

# The Word Became Flesh: An Exploratory Essay on Jesus's Particularity and Nonhuman Animals

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THE WORD BECAME FLESH: AN EXPLORATORY ESSAY ON JESUS'S  
PARTICULARITY AND NONHUMAN ANIMALS

by

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ABSTRACT  
THE WORD BECAME FLESH: AN EXPLORATORY ESSAY ON JESUS'S  
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Andy Alexis-Baker

Marquette University, 2015

In this exploratory work I argue that Jesus's particularity as a Jewish, male human is essential for developing Christian theology about nonhuman animals.

The Gospel of John says that the Word became "flesh" not that the Word became "human." By using flesh, John's Gospel connects the Incarnation to the Jewish notion of all animals. The Gospel almost always uses flesh in a wider sense than meaning human. The Bread of Life discourse makes this explicit when Jesus compares his flesh to "meat," offending his hearers because they see themselves as above other animals. Other animals are killable and consumable; humans are not.

The notion that the Word became flesh has gained prominence in ecotheology, particularly in theologians identifying with deep Incarnation. Unless this notion is connected to Jesus's particularity, however, there is danger in sacrificing the individual for the whole. We can see this danger in two early theologians, Athanasius and St. John of Damascus. Both of these theologians spoke of the Word becoming "matter." Yet they ignored Jesus's Jewishness and rarely focused on his animality, preferring instead to focus on cosmic elements. Consequently they often devalued animal life.

Jesus's Jewishness is essential to the Incarnation. His Jewishness entailed a vision of creation's purpose in which creatures do not consume one another, but live peaceably by eating plants. This Jewish milieu also entails a grand vision for transformation where predators act peaceably with their former prey.

Jesus's maleness is also connected to his Jewishness. In the Greco-Roman context in which he lived, his circumcision marked him as less male and more animal-like. Moreover, Jesus's Jewish heritage rejected the idea of a masculine hunter. His theological body was far more transgendered and connected to animality than the Roman ideal.

Finally, Jesus's humanity entails a kenosis of what it means to be human. By becoming-animal he stops the anthropological machine that divides humans from animals. We see this becoming animal most clearly in his identity as a lamb, but also in Revelation's idea that he is both a lion and a lamb. His eschatological body fulfills the Jewish vision for creation-wide peace.

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rather than simply report on what others are doing as I had originally planned. That remark caused me to do something more constructive than I otherwise would have done.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	i
INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Incarnation and Ecotheology: A Review.....	3
Joseph Sittler.....	3
Jürgen Moltmann .....	5
Matthew Fox .....	11
Sallie McFague .....	14
Catherine Keller .....	15
Deep Incarnation.....	22
Niels Gregersen.....	22
Neil Darragh, Denis Edwards, and Elizabeth Johnson .....	26
Celia Deane-Drummond .....	31
Nonhuman Animals and the Incarnation: Recent Literature .....	33
Overview of this Work.....	42
CHAPTER 1: THE WORD BECAME FLESH .....	46
Hermeneutics .....	50
The Gospel of John .....	54
The Prologue: The Word Became Flesh.....	54
The Λόγος Rooted in Hebrew Scriptures .....	55
A Narrative Reading .....	61
“Flesh” Rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures.....	65
Sinful Flesh.....	69

John 3: Flesh and Spirit .....	74
John 6: Eating Jesus's Flesh .....	75
John 17: All flesh .....	79
1 John 4:2 .....	81
2 John 7 .....	87
1 Timothy 3:16 .....	88
1 Peter 3:18 and 4:1 .....	90
Excursus: 1 Corinthians 15:38–41 .....	94
Conclusion .....	95
CHAPTER 2: THE WORD BECAME MATTER .....	97
The Word Became Flesh: Early Christian Uses .....	98
Gnostic Views of the Incarnation .....	102
The Word Made Flesh: Body, Matter, and Particularity .....	107
Athanasius .....	107
Athanasius's Theology of Creation .....	108
The Matter of Christology .....	116
Embodied Christology .....	121
<i>Life of St. Antony</i> and Following Christ .....	127
The Word Becomes Matter: Christian Philosophy and an Anti-Judaism .....	134
John of Damascus .....	134
First Treatise .....	137
Second Treatise .....	142
Third Treatise .....	145

John's Eschatological Vision .....	146
Nonhuman Animals and Rationality.....	152
Conclusion .....	155
CHAPTER 3: THE WORD BECAME JEWISH .....	159
The Fluid Boundaries of Jewish/Christian Identity .....	161
Jesus's Eschatological Messianism.....	163
Jewish Visions of an Original Peace.....	172
Law and Sacrifice of Nonhuman Animals in recorded teaching recorded teaching recorded teaching recorded teaching Jewish Tradition .....	180
Jesus's Death as an Animal Sacrifice .....	192
Conclusion .....	197
CHAPTER 4: THE WORD BECAME A JEWISH MALE .....	200
Jesus's Destabilizing Maleness.....	202
Jesus's Theological Body: Neither Male nor Female in Jesus's Body....	204
Maleness in a Hyper-Masculine Roman Empire .....	208
Jesus's Unmanly Maleness .....	212
Jesus in the Temple: The Doves .....	213
Jesus the Mother Hen.....	217
Jesus the Hunted; Herod the Hunter .....	219
Hunting in the Jewish Tradition.....	221
Anti-Hunting in the Tanak .....	225
Anti-Hunting in Rabbinic Tradition.....	229
Jesus with the Wild Animals.....	233



Circumcision as a Jewish Identity Marker .....	241
Conclusion .....	253
CHAPTER 5: THE WORD BECAME A JEWISH, MALE HUMAN .....	256
Jesus’s Humanity as a Problem for Animal Theology.....	257
Pigs and Demons: Mark 5:1–20.....	258
Jesus and Fish .....	264
Clearing Away Another Challenge: Descartes’s Humans and Animals.....	270
Animal Rights and Homogeneity.....	273
Framing a Hermeneutic: Derrida, Deleuze and Guatarri, and Agamben.....	274
Jacques Derrida: The Animal Difference .....	275
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri: Becoming-Animal.....	280
Giorgio Agamben: The Anthropological Machine .....	287
Jesus Becoming-Animal .....	289
Jesus: <i>Homo Sacer</i> , Becoming Animal.....	290
Jesus’s Kenosis of Humanity .....	295
Becoming Animal: <i>Ecce Agnus Dei</i> .....	299
The Gospel of John Again .....	304
Becoming-Meat.....	307
The Lamb of Revelation .....	311
Conclusion: “Behold the Man!” Or “Behold the Lamb!” .....	318
A Challenge .....	323
CONCLUSION.....	327
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	330

## INTRODUCTION

In this work, I examine Jesus's particularity as a Jewish, male human for animal theology. My argument is simple. Working through Jesus's particularities —Jewish, male, and human—provides an essential lens through which to view the Incarnation's significance for nonhuman animals. Yet most Christian theologians writing about nonhuman animals have taken a different path.

Working through Jesus's particularity for animal theology seems counterintuitive. Particularities such as Jesus's humanness seem like barriers. After all, many theologians have appealed to Jesus's humanity to exclude other creatures. As a corrective, theologians can respond by relativizing Jesus of Nazareth altogether. That God became a Jewish male in first-century Palestine seems too specific to have universal significance. So one way to broaden the Incarnation would be to search for a "messianic structure" of life. For thinkers in this milieu, creation's messianic structure does not depend on Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The particularity of religion is one thing, but universal "faith" is quite another. Some Christian ecotheologians have followed a similar path.

The larger climate has not favored highlighting Jesus's particularity. In 1967, Lynn White accused Christianity of having "a huge burden of guilt" for modern ecological problems.<sup>2</sup> For White, the idea that God transcends creation led theologians to separate humans from the larger environment. Christians focus on their spiritual salvation

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, ed. John Caputo (New York: Fordham, 1997), 22. "As soon as you reduce the messianic structure to messianism, then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences. Then you are accrediting one tradition among the others and a notion of an elected people, of a given language, a given fundamentalism."

<sup>2</sup> Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* March 10, 1967, 1203–1207.

while ignoring the surrounding material world. Worse still, Christians promote human domination over nonhuman creation, leading to environmental degradation. By focusing on human needs and desires, Christians have helped to commodify nature. So White concluded that Christianity is “the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen.”<sup>3</sup>

White’s analysis prompted some Christians to take creation more seriously.<sup>4</sup> With such powerful arguments about Christianity in mind, focusing on Jesus’s humanity seems foolhardy. Even so, I argue that theological thinking about nonhuman animals needs the Incarnation’s particularity. The same could be said for his maleness and his Jewishness.

But some theologians argue that for ignoring Jesus’s particularity. Instead they focus on Christ’s cosmic Lordship. That is, we must relativize his humanity to make room for other creatures. We need to see a universal “structure” apart from Jesus’s Jewishness or maleness. I will build on these previous works, but I will argue for a different starting point. In that light I turn to a review of some relevant literature for the task.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1205.

<sup>4</sup> This is Celia Deane-Drummond’s conclusion in Celia Deane-Drummond, “What is Creation For?,” in *A Faith Encompassing All Creation: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for the Environment*, ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 7–8. While we might object to the sweeping indictment against Christianity that White makes, I take it as also true that Christians have not been quick to take the ecological crisis seriously and are even more reluctant to take on issues around nonhuman animals. So while White’s analysis prompted some theological reflection, Christians have not yet lived up to the task and too few theologians are taking seriously the modern ecological and death-dealing crisis in factory farming. These are major issues of our time, and an act of corporate repentance would at least entail serious theological work on these issues from more than niche theologians and scholars. Deane-Drummond argues similarly: “Half a century after White’s diatribe against Christianity, the attention ethicists and theologians have paid to ecology is still less than one might expect, given the scale and scope of the problems involved.” Ibid., 8.

## The Incarnation and Ecotheology: A Review

### Joseph Sittler

Some theologians have responded to the modern ecological crisis by emphasizing the biblical notion of the cosmic Christ, found especially in Colossians 1:15–20 and Ephesians 1:10, 20–22. In Colossians, the Pauline author claims that Christ created, sustains, and redeems “all things.” One of the first modern theologians to use the cosmic Christ vision in relationship to ecology was Joseph Sittler. Sittler first raised the issue of Christology and the environment at the 1961 World Council of Churches meeting in New Dehli. In that address, he appealed to passages from Ephesians and Colossians to argue that God’s theater of grace is creation.<sup>5</sup> Only a “Christology expanded to its cosmic dimensions, made passionate by the pathos of this threatened earth, and made ethical by the love and the wrath of God” can address the radical split between nature and grace that has afflicted Christianity.<sup>6</sup> This split has caused environmental damage and has made even atoms a tool for murder. So even “atoms must be reclaimed for God and his will.”<sup>7</sup> For Sittler, we must recover the New Testament’s vision of a creation-wide redemption. Christ’s redemption is cosmic in scope.

Sittler’s address preceded Lynn White’s critique by eight years, calling upon Christians to recognize something already present in Christian tradition. Sittler called for Christians to recognize the truly broad scope of Jesus’s work. If Jesus Christ created all things, then Jesus Christ redeems all things as well. Anything less than a creation-wide

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<sup>5</sup> For the phrase see Joseph Sittler, “Called to Unity,” *The Ecumenical Review* 14, no. 2 (1962): 186.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

focus on Jesus's redemptive work misses God's radical love for creation. Sittler, therefore, draws from New Testament Christologies to help Christian discourse more faithfully point to God's beauty, goodness, and truth. Sittler had an ethical agenda as well: a cosmic Christ who redeems creation beckons Christians to care for the world around them and to tread lightly and carefully.

Interestingly, however, Sittler's passionate call for a cosmic Christ does not really deal with Jesus's particularities. It is also striking that at the same time that he has much to say about redeeming all things, he has very little to say about nonhuman animals. He seems concerned about environmental destruction but says little about how humans treat animals or how such treatment would connect to environmental concerns. I will argue that this type of move results from not paying attention to particularities, which often loses the individual into the many. In such big pictures individuals disappear. We need these large portraits and must recover a sense of Jesus's cosmic work. The question is how to get to the cosmic: do we start with the cosmic as Sittler does, or do we work through Jesus's particular characteristics, uniting the particular and the universal so that Christ's cosmic work also unites the one and the many, the particular and the universal? For if we swing in the opposite direction, theological discourse may easily lose individual creatures in favor of systems. To say this theologically, many theologians talk about God's care for the environment and creation, but tend to ignore individual creatures and particularly whole classes of living creatures we call "animals." Despite the beauty of his vision and passion of his call, Sittler seems to have made this move.

## Jürgen Moltmann

In *The Way of Jesus Christ*, Jürgen Moltmann attempts to develop an ecological Christology for the modern world. His treatment of Jesus relies on the Gospel texts, showing that Jesus's way calls believers to a nonviolent way of life that would challenge the structures of oppression and preach liberation to the oppressed. He therefore grounds his Christology in Scriptures and makes Jesus normative for how Christians think and behave in the modern world. Moltmann also turns to the "Cosmic Christ," arguing that it is necessary to recover this biblical vision for the modern world: "The rediscovery of cosmic Christology will have to begin with ecological Christology if cosmic Christology is to be of therapeutic relevance for the nature which is today suffering under the irrationality of human beings."<sup>8</sup>

Modern Christologies have tended to take their cues from the quest for the historical Jesus. They have therefore focused on humanity. By contrast, Moltmann argues that theologians should focus on creation more broadly. He then points readers to Ephesians and Colossians, where the authors depict Jesus as redeeming the entirety of creation. In the context of human-generated catastrophe, Moltmann argues, we must recover this sense of cosmic Christology. He says earlier in the work: "In the danger of annihilation that is hanging over us, God's salvation is the healing and survival of the whole threatened earth and all individual created beings, in their common peril."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 194–95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

Fortunately, Scriptures have provided the means to refocus our theological imaginations. Scriptures depict “the always greater Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Every time we think we know Christ the texts expand our vision: “Christ is the first-born among many brethren – Christ is the first-born of the new humanity – Christ is the first-born of the whole creation: Jesus is Israel’s messiah – Jesus is the Son of man of the nations – Jesus is the head of the reconciled cosmos: the body of Christ is the crucified and raised body of Jesus – the body of Christ is the church – the body of Christ is the whole cosmos.”<sup>11</sup> The early Christians understood Jesus as having died to reconcile the whole of creation (2 Cor 5:19). The entire cosmos needs redemption. While the Apostle Paul, according to Moltmann, understood this cosmic redemption as not having taken place yet, Colossians and Ephesians see this redemption as “already” beginning.

Moltmann then argues that today we need a cosmic Christology that can take seriously Jesus’s differentiated roles. Jesus is 1) creator of all things (*creatio originalis*); 2) sustainer of all things (*creatio continua*); and 3) redeemer of all things (*creatio nova*). Modern Christians have neglected the third aspect, according to Moltmann. Moltmann understands this redemption as an eschatological peace: peace between humans, peace between humans and other animals, peace between all creatures: “the peace of Christ is universal and pervades the whole cosmos.”<sup>12</sup> In this life evolution and natural selection have created an enormous amount of suffering in the world, particularly with nonhuman animals. Christ, Moltmann argues, suffers with all of evolution’s victims. But God

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 306.

redeems evolution too. The cosmic Christ takes up the process and the suffering of every creature since the beginning of time.<sup>13</sup>

Because God is the environment within which creation evolves and God is intimately involved in creation through the Spirit, and because Jesus redeems and reconciles the conflicting and warring elements of creation, Christians are those who witness to the coming kingdom that is already present in part. As such, Christians are those who understand themselves as part of a “community of human beings, animals and plants based on law.” Moltmann points to the Torah where the Sabbath laws apply to all creatures, not just humans. But the law’s main function is to regulate human tendencies to exploit one another, other animals, and the environment.

This entails an understanding of a nonhuman animal as “a living being with its own rights.”<sup>14</sup> Moltmann states that this at the very least means working to end “factory farming” and genetically engineering other animals. He notes that the Gospels do not have much to say about Christ’s relationship to other animals, except that angels and other wild animals “ministered to him” in the wilderness (Mark 1:13), adding that “this is an allusion to the messianic peace of creation, which is part of Israel’s hope according to Isaiah 11.”<sup>15</sup>

Moltmann goes on to state that because human beings are embodied creatures we have no way of speaking about human rights apart from the rights of other animals. Presumably he means that humans share in the same evolutionary process and have deep biological connections to other creatures. He believes that if we do not formulate

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<sup>13</sup> See *ibid.*, 274–312.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



“ecological rights and duties” toward other animals, “then the rights of human beings in their own lives remain unrealistic.”<sup>16</sup>

Moltmann’s Christology is one that is heavily rooted in the story of the Gospels. Jesus’s life provides a strong example for his subsequent followers in terms of their work for justice and peace as a witness to God’s full kingdom that is still coming. Moltmann places a strong emphasis on Christ’s cosmic redemption, which then entails new relationships throughout creation. These new ways of relating start within the Christian community, where believers treat each other, their enemies, and all of creation as Christ’s very good creation that will all someday experience a full redemption, only hinted at in Christian life. He points out that the eschatological peace Jesus inaugurates entails new relationships with nonhuman animals, and insists that without reconfiguring the human-nonhuman animal relationship, attempts at intra-human peacemaking will fail. So his Christology is strongly ethical in orientation and includes nonhuman animals in redemption. His cosmic Christology is rooted in Scripture and answers many of the major problems facing the world today. How we understand Jesus, the cosmic Christ, depends heavily on how we read his life, which Moltmann covers in detail, arguing for the political and social relevance of Jesus’s life and teachings.

Although Moltmann sometimes speaks of Jesus’s Jewishness, the treatment of Jesus’s Jewish roots is often too brief. However, he does bring out places where Jesus’s Jewishness seems to matter most. For instance, in a brief section titled, “The Death of the Jew,” Moltmann argues that Jesus’s death as a Jew at the hands of the Romans was what many Jews before and after him experienced at the hands of Gentiles.<sup>17</sup> Jesus’s sufferings

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 167–68.

and death as the Son of God are also Israel's sufferings. So Moltmann begins with Jesus as a human, Jewish person and moves outward to Christ the cosmic redeemer. This short reflection shows Jesus's Jewishness as mostly relevant for Jews only. How it might connect to ecology, Moltmann does not say.

Of all the early proponents of cosmic Christology, Moltmann is the one who most focuses on Jesus of Nazareth and works from that perspective toward a cosmic vision. He is also one of the only theologians who worked on ecology to suggest that a strong stance of justice toward nonhuman animals is a non-negotiable aspect of Christian life. Yet it is not clear to me that Moltmann goes far enough. If the eschatological vision of Jewish vision entails a completely nonviolent new creation, seen only in part in the new community who love their enemies, then should that community also live as peaceably as possible with other animals, which would entail at least a provisional vegetarianism? Moltmann stops short and only calls for an end to factory farming and genetic engineering of other animals.

Though Moltmann points to Scripture's vision of an eschatological peace, elsewhere in his theology Moltmann may undermine this vision. He uses Jewish Kabbalah to illuminate Christianity's doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. How do we explain God acting outward when God is all? That is, how can creation exist at all outside of God, and yet not be far from God? Withdrawing into God's own self, God creates a void. As God retracts inward, God "let's be" a negative space: "God-forsakenness, hell, absolute death."<sup>18</sup> This negative space constitutes "a partial negation of the divine Being" and is therefore "the non-being of the Creator."<sup>19</sup> The threat of nothingness emerges in

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<sup>18</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 74–75.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–88.

God. For creation to continue existing, God must suppress the divine negativity, which God does by transforming it into redemption on the cross. Since God has created everything within God's own void, everything exists in God. Thus Moltmann advocates pantheism. He seems to undercut creation by positing a necessary ontological void within God as creation's prerequisite. Brian Walsh states the problem:

Redemption, then, is not primarily a restoration of a covenantal relationship broken in history, but a "re-filling" of that space, an overcoming of God's self-limitation by means of an *annihilatio nihili*. But if this *nihil* was for some reason necessary for the *creatio originalis* then how can the God/creation distinction still be maintained when this *nihil* is vanquished and God is all in all? Is the distinction between pantheism and panentheism only semantic?<sup>20</sup>

Moltmann comes perilously close to making finitude evil since nothingness is a necessary precondition for creatureliness. God's self-negation and God's creativity work in dialectical opposition. Moreover, Moltmann's idea that God *first* withdraws inward and basically punches a hole in divine space and *then* fills it with creation, suggests that God is some kind of spatial entity bound by time.<sup>21</sup> God does not create space; God fills it. God creates "nothing" within already existing space in a temporal way. Finally, Moltmann's view seems to require evil and suffering for God to self-actualize in the creation and redemption of the world. Ironically, by trying to uplift creation by positing this divine void, Moltmann has actually made creation antagonistic toward God,

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<sup>20</sup> Brian Walsh, "Theology of Hope and the Doctrine of Creation: An Appraisal of Jürgen Moltmann," *Evangelical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1987): 75.

<sup>21</sup> For this critique see Alan J. Torrance, "*Creatio ex Nihilo* and the Spatio-Temporal Dimensions, with Special Reference to Jürgen Moltmann and D. C. Williams," in *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. Colin Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 90–93.

something that must be constantly overcome. This makes a strange basis for a theology that wants to see creation as something good.

Nevertheless, Moltmann's work is a starting point for reflection on the Incarnation in relationship to other animals. He leaves many questions open for further investigation. How does Jesus's Jewishness matter for the Incarnation in relationship to other animals? If we must move away from an anthropocentric theology, then how does Jesus's humanity matter for other animals? Furthermore, since Jesus's maleness is a particularity of some controversy, is there some aspect of Jesus's maleness that might help us develop a theology of the Incarnation that also does justice to other animals? Moltmann says that human ethics and peacemaking must entail peacemaking with other animals. So he sees how deeply we are connected to other animals. My argument will build on that basic insight and goes further, exploring some ways that Jesus's Jewish, male humanity works in favor of the Incarnation's inclusion of other creatures.

### **Matthew Fox**

Matthew Fox has also interpreted Christology in relationship to ecological concerns.<sup>22</sup> Citing what he considered an obsessive and unhelpful scholarly focus on the historical Jesus, Fox looks to the cosmic Christ for aid. The quest for the historical Jesus discounts theological reflection needed for modern ecological problems. Christology for a new era of ecological crisis must take into account the historical Jesus. But the new quest for the cosmic Christ must connect the stars to life forms on Earth. In Christ we become connected anew to the universe. In the cross we see God and humanity severed

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<sup>22</sup> See Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

as Jesus cries out asking why God had forsaken him.<sup>23</sup> But through the cross the connection is actually reaffirmed and strengthened. Jesus rises from the dead and becomes the cosmic Christ. So Christ connects us to our particular time and place and also to everything else. Christ connects us to the far-off mountains, to the homeless of our city, and to the animals in our backyards. In short, “It connects all creatures in the entire universe.”<sup>24</sup>

Fox believes that Christians have lost the New Testament sense of cosmic redemption. The Enlightenment desacralized the universe and refocused Christians on personal salvation.<sup>25</sup> Christians exchanged the God of the universe for an individualized salvation and a self-obsessed culture.<sup>26</sup> Christian theologians shifted to the historical Jesus and away from the grandeur of Christ in all things.

The only way forward, Fox argues, is to reclaim the cosmic Christ in a new “living cosmology.” This shift would have dramatic impact on the way Christians train theologians and pastors. The spiritual disciplines would help Christians recognize the “primal sacraments”—sea, land, wind, fire, and life. Mystical contemplation would help us see and hear Christ in the universe at large.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Jesus’s crucifixion is mother Earth’s crucifixion. The earth and universe itself is the universal cosmic Christ. To hear Christ one must listen to the environment.

Fox corrects a theological tendency to make humans stand aloof from other creatures. He points to an interconnectedness that he likely learned from modern science.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 7. See also *ibid.*, 81 where Fox quotes church historian Jaroslav Pelikan who wrote, “Enlightenment philosophy deposed the cosmic Christ.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 151–52.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 40.

Even the dust out of which humans are made has a cosmic element, since Earth's elements are a conglomerate of stardust. This can redefine what it means to be human in the modern world from independent autonomous individuals to deeply dependent and connected beings. Jesus's body was no different.

Yet, whatever the merits and worthy goals, Fox's theology leaves serious questions unanswered. Fox maintains that early Christians put aside "nature" for introspection. He blames Augustine and the Enlightenment for this. Several issues arise from this story, one that Lynn White also tells. First, do Christian theologians obsess about personal sin and salvation? Is that the root of the modern ecological problem? Alternatively, although Christians have tended to view humans as superior to all other creatures, a sense of interdependence with other creatures used to mitigate that anthropology. Today we have largely lost interdependence as a part of anthropology. If Christians no longer sense our interrelationship with other creatures, perhaps we cannot solve the ecological crisis by collapsing the world into Christ's body. Rather the more helpful task is to reattach a common creatureliness to theological anthropology. The fundamental theological division does not lie between humans and all other creatures but between God and all creation. God relates to all creation and creatures regardless of God's relationship with humans.

Returning to creatureliness, we might indeed see God in everything. But only by distinguishing God and creation can we recognize the divine in the first place. There has to be a difference between God and creation to be able to recognize creation. Fox seems to blur the lines between God and creation in his cosmic Christology. We encounter God by encountering the world around us. As we gaze in awe at the immensity of the

universe, we experience God per se. The universe does not point us toward God. The universe, according to Fox, is God for us at that moment of wonder. But one has to also wonder whether this God is a mere figment of human imagination projected onto the skies. If so, then God is a creation of human thought without transcendence from the human mind. This elevates human thinking above creation.

Indeed, Fox suggests a path that would heighten anthropocentrism. He conflates humanity with divinity. He says, “Perhaps the most gross of all dualisms is the dualism between the divine and us. As if we hold no divine blood in us, as if we are creatures only and not creators. Co-creators with God.”<sup>28</sup> We can see how problematic this statement becomes in the instrumental value he assigns to the suffering of other animals in creation. By conflating Christology with creation he is able to say that all nonhuman animal suffering over the vast course of life on Earth “may well be sacrificial suffering, a gift of our very being for others.” He goes on: “Whole species have been called upon to lay down their lives for others, and they have done so.”<sup>29</sup> Fox sees nonhuman animal suffering as “sacrificial.” They live to the end of dying for “others” (and ultimately in his view those “others” are humans). But evolutionary suffering is not teleological or voluntary. In trying to renew creation in Christian theology, Fox creates more problems than he solves. He universalizes Christ but creates a problematic anthropocentrism.

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1983), 236.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 51.

## Sallie McFague

While Fox ignores Jesus's particularity, Sallie McFague goes further. She explicitly rejects the Incarnation's particularity. For McFague, Christianity teaches that God has become human form. The central message is not the particular person Jesus. McFague sidelines the particular man Jesus and focuses on humanity. Christian theology must do two things. "The first is to relativize the incarnation in relation to Jesus of Nazareth and the second is to maximize it in relation to the cosmos."<sup>30</sup> So the world is "God's body." Since this view echoes Fox's I will not belabor the point by critiquing McFague. McFague's impulse seems ethical. If Christians see the world as divine, they will act better toward it. But the price for this impulse is high. God is no longer perfect because God's body would have to be perfect. But this world is full of arbitrary suffering, predation, and meaningless death. That does not sound perfect. So if God is perfect, then God's body cannot be "the cosmos" as we know it.<sup>31</sup>

McFague wants Christians to act more compassionately toward nonhuman creation. This is a good goal. But marginalizing Jesus of Nazareth and claiming the cosmos as God's body is unnecessary. Deepening traditional Christian doctrines can do the same task.

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<sup>30</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 162.

<sup>31</sup> The only way for McFague to get out of this objection would seem to be for her to change the terms of what and who God is. If God is a principle, an impersonal intelligence that moves all of creation, then the world certainly could be God's body. But that is not the God of Christianity. Nevertheless, McFague can be very vague about what God means.



## Catherine Keller

The same tendency to relativize the Incarnation's particularity and "maximize" it in relation to the cosmos shows up in numerous treatments of Christology. Catherine Keller, for example, says that she wants to open up "breathing room back in Christology: an interval of *ruach*, right in between 'Jesus' and 'Christ.'"<sup>32</sup> For Keller, this means that creation is God's incarnation.<sup>33</sup> For Keller, "incarnation is co-extensive with the body of creation," and Jesus of Nazareth's particularity has little to do with anything.<sup>34</sup> For Keller, the cosmic Christ eclipses Jesus of Nazareth: "The significance of the cosmic Christ extends—from a Christian perspective—infinately outward, in all directions."<sup>35</sup>

Keller charges that theologians who make a strong Creator/creature distinction ignore the creative chaos of the watery depths depicted in Genesis 1:1. Consequently, these same theologians rarely consider the wild animals of Scripture or daily life. "They stand in a long line of animal erasure."<sup>36</sup> She notes, for example, that in his twenty sermons on the Book of Job, John Calvin completely ignored the animals that predominate in Job 39–41. "Christian interpreters may appreciate the sun and stars as evidence of divine order. But animals, especially wild ones, have always posed a gamy embarrassment to human dominion."<sup>37</sup> For these theologians, nonhuman animals have nothing to say worthy of pause. They must be subjected to dominion, like all chaos and

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<sup>32</sup> Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 136.

<sup>33</sup> See Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 219. She asks, rhetorically "Might the 'in' of panentheism begin to designate creation as incarnation?"

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>35</sup> Keller, *On the Mystery*, 152.

<sup>36</sup> Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 135.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

multitude, and made one. So, according to most interpreters, Job's final chapters primarily depict God's power.<sup>38</sup>

Ironically, however, though Keller indicts mainstream theologians for ignoring nonhuman animals, she also ignores other animals when she examines Job 38–41. She only mentions one nonhuman animal, behemoth, and interprets the creature as a mythological chaos monster arising from the chaotic depths rather than an actual sea creature (or both). Indeed, a search through all of her books easily reveals that Keller completely ignores nonhuman animal life. On her own terms, which legitimately decry animal erasure in theology and biblical studies as a function of anthropocentrism, Keller's own theology does not really escape the very traps she hopes to move beyond.

Keller deliberately unhinges her theology from Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Just as she ignores other-than-human animals in Job, she also ignores Jesus, preferring instead to talk about "tehom" and "chaos." She believes that these Christological patterns will make Christian more open to the surrounding material world. The incarnation is not a unique event in history, but a process of God's own becoming. Keller states "Creation is always incarnation—and would have been so without the birth of the Nazarene."<sup>39</sup> The world as we see it is God's incarnation. Jesus, a wisdom teacher, coaches us to understand that "God's commonwealth" entails sharing abundant life with neighbors, strangers and enemies. Jesus is bait. Jesus "lures" us toward a more deliberate becoming.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, 124–40 and Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 143–45.

<sup>39</sup> Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 226.

<sup>40</sup> See Keller, *On the Mystery*, 151.

But unhitching Christology from Jesus does not seem to give nonhuman animals any more importance in Keller's theology than jumping straight to a cosmic Christ. Indeed it is hard to understand how Christology redeems nonhuman animals at all. In her schema the Spirit of God beckons the world toward great complexity. As the world moves toward greater and greater complexity the possibilities for happiness and pleasure increase, but so also do the possibilities for suffering and disorder. Without suffering and disorder, life would lack pleasure. Thus evil and suffering are not, as in traditional Christian theology, a distorted grasping for the good, but are inherent aspects of earthly life. Chaos moves the world toward greater complexity, and thus the potential for greater good as well.<sup>41</sup> Complexity requires predation. Keller does not speak about sin or the need for redemption and salvation within creation. For Moltmann, God redeemed the suffering inherent in creation by becoming part of it and taking up the process. But Christ's redemptive work transforms evolution. For Keller, Christ does not redeem evolutionary suffering because such suffering is simply part of life. "If incarnation is always going on, so is the carnage."<sup>42</sup> Predation and death in the animal world are part of the process leading to something, but what? Humans? It is not clear what the God of Keller's process thought would save us from, since notions of moral and natural evil rarely arise. To the extent that they show up in Keller's work, they tend to be subsumed into a process of becoming whereby a greater good arises out of death and decay. God lures us toward the greater good, but that might involve extinctions, disease, and other

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<sup>41</sup> It is not clear what Keller means by "good" since she connects God being "purely good" with God being "purely dominant." This is part of a "love-coated Christian dominology" that connect evil to chaos in her reading. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 96. But if death and suffering are part of what it means for creation (and God) to be good, then it is hard to understand just what Keller's point is in relationship to Christian salvation: why should humans reduce or eliminate our domination over the chaotic swarming animal others if part of what it means to be a creature is to suffer and die? Why not sin so grace can abound?

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

ills—evils that humans have not caused. It is hard to see how this avoids a theodicy problem. Nonhuman animals do not play a real role in this “cosmic Christology.” Jesus does not play a part either. The particular is lost in the chaos, sacrificed to God’s own becoming.

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It is very difficult to see how any of the Christologies that relativize Jesus of Nazareth and maximize a cosmic Christology can really accomplish the wholesale renewal of the doctrine of creation. The only theologian I have so far examined who even briefly examines the issue of nonhuman animals is Moltmann. His theology provides a decent place from which to begin thinking of the Incarnation and animals, despite some drawbacks in his overall view of the Trinity and creation broadly speaking. But most of the ecotheologians so far examined completely ignore Jesus’s particularity. In response to these kinds of trajectories and problems, Ernst Conradie has said that ecotheology has generally tended “to explore the ecological significance of God’s creation more than its Creator, God’s immanence more than God’s transcendence, the cosmic work of God’s Spirit more than the particularity of Jesus Christ, the humanity of Jesus more than the divinity of Christ, general revelation more than special revelation,” and other such reductions in a polarity.<sup>43</sup> Some of the work reviewed so far—particularly Fox, McFague, and Keller—are prone to devolve into a thin consciousness of a Christ paradigm in nature. While they bring the entire created order into the purview of Christology, they do so at the expense of the Incarnation’s particularity. Their impulses are good: we

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<sup>43</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “Towards an Agenda for Ecological Theology: An Intercontinental Dialogue,” *Ecotheology: Journal of Religion, Nature & the Environment* 10, no. 3 (2005): 307.

desperately need to change our behavior and thinking about creation. But the result of a quick turn to cosmic Christology divorced from Jesus's particularity does not really lead to a renewed respect for all of creation. Nonhuman animals almost never play a role in these theologies. They detach Christology from Jesus, who is presumed to be too particular and too historical to be of much use for a renewed Christology.<sup>44</sup> To save the material world from Christian dogmatic erasure, the material Jesus has to be spiritualized.

Emphasizing the cosmic dimensions of Christology at the expense of the particular historical incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth create serious doctrinal problems, some of which I have already noted: in process theology God and the world collapse into one another so that evil and suffering become part of God's own becoming. These Christologies reflect ecological concerns, emphasizing systems and wholes rather than particular individuals. We humans certainly need to be reminded of our interconnectedness with all creatures and all of creation. But everything that exists does so in a particular place, a particular time, and has its own integrity. The question becomes whether we can encounter "the universe" as Fox and Keller suggest. I have never seen "the universe." I have only seen particular bodies and creatures whose own particularities are bound up with other particularities. It is through the particular that we encounter the universe and not vice versa.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond makes this critique in Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (London: Dartmon, Longman and Todd, 2008), 107.

<sup>45</sup> There are ecologists who argue this way as well. For example, Freya Matthews claims that it is difficult to get abstract metaphysical principles from looking at "the universe." We are unlikely to get principles like "e=mc<sup>2</sup>" or "reality is a reflection of the Form of the Good" from "the universe," whatever that is. Rather, we learn from the world around by particularity. "This is because the world must speak, if it speaks at all, in the poetic language of particulars. It speaks through this landscape, through these individual women and men, through the tangled psychic terrain of this gathering, and through images borrowed from the seekers' personal frames of reference." When we ask a metaphysical question we are pointed to a particular entity in a particular place at a particular time. The universe then points us to individuals who have joys, sufferings, and concerns. This is metaphysics. But it is a metaphysics that

Keller, McFague, and Fox denounce traditional Western “metaphysics.” Yet the cosmic Christ they posit becomes a principle abstracted from concrete reality. Why would anybody need such a “Christ” to respect the universe or the Earth? But there is no need for a Christ-consciousness to respect these theoretical entities. If we want an encounter with the Other, whose particular individual presence before us demands a response, then we will need more than the cosmic Christ as a paradigm, and that will come from the particular: from Jesus of Nazareth.

I will build upon the basic notion that Christ’s work is cosmic in scope and that this theological viewpoint entails a radical shift in behavior toward nonhuman creation. These are the insights that the theologians I have examined thus far bring to the table. McFague, Fox, and Keller, divinize creation but they do so with deeply pious motives: to bring God back into this world at a time when God’s transcendence would seem to beam God straight out of this world. There is not even room for God in the Eucharist in some theologies (Reformed and Anabaptist views, for example).<sup>46</sup> For these theologians, bringing God back to this Earth in our theologies is a way to reaffirm the goodness of creation. But, as I have argued, their solutions come at a high price that probably undermines their intent. I will move beyond these insights by focusing on the particular.

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begins from the particular and only encounters anything like “the universe” by means of these interconnected individuals. See Freya Matthews, *Reinhabiting Reality: Toward a Recovery of Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 111–12.

<sup>46</sup> In this sense, one could read McFague, Fox, and Keller as countering a trend toward complete atheism that ironically has its roots with the systematic negating of God in the material world in Zwingli and the trajectory he began. This is a tale of caution. If Zwingli, the Anabaptists, and Calvin sought to reform Christianity by reaffirming God’s complete otherness—taking away God’s real presence—they also make room for a secular world without God in some way. The irony here is that this leads to God’s utter absence if taken to its logical conclusion (though taking things to their conclusions may or may not be necessary). Ecotheologians who, with similarly good motives, wish to bring God back in and affirm the goodness of creation may very well end up with no God and a creation that cannot be affirmed as creation. Their negation of nonhuman animals is the most telling warning for this conclusion in my view.

## Deep Incarnation

### Niels Gregersen

In recent years, the phrase “deep Incarnation” has entered theological discourse. Diverse thinkers such as Elizabeth Johnson, Denis Edwards, and Normal Habel use the expression. Niels Gregersen coined the term. He first spoke of a deep Incarnation with a view toward understanding Christology in evolutionary terms.<sup>47</sup> Deep Incarnation, according to Gregersen, means the Logos entered “into the very tissue of biological existence, and system of nature.”<sup>48</sup> The Logos does not assume humanity alone but “the *whole malleable matrix of materiality*.”<sup>49</sup>

Gregersen points to John 1:14: “the Word became flesh,” arguing that the Greek notion inherent in σάρξ does not simply point to “frailty and vulnerability” in our bodies that make everything subject to decay. He argues that σάρξ points to the Stoic notion that “bodies were taken to be part of a whole flux of material beings, always being in contact with one another.”<sup>50</sup> So our “flesh” signals the “basic elements of earth, water, air, and fire.”<sup>51</sup> If we translate this concept into modern ideas, then σάρξ covers “the whole realm

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<sup>47</sup> See Niels Henrik Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40, no. 3 (2001): 192–207.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>49</sup> Niels Henrik Gregersen, “The Idea of Deep Incarnation: Biblical and Patristic Resources,” in *To Discern Creation in a Scattering World*, ed. Frederiek Depoortere and Jacques Haers (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 321. Emphasis in the original. This article is an update to Niels Henrik Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (2010): 173–88. Many of the quotes I use are also in the 2010 article, though there are differences between the two articles, such as Gregersen’s 2010 alignment with ecologist Arne Naess. The 2013 article leaves Naess aside for the most part.

<sup>50</sup> Gregersen, “The Idea of Deep Incarnation,” 321. On the connection to Stoicism see *ibid.*, 322–27. Gregersen does not claim that the Gospel of John is exclusively tied to Stoic doctrine. It has middle Platonist, Stoic, and Jewish ideas intertwined. See *ibid.*, 327.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

of the material world from quarks to atoms and molecules, in their combinations and transformations throughout chemical and biological evolution.”<sup>52</sup>

Drawing on a few contemporary biblical scholars, Gregersen argues that the Gospel of John presupposes “a synthesis of Stoic thought and Jewish ideas, common to many of their contemporaries.”<sup>53</sup> While Jewish thinkers would have kept a strict separation between God and creation, John maintains that the Logos “became flesh.” This means that the Logos was “present in Jesus *as* flesh, *with* the flesh of others, and *for* all flesh.”<sup>54</sup> For Gregersen, the Gospel of John’s emphasis on flesh marks a Stoic and not a Jewish background.

As a “semantically flexible” term σάρξ can mean Jesus’s body, sinful “flesh,” and/or “the realm of materiality in its most general extension, perhaps with a note of frailty and transitoriness.”<sup>55</sup> Gregersen connects the last meaning to deep Incarnation. The Son of God has material existence writ large. What this means is that “in Christ, God is conjoining all creatures and enters the biology of creation itself in order to share the fate of biological existence. God becomes Jesus, and in him God becomes human, and (by implication) foxes and sparrows, grass and soil.”<sup>56</sup> But this deep Incarnation, rooted in the interconnectedness of the material world, does not spread Christ thinly across the universe as a paradigm. Rather, “Christian people know of a more saturated or ‘thick’ experiences of the presence of Christ” in the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and our “communal settings.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>54</sup> Niels Henrik Gregersen, “Christology,” in *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives*, ed. Michael Northcott and Peter Scott (London: Routledge, 2014), 45.

<sup>55</sup> Gregersen, “The Idea of Deep Incarnation,” 328.

<sup>56</sup> Gregersen, “Deep Incarnation,” 182.

<sup>57</sup> Gregersen, “The Idea of Deep Incarnation,” 341.



Celia Deane-Drummond suggests that Gregersen points “to the equivalent worth of all life, caught up in a matrix of *sarx*.”<sup>58</sup> She questions whether this view adequately distinguishes between different life forms. Gregersen’s emphasis on Stoic continuity, she suggests, stretches out materiality into a thin veneer. I am not convinced by this critique. Deane-Drummond is right to ask if Gregersen’s Stoicism *adequately* makes distinctions in forms of life. She is concerned with homogeneity. My concern is different.

Stoics did not homogenize life forms. Stoicism sharply distinguished between rational humans and irrational nonhuman animals. Stoics made the difference between rational humans and irrational nonhuman creatures into a cosmic principle. For the Stoics, humans resemble the gods in that we have internal and external λόγος (thought and language) as well as freedom to act. By contrast, nonhuman animals are ἄλογα—without reason or language, the two forms of λόγος in Stoic thought. Human speech (λόγος προφορικός) reflects internal thought (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), but animal sounds merely indicate blind reactions to external stimuli.<sup>59</sup> As Diogenes of Babylon (ca. 230–150 BCE) reportedly taught, “the voice or cry of an animal is just a percussion of air brought about by natural impulse.”<sup>60</sup> Lacking λόγος, therefore, nonhuman animals merely act based on impulses for self-preservation, which explains why so many of them act resourcefully: they act from innate instincts and not from deliberation and reasoning.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, “Who on Earth Is Jesus Christ? Plumbing the Depths of Deep Incarnation,” in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie, et al. (London: T & T Clark, 2014), 33.

<sup>59</sup> For an overview of Stoicism and language see Lia Formigari, *A History of Language Philosophy* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004), 46–51.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, Greek text with English translation and edited by R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 7.55. (Diogenes Laertius is a different person from Diogenes of Babylon).

<sup>61</sup> Seneca argues this way in Seneca, “Letter 121: On Instinct in Animals,” in *Seneca Epistulae Morales*, Greek with English translation and edited by R. M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Stoics routinely used a teleological argument: all nonhuman entities exist for the sake of human beings. One of the earliest Stoics, Chrysippus (ca. 279–206 BCE), deduced from this teleology that “men can make use of beasts for their own purposes without injustice.”<sup>62</sup> Chrysippus goes so far as to claim that pigs exist for the sole sake of nourishing humans, crudely stating that the pig’s soul “was given to it to serve as salt and keep it from putrefaction.”<sup>63</sup> The *telos* for nonhuman animals— food, clothing, and slaves for humans—means they do not need thought and language. But the Stoic hierarchical view of the cosmos is very clear. It is very difficult to see how an emphasis on Stoicism could help theologians recover any kind of respect for nonhuman animals.

I am also not convinced of a strong Stoic influence on the Gospel of John. For example, the Stoic idea that a male needed to be “passionless” and show very little emotion might sometimes be seen in the way that John’s Jesus walks this earth without much care. But at the same time, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (John 11:35) and is moved strongly by Lazarus’s death (John 12:27), an indication that Jesus’s emotional life was not at all like a Stoic male. Jewish Psalms do not advocate a Stoic male emotional life either. Rather, the Psalms call for unrestrained joy and praise of God as well as deep lament at times. So the ostensible “Stoicism” of the Gospel of John seems at the very least severely qualified, and with such severe qualification, is it even worth reading Stoicism into the Gospel?

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University Press, 1925). He echoed the major Stoics such as Zeno. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 2, 7.85.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, Latin text with English translation and edited by H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 3.67.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, Latin text with English translation and edited by H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 2.64.160.

Scholars have long known that once Christians mixed up Stoic doctrine with Christianity, respect for nonhuman creation began to wane and anthropocentric arrogance worsened. Gregersen takes the Gospel of John out of its biblical heritage, a heritage utterly immersed in Jewish faith and life.<sup>64</sup> This is a problem of particularity and is a central concern of this dissertation. I am intrigued by Gregersen's ideas, but his Stoicism seems unnecessary and counterproductive to the extent that Stoicism is hostile to the "irrational" nonhuman world, utterly anthropocentric in the worst way, and at odds with the Hebrew Bible's respect for all of God's good creatures. Jesus's story continues and arises from the story of God's faithfulness to Israel. Gregersen's Jesus does not need Stoicism; he needs Jewishness.

**Neil Darragh, Denis Edwards, and Elizabeth Johnson**

As I already noted, numerous theologians have taken up the idea of deep Incarnation. Neil Darragh, for example, sees the Incarnation running so deep that Jesus is not merely connected to other humans and other animals. He is connected to inanimate creation as well. "Jesus of Nazareth is not just a human being, he is also a function in the carbon and oxygen cycles of the planet, a mammal, an event in the production-consumption processes of first century Palestine, and so on."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> I am not claiming that there were not Jews who took up Stoic doctrines. That would drive too sharp of a wedge between "Jewishness" and "Hellenism." I take it that the primary field of reference for the Gospel is the Hebrew Scriptures, and this position is in line with many biblical scholars, including modern interpreters who see Wisdom literature as one of the primary influences on the Gospel. To the extent that we read anything Stoic or Platonist into the Gospel of John we have to severely qualify such statements with views from Hebrew Scripture, which could be very different, particularly with regard to nonhuman animals.

<sup>65</sup> Neil Darragh, "Adjusting to the Newcomer: Theology and Ecotheology," *Pacifica* 13, no. 2 (2000): 171. Saying that Jesus is a "function" in the material world seems to move toward a Christ-paradigm. Darragh does not elaborate on this idea, however.

Likewise, Denis Edwards says that Gregersen's idea of deep Incarnation faithfully reflects Christian tradition and Scripture as well as evolutionary biology, which show us that the universe is marvelously interconnected.<sup>66</sup> Deep Incarnation suggests that the Incarnation of the Word in the human Jesus "can now be understood as, like all of humanity, dependent upon the evolution of life from its microbial origins 3.7 billion years ago. In the bodily humanity of Jesus, God is made one with all the fruits of evolution by means of natural selection. The body of Jesus is made up of atoms produced in the nuclear furnaces of stars. It depends upon the cooperation of the billions of microbes that inhabit it. It exists only in interdependence with all the other organisms and all the systems that sustain life on Earth."<sup>67</sup>

Jesus of Nazareth was a human. That means he was interdependent with all other creatures. His body had DNA, DNA shared with chimpanzees and gorillas.<sup>68</sup> His body

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<sup>66</sup> Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 59–60. Edwards most recently endorsed Gregersen's thesis in Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution, and Ecology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 58.

<sup>67</sup> Denis Edwards, "Deep Incarnation: The Meaning of Incarnation for the Rest of the Natural World," in *Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution, and Ecology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 59.

<sup>68</sup> Humans share 98.4% of our DNA with chimpanzees. That is, 984 out of 1,000 base pairs along every double strand of DNA are in the same sequence. A lot of our human DNA is "junk DNA" that we do not use at all. If we disregard the junk DNA, humans, chimpanzees, and bonobos share 99.5% on the same base sequences. Humans, chimpanzees, and bonobos differ by only a few hundred genes out of approximately 100,000. Indeed, humans, chimpanzees, and bonobos can and have receive blood transfusions from one another since all our 287 units of hemoglobin are the same. On the very close DNA between humans, chimpanzees, and bonobos see Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 20–24; M-C. King and A.C. Wilson, "Evolution at Two Levels: Molecular Similarities and Biological Differences between Humans and Chimpanzees," *Science* 188 (1975): 107–16; Morris Goodman, Lawrence I. Grossman, and Derek E. Wildman, "Moving Primate Genomics beyond the Chimpanzee Genome," *Trends in Genetics* 21, no. 9 (2005): 511–517.

Gorillas and humans share nearly the same amount of DNA as chimpanzees and humans, making gorillas our second-most related cousin in the animal kingdom. Researchers completed mapping the genomes of a western lowland gorilla in 2012. Their published results revealed that humans and gorillas differ by a mere 1.75% of DNA. That is, 982 out of every 1,000 base pairs of DNA are in the same sequence between humans and gorillas. See Aylwyn Scally and et. al, "Insights into Hominid Evolution from the Gorilla Genome Sequence," *Nature* 483 (March 8, 2012): 169–175.

takes up the same dust as ours, dust made from exploding stars.<sup>69</sup> The Incarnation is deep in simply being fully human. It is also cosmic in being fully human. For these theologians, there is no separation between the particular and the universal in Christology (unlike Fox, McFague, and Keller). Because Jesus is the Logos incarnate, this means God has entered into the biosphere in such a way as to begin to divinize the whole world. Jesus is the climactic pivotal point of evolution and represents the entire cosmos as well as humanity.

But the emphasis of these Christologies is not on Jesus's humanity per se. The Word became "flesh." Flesh is a wider category than humanity. Any Christology that focuses mainly or solely on God's relationship to humans, therefore, misses the way that the Logos takes up flesh and all things (Col 1:15–20). Jesus of Nazareth's body becomes "extended" to encompass a social body, the church, as well as the vast expanding universe.<sup>70</sup> These theologians emphasize Jesus's physicality and flesh rather than his humanity. As Elizabeth Johnson notes: "'Deep Incarnation' understands John 1:14 to be saying that the *sarx* which the Word of God became not only weds Jesus to other human beings in the species; it also reaches beyond us to join him to the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which they are composed. The Incarnation is a cosmic event."<sup>71</sup> To focus exclusively on his humanity would be anthropocentric, missing the Incarnation's creation-wide significance. Seeing Jesus as deeply embedded in evolutionary history, taking up humanity's shared DNA with other great apes, stardust,

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<sup>69</sup> See Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 117 and Michael Woolfson, *Time, Space, Stars, and Man* (London: Imperial College Press, 2013), 66–67.

<sup>70</sup> On the idea of Jesus's extended body see Niels Henrik Gregersen, "The Extended Body: The Social Body of Jesus according to Luke," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 3 (2012): 234–44. In this article, Gregersen reads how the Gospel of Luke, depicts Jesus's body, looking at how his body is often "open" and permeable.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Continuum, 2014), 197.

and evolutionary history might seem strange. But according to Darragh, this is because we rarely look at ourselves as interconnected with other creatures:

If we find it strange to describe Jesus of Nazareth in this way, it is presumably because we are not used to seeing him as integrated within the events and processes of the planet Earth. The core of the issue though is that we are not used to seeing ourselves in this way. We do not commonly see ourselves as existing in these dimensions. We have rather tended to see ourselves in terms of will, or intellect, or consciousness, or reason, or freedom. Thus the many dimensions of our existence within the Earth have been reduced to only a few and thereby isolated us from the rest of the Earth.<sup>72</sup>

Deep Incarnation therefore resists modern anthropology, which sees human persons as autonomous, thinking, individuals rather than interdependent, communal, and shaped by our environment and bodies. We tend, in the modern world, to think we can overcome our physical limitations by sheer will power and hard work. But the kind of Incarnational perspective examined here sees Jesus Christ as absolutely dependent and embedded in a deep history, a deep time, and deep physicality. Only through that depth do we get to the cosmic Christ.

Elizabeth Johnson has developed these notions even further. If Jesus of Nazareth's flesh is composed of "star stuff and earth stuff" as part of the "historical and biological community of Earth" and existed in a relationship of interdependence with the physical universe, and if Jesus was raised from the dead in the flesh, then "this signals embryonically the final beginning of redemptive glorification not just for other human beings but for all flesh, all material beings, every creature that passes through death. The

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<sup>72</sup> Darragh, "Adjusting to the Newcomer," 171.

evolving world of life, all of matter in its endless permutations, will not be left behind but will likewise be transfigured by the resurrecting action of the Creator Spirit.”<sup>73</sup>

For Johnson, Jesus’s ministry and life also have a bearing upon deep Incarnation. If we start, according to Johnson, with cosmology, we will tend to leave behind the historical Jesus. Jesus transgressed a remarkable number of boundaries, giving impetus for social justice. “Concrete vignettes of Jesus’ teaching and characteristic behavior center around the rich Jewish symbol of the reign of God, a biblical expression for the very nature of the indescribable holy One, evoking the moment when the loving power of God will win through over the powers that destroy. In parables and beatitudes, healings and festive meals, some of which were scandalous and rife with conflict, this Spirit-blessed prophet provided a joyous foretaste of what the arrival of God’s reign would entail.”<sup>74</sup> Johnson seems to be on the right track. The cosmic Christ, unhinged from the historical Jesus, seems to me a recipe for the exact opposite of its intent to ground Christology in the physical realm. She is also on the right track in pointing to Jesus’s Jewishness, though she does not develop this aspect. Unlike Gregersen, who grounds deep Incarnation in Stoic metaphysics, potentially setting up a new anthropocentric arrogance, Elizabeth Johnson points to Jesus’s indispensable Jewish particularity. But again, she does not develop how this is the case. In my argument, Jesus’s particularity as a Jew will be a bedrock for understanding the Incarnation’s significance for nonhuman animals.

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<sup>73</sup> Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 209.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

### Celia Deane-Drummond

One approach to grounding the notion of deep Incarnation in Jewish thinking is to approach the issue not from the humanity and flesh of Jesus but from the other end: Logos Christology, or to put it in terms of Hebrew Scriptures: Wisdom. Celia Deane-Drummond has done significant work in this area. Deane-Drummond agrees with Gregersen and others that the Gospel of John's prologue is extremely important for understanding the Incarnation. But rather than focusing on what *σάρξ* means Deane Drummond starts from the Logos, which she interprets as primarily grounded in Jewish tradition first and foremost.<sup>75</sup> While Gregersen would emphasize the Greek influence on Logos, Deane-Drummond points out that the Hebrew term *דְבַר*, which combines "word" and "deed," seems more suitable for understanding the Gospel since it emphasizes ethics in addition to more abstract philosophical notions inherent in the Greek. As she says, "it is the concrete, then, rather than the universal that is implied by *dabar*."<sup>76</sup> But the Logos is also associated with Wisdom, an idea with deep roots in Jewish literature.

Celia Deane-Drummond's work takes Jesus's Jewish background seriously but from the perspective of Wisdom Christology. If what it means to be a human being is to be embedded in an ongoing evolution of life on Earth, then Jesus's humanity was also part of evolution on Earth. God's transcendence does not place God at odds with creation. In a kenotic reading of the Incarnation, Deane-Drummond focuses less on the ontological status of the human and divine "natures" of Jesus Christ, and more upon the union of

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<sup>75</sup> Deane-Drummond recognizes a certain amount of blending so that it is difficult to separate Greek from Hebrew cosmology in the biblical record. She does not play on the tired trope of Greek versus Hebrew influences. But she rightly points to the Scriptures themselves as a primary context for understanding the Gospel of John's prologue.

<sup>76</sup> Deane-Drummond, "Who on Earth Is Jesus Christ?," 39.



divine and human obedience in the one person, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus's whole life exhibits this theodrama. The "deep incarnation" connects Wisdom to the entire creation and whole cosmos. All of created existence contains a hidden mystery that nevertheless shows forth beauty, which we humans can appreciate even if we cannot fully understand it. We can still wonder at the mystery, which prepares us for the beauty of Christ. Jesus's death on the cross redeems all of creation. Nonhuman animals have their own morality and rules, and fall short of the kind of justice and peaceableness that even they sometimes aspire to according to the work of modern ethologists like Frans de Waal. So nonhuman animals need redemption as well, and the Wisdom of God on the cross redeems these creatures, takes them into the divine life to which all of creation is destined in Jesus Christ.<sup>77</sup>

Deane-Drummond's Christology powerfully appropriates "deep Incarnation" and respects Jesus's particularity while focusing on cosmic redemption that other theologians emphasize. Her Christology is meant to make sense of Christology in an evolutionary view without some of the shortcomings of other attempts, which often make evolution part of the very being of God so that God "becomes." The Incarnation and Resurrection are not radical breaks with evolutionary history in her theology, but continue the hidden sophianic beauty inherent in all things that prepare us for God's becoming flesh.

Deane-Drummond critiques cosmic Christologies for the same reasons I have done so in this introduction. She says, "Theological descriptions of cosmic Christology . . . suffer the disadvantage of detaching Christ from the historical Jesus as understood

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<sup>77</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 159–93.

according to the Gospel accounts.”<sup>78</sup> She places Jesus in the Jewish Wisdom tradition and her appropriation of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theodrama for Christology helps her respect the Incarnation’s particularity while also showing a cosmic redemption. Nevertheless, I think there is a lot more to say about Jesus’s particularity. By focusing on a Logos Christology, Deane-Drummond is able to talk about the Incarnation in broad terms that make sense in a world in which evolution of life is the predominant narrative. But what happens when we focus on the “historical accounts as understood according to the Gospel accounts” where we see Jesus’s maleness, Jewishness, and humanity in full view? Does a Wisdom Christology by itself fully address the scandal of particularity that these three identities in particular have represented? I am concerned that the sweeping theodramatic narrative she develops loses the individual at times. Bypassing Jesus’s specific gendered, species, and ethnic/religious identity in favor of a Wisdom Christology does not face head on the scandal that these identities present to the modern theologian. Nor does it allow us to refocus the particularity in new ways to develop a theology that is not only ecological, but begins to reshape the human/nonhuman animal relationship.

### **Nonhuman Animals and the Incarnation: Recent Literature**

Long before ecotheologians had taken up the mantle, Christian theologians who have written on theology and nonhuman animals have claimed similar things as those speaking about a “deep Incarnation.” One of the earliest attempts to see the Incarnation as touching on nonhuman creation comes from Andrew Linzey. In his introduction to an edited volume titled, *Animals on the Agenda*, Linzey briefly states that “by becoming flesh, the Logos identifies . . . not only with humanity but with all creatures of flesh and

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<sup>78</sup> Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, 107.

blood.”<sup>79</sup> He did not elaborate further but clearly argued that the Incarnation should not be limited to humans alone, any more than it should be limited to males alone. In another book Linzey claims that the λόγος became a mammal: “for the flesh assumed in the incarnation is not some hermeneutically sealed, highly differentiated human flesh, it is the same organic flesh and blood which we share with other mammalian creatures. There is no human embodiment totally unsimilar to the flesh of other sentient creatures.”<sup>80</sup> Here Linzey uses the concept of “flesh” to broaden the Incarnation to all mammals. Likewise, Stephen H. Webb wrote: “animals are a part of the incarnation because traditional Christology combines the divine and the human without subtracting anything from the physical or material aspects of creation, and humans are mammals, flesh and blood creatures with bodily needs and functions.”<sup>81</sup> These are clear and early indications that theologians working on nonhuman animal issues have seen how fruitful something like a “deep Incarnation” theology can be.

There was a time when Andrew Linzey and Stephen Webb were two of the predominant voices in a small cadre of theologians who cared about nonhuman animals and theology. Today, however, there are more Christian theologians, biblical scholars and ethicists than ever working on this issue. In the past six years or so there has been an

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<sup>79</sup> Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto, eds., *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), xvi.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 5. Linzey draws the line at mammals, which would exclude various birds, reptiles and sea creatures in the animal kingdom because they live? “Spirit-filled lives which are analogous to human beings.” I wonder about this statement since it seems to assume that humans are somehow the measure of whether the Incarnation has relevance, and in the context of Linzey’s argument about animal rights, suggests that mammalian animals have rights based on sentience, the ability to feel pain, and their ability as individuals to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Some of these criteria suggest a type of anthropocentrism rather than these creatures having their own dignity. The capacity to receive the Holy Spirit is a strange choice in my view as it seems somewhat arbitrary to limit the Spirit to mammals given the way Hebrew scriptures speak about creation “praising God,” an issue I will raise in a later chapter.

<sup>81</sup> Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 170.

explosion of books and articles dealing with Christianity and nonhuman animals.<sup>82</sup> The literature I have reviewed so far is more broadly concerned with ecology and Christianity, but all of it has a strong bearing on thinking about nonhuman animals in relationship to the Incarnation. Books that deal with Christianity and nonhuman animals often focus more narrowly on biblical interpretation and/or ethics. For example, I co-edited a book along with Tripp York in which the vast majority of the chapters deal with interpreting various passages of Scripture that some Christians use to reject focusing on nonhuman animals at all.<sup>83</sup> Charles Camosy recently published a book that deals mostly with how to think ethically about nonhuman animals as Christians.<sup>84</sup> Two books published that bear upon the subject of Christianity and animals, *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat*

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<sup>82</sup> Although I have noted a couple examples from the past three decades, in this literature review I am pointing only to some of the literature published in the past six years. A comprehensive review would have to take into account the long career of Andrew Linzey. Linzey's work crosses a broad range of disciplines and trajectories. Starting with his unpublished dissertation on Karl Barth and nonhuman animals to his *Animal Theology* Linzey has focused on theology, the Bible, ethics, and social science. His work should probably be seen as helping to create the groundwork for the recent explosion of works on Christian theology, Scripture, and ethics in relationship to nonhuman animals. Indeed, Linzey is one of the first theologians to point to the prologue of John and the Incarnation in the "flesh" as helpful to expanding our purview of the Incarnation.

Strikingly, however, Linzey's voice has been completely absent in recent collections on this subject. This is the case despite the fact that some of the most popular and widely published authors have enthusiastically participated in the projects. I will draw from Linzey in this dissertation at various points to make particular points. I have decided not to review his massive corpus for this Introduction since such a review could take a chapter of its own, and in any case, he has largely stayed out of the recent conversations. What he has said about the Incarnation that is relevant to the current conversation I have already noted in the text.

<sup>83</sup> See Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York, eds., *A Faith Embracing All Creatures* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012). See also Michael Gilmour, *Eden's Other Residents: The Bible and Animals* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014). Another collection deals with the Bible and what it means to be human, which touches on this issue of the Incarnation and nonhuman animals in a helpful way but tangentially. See Jennifer L. Koosed, *The Bible and Posthumanism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> Charles Camosy, *For the Love of Animals: Christian Ethics, Consistent Action* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2013). Camosy touches on a few biblical issues as well, often drawing from and interacting with *A Faith Embracing all Creatures*. But by and large the book's subtitle about action and ethics is the book's focus. See also Daniel K. Miller, *Animal Ethics and Theology: The Lens of the Good Samaritan* (New York: Routledge, 2011). As the subtitle of his book indicates, Miller uses Scripture but his focus is by and large towards action. Laura Hobgood-Oster also focuses on ethics in her book. See Laura Hobgood-Oster, *The Friends We Keep: Unleashing Christianity's Compassion for Animals* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).

*and Christian Diet* co-authored by David Grummet and Rachel Muers and *Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology* co-edited by David Grummet and Rachel Muers, largely deal with the issue of vegetarianism and Christianity. While these books are helpful and I will draw from them occasionally, they do not focus squarely on the Incarnation as the works I reviewed by Gregersen and others do.

Deane-Drummond's new book, *The Wisdom of the Liminal: Evolution and Other Animals in Human Becoming*, draws extensively from ethological studies to reconfigure theological anthropology. But she explicitly leaves aside what her work in this area means for Christology per se. Instead she refers readers to her book *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom*, which I have already reviewed. But obviously, any theological anthropology is tied to Christology in some way. Her conclusions in this new book therefore should have some implication for Christology, but she avoids drawing any.

In *Creaturely Theology*, editors Deane-Drummond and David Clough bemoan the fact that Christian theologians have by and large ignored questions about nonhuman animals with any depth. Theologians have based their own anthropology on the distinction between humans and all other animals. But these reflections, Clough and Deane-Drummond argue, are usually shallow and not conversant with contemporary philosophy, science, or political theory, which have all given extended attention to questions about other animals, and have been doing so for quite a while. Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Martha Nussbaum, Mary Midgley, and many others have been carrying on a conversation that when coupled with ethological research represents a significant philosophical, political, ethical, and scientific challenge for theologians to

consider. The idea that the most fundamental distinction in Christianity is that between God and all creatures is what underlies the basis for this edited collection, and is what the editors believe is a distinctive theological contribution to the ongoing conversation writ large.

While the essays in this book are all fruitful and challenging, the primary essay that is relevant for this dissertation is Denis Edwards's chapter, "The Redemption of Animals in an Incarnational Theology."<sup>85</sup> Drawing on the cosmic Christology he finds in the New Testament, Edwards looks to develop a theory of "redemption through incarnation" that includes other-than-human animals.<sup>86</sup> To do this Edwards turns to Athanasius. For Athanasius, the fact that all of creation exists in the precarious state between being created out of nothing and falling back into nothing means that all of creation exists and is sustained by God's grace. By becoming a creature, God moves beyond simply restoring humanity to an original sinless state. Jesus's death into the precarious state of creatureliness and his resurrection lifts "all things" out of the balance and toward a new life. Christ becomes the "firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15), a sign that all of creation will be released from the death struggle (Rom 8:19–20) by a process of deification.<sup>87</sup>

Edwards moves on to extrapolate from Athanasius's theology. Edwards wants to "develop an ecological theology that is also a theology of animals."<sup>88</sup> Salvation through the Incarnation provides an alternative model to atonement theories that focus squarely

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<sup>85</sup> Denis Edwards, "The Redemption of Animals in an Incarnational Theology," in *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough (London: SCM, 2009), 81–99.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–90.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–91.

on human sin. By becoming part of creation God changes the ontological status of creation and moves all things toward divinization. Nonhuman animals will also be taken up into the life of the Trinity, and indeed already bear the imprint of God's Wisdom, according to various biblical passages. Humans who are aware of their redemption in Christ, therefore, are called to live nonviolent lives that help to heal the world rather than destroy it.

What is striking to me about Edwards' interpretation of Athanasius is how he has to extrapolate from Athanasius: Athanasius himself does not focus on nonhuman animals. In chapter 2, I will look closely at whether Athanasius and also John of Damascus, who takes a similar line using John 1:14, are really all that helpful for thinking about nonhuman animals. The "ecological theology that is *also* a theology for animals" way of thinking seems, again, to start with the cosmic Christ and ontological categories that bypass the particularities of the Incarnation. I suggest that the focus on the cosmic Christ needs strong supplementation with a focus on Jesus of Nazareth in order to be more balanced and provide more space than the "also" in Edwards's statement allows.

Finally, David Clough's groundbreaking book, *On Animals*—the first book on systematic theology in relationship to nonhuman animals—has some helpful and pertinent sections for this dissertation. Because I will focus on particularity, Clough's chapter on the Incarnation and nonhuman animals is most relevant.<sup>89</sup> The Incarnation is the central chapter of Clough's book and the central idea in his systematic theology. In the first section of the chapter, "Reading the Particularity of the Incarnation," Clough passes over Jesus's Jewishness and maleness with a few sentences and quickly moves on

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<sup>89</sup> See David Clough, *On Animals: Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 81–103.

to the idea, which we have already encountered, of the Word becoming flesh in John 1:14. Clough ends his three-page reflection on particularity (heavily truncated because of the enormous footnotes) with the assessment that “the particular creature God became was a human, male, Jewish, Palestinian, first-century one, but none of these specifics seem to have been first in the mind of the New Testament authors who chose the term ‘flesh’ to characterize the event.”<sup>90</sup>

The main purpose of the section on particularity is to show that the wider purview of the Incarnation includes nonhuman animals. The Word became an animal. The Word became a creature. He then moves on to look at the cosmic Christ in the New Testament. This is a familiar way to argue, even though Clough does not interact with Gregersen or others who have taken up the deep Incarnation interpretation. But his interpretation of the Incarnation is very much in line with Edwards’s statement of desiring to develop an ecotheology that also includes nonhuman animals. Clough’s focus is wide: the Incarnation is about becoming a “creature” because the most fundamental distinction in Christian theology is between God and all creatures.<sup>91</sup> And when it comes to distinctions within the creaturely realm, Jesus Christ provides the most fundamental distinction. Jesus is the image of God. Following Barth’s Christocentric interpretation of the *imago dei*, Clough argues that Jesus rather than humanity writ large is the one to whom Scripture points as the image of God. If this is the case, then we can see that “the key distinction is that between Christ and all other creatures, rather than particular groups of creatures that image God in different ways.”<sup>92</sup> Only when we have clarified these theological

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>91</sup> See *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 102.



distinctions can we then begin to look at other differences and see how particular creatures image God themselves.

As with other theologians reviewed so far, I find much that is helpful and fruitful in Clough's analysis. He and other theologians looking at cosmic Christology provide a needed theological correction to anthropocentric interpretations of Christology. Clough, in contrast to eco-theologians, focuses more squarely on nonhuman animals. He rightly sees, I think, that even ecotheologians have tended to bypass other animals in favor of ecosystems and universes.

Yet when it comes to the Incarnation itself, Clough is strikingly similar to all of the theologians I have reviewed so far: he bypasses the Incarnation's particularities in favor of cosmic Christology. I am not convinced that dismissing the particularity of the Incarnation as unimportant should be done so easily. I agree that the fundamental distinction in Christian theology is that between God and all creatures. I also agree with the Christocentric interpretation of the image of God found in Karl Barth. But why should that somehow mean that the particularity of the Incarnation in Jesus's Jewishness, maleness, and humanity are irrelevant?

"Deep Incarnation" theologians (as I will call them and which I subscribe to as well) only see the particularity as important insofar as it demonstrates embeddedness in the matrix of life at its most fundamental levels. I think there is at some level a fear that any focus on Jesus's maleness, for instance, would lead to unhelpful gender stereotypes written into the doctrine of God. Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar argue this way.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> For critiques and discussion of Barth and Balthasar on gender see Sarah Coakley, "The Woman at the Alter: Cosmological Disturbance or Gender Subversion?," *Anglican Theological Review* 86, no. 1 (2004); Rachel Muers, "The Mute Cannot Keep Silent: Barth, von Balthasar, and Irigaray, on the Construction of Women's Silence," in *Challenging Women's Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith*

These theological moves can also underwrite systems of patriarchy within human society. But this only has to be the case if we essentialize gender in particular ways. Could it be that Jesus of Nazareth's particular way of being male might actually tell us something important for theology concerned about nonhuman animals? I think it might, and I will argue why in chapter 4.

I am also concerned about the long history of Christians erasing Jesus's Jewