alteration".³⁰ The inseparable distinction between the three forms of time (Easter, the time between the times and the final *parousia* of Jesus Christ) means that the time of the church is not an open time without any direction or form. At this point, Barth's analogy of a river moving towards a cataract is helpful. A river is shaped by its impetus and flow towards a cataract; similarly, the time of the church is teleologically determined by its movement towards the final *parousia* of Jesus Christ and its *arche* in the Easter event. The basis and power of Christian hope is the Christian community's irresistible impetus and flow towards its christologically defined *telos*.

The church anticipates the already established teleology of the world pre-determined by the Easter event and the final *parousia* of Jesus Christ. For Barth, the future of the world is not an open future, but is pre-determined towards its already established *telos*. The hope of the Christian community is grounded in the confluence of the penultimate time of the church and the ultimate definitive time in the final *parousia* of Jesus Christ. "This teleological direction of its existence which is the consequence of its origin constitutes its strength.... To that extent it proceeds from the fulfilment of its hope. Its hope is not the expression of a longing and striving. It is the expression of the impetus by which it

26. C.D. Vol. IV/I, 726.

27. C.D. Vol. IV/II, 621.

28. John Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1989) 158.

29. C.D. Vol. IV/I, 319.

30. C.D. Vol. IV/I, 319.

exists."³¹ The *eschaton* actualised in Jesus Christ does not remain in an eschatological hinterland insignificant to the present time. On the contrary, the fulfilment of time in Jesus Christ establishes the teleological direction of this time between, as the Easter event defines the church's hastening towards this ultimate occurrence. "From their life from and with the life of the Resurrected they stretch out to a new form of life with Him. From the alteration of the human situation which He has brought about and in which they stand, they stretch out to its definitive manifestation."³² John McDowell puts it this way: "the light of Easter's 'already' floods the present, providing a dim, but nevertheless real, glimpse into the 'absolute future' since eschatology is christologically regulated talk about the history's divinely elected teleology".³³ This future ahead of the world proceeds from the fulfilment of time in the Easter event and therefore this future already has an established victory, which defines the present time in its anticipatory and pre-determined flow towards this end.

Barth's description of the church's real anticipation of the future, while recognising its penultimate and provisional nature, removes his concerns about Christian vegetarianism as a wanton anticipation of the new aeon. His ecclesiology avoids a legalism and utopianism derived from the church living as if it was already at the end of time, while allowing for the eschatological character of the Christian community in its understanding of human relationships with animals. It does this by grounding the *telos* of creation, as the impetus by which the church lives, and the possibility of the provisional witness of the church in *Jesus Christ*. The life of the Christian community is defined by its relationship to Jesus Christ and this relation is the basis for its preliminary witness. The church not only confesses the future of the world to come, it *is* the beginning and the promise of this future. It is the Christian community that embodies in a preliminary way the Kingdom of God already accomplished in *Jesus Christ*. The threat of a *wanton* anticipation is replaced by the promise and hope of a *real* anticipation of the eschatological reality of Jesus Christ in the penultimate existence of the Christian community. Perhaps the danger for the church vis-à-vis human and animal relations is not the church living as if it is already at the end time, as Barth fears Christian vegetarianism will lead to, but the church living as if Jesus Christ has no eschatological significance for its present existence in relation to animals.

31. C.D. Vol. IV/I, 727.

32. CD. Vol. IV/I, 323.

33. John McDowell, *Hope in Barth's Eschatology: Interrogations and Transformations beyond Tragedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) 180.

4. A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN AND ANIMAL RELATIONS

The above discussion hints at three interconnected themes for a theology of human relations with animals. First, Barth rightly frames human and animal relations within a christological account of the *telos* of creation. Creation has a teleological character defined by the Father's purposes accomplished in Jesus Christ through the creative power of the Spirit. We have seen that the particularity of the covenant of grace between God and human beings does not confer on human beings a right to exploit animals but is a microcosmic representation of the *telos* of all creation including animals. Barth interprets the particularity of the Word becoming human flesh as privileging human beings over animals, instead of as a microcosmic representation of creation's teleology. The latter emphasises the responsibility of the church who is called to be a microcosmic witness to creation's redemptive fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The church's calling is to witness to God's generous self-giving love and the servant lordship of Jesus Christ in its ethical responsibility towards animals.

Secondly, Barth insightfully brings eschatology into his discussion of the ethical status of killing animals, although he does not connect this to the vocation of the Christian community, and he is fearful of a legalism and utopian fanaticism that may result from living as if we were already at the end time. Christian hope is cosmic in scope including animal life and not only human beings. In the witness of Scripture, animals are part of the future consummation of creation, with this eschatological vision including the restoration of the original peacefulness of creation between human beings and animals. Eschatology is not a description of a distant future, but is the impetus by which the church lives, like a river moving towards a cataract, while acknowledging the provisional nature of this time between the times. The eschatological perspective of animals must form part of the life of the Christian community as its life is teleologically determined by its flow towards creation's *telos*. The Christian community is called to provide a glimpse of the peaceable Kingdom of God in its treatment of animals.

If Barth's account of the ultimate end awaiting creation is on the right path, and if his ecclesiology gives an adequate account of the provisional eschatological existence of the church, then it follows that animals cannot be considered irrelevant to ecclesiology. Barth's account of human and animal relations is lacking in an account of the church and its provisional eschatological character. A theology of human and animal relations will include an eschatological ecclesiology grounded in a christological account of the *telos* of creation. The church is concretely

concerned with practices that long for the future and are orientated towards the consummation of creation, practices that do not dominate and inflict suffering on animals, but generously serve creation in self-sacrificial love witnessing to the peaceable Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

What are the practical implications for the life of the church of this understanding of human relationships with animals? It is beyond the confines of this paper to consider every ethical issue relating to the treatment of animals. However, a few suggestions may stimulate the necessary debate within the church. From what has been argued in this article, the ethical question for the church in human and animal relations is what practices of the Christian community provisionally embody the peaceable Kingdom accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The report to the World Council of Churches, as part of its *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* program, offers the following guidelines.

- Avoid cosmetics and household products that have been carefully tested on animals. Instead, buy cruelty free items.
- Avoid clothing and other aspects of fashion that have a history of cruelty to animals, products for the fur industry in particular. Instead, purchase clothes which are "cruelty free".
- Avoid meat and animal products that have been produced on factory farms. Instead, purchase meat and animal products from sources where the animals have been treated with respect, or abstain from these products altogether.
- Avoid patronising forms of entertainment that treat animals as mere means to human ends. Instead, seek benign forms of entertainment, ones that nurture a sense of the wonder of God's creation and reawaken that duty of conviviality we can discharge by living respectfully in community with all life, the animals included.³⁴

This is a practical guideline for the witness of the church. It implicitly recognises that the food Christians eat and the clothes and products they purchase is part of the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition to these suggestions, I would include the following guidelines:

34. Quoted in Paul Brett, "Compassion or Justice? What is our Minimum Ethical Obligation to Animals?" in Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (eds.), *Animals on the Agenda* (London: SCM, 1998) 225-36.

- That the church's teaching should be that vegetarianism is normative for Christians as part of their witness to the future Kingdom of God, without imposing a strict legalism.
- If animals are made use of for food or clothing, only out of a serious necessity and not as a normative right of human beings, then there should be strict guidelines for the purchasing of meat and other products. This could include criterion such as ensuring that animals have provision to perform natural daily activities within a natural environment, to provide adequate natural food and water, to minimise any pain through farming practices, provide painless and comfortable transportation of animals and that care is taken to minimise the suffering of animals through a speedy and painless death. This would of course add to the cost of farming animals, but this is part of an expression of servant lordship in which human beings humble themselves in self-giving love in imitation of Jesus Christ.
- Meat purchased in the abovementioned way should be consumed in a way that acknowledges the sacredness of the animal eaten including a prayer for the realisation of God's eschatological vision.
- It would be well if the Eucharistic prayer of the church should explicitly include allusion to or quotation from the eschatological vision so eloquently described by the prophet Isaiah: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, etc." (Isa 11:5-9).

These suggestions are certainly not exhaustive and they do not consider the church's response to individual issues relating to animals. However, this is a modest proposal for the church to take seriously its mission in witnessing to the peaceable Kingdom accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.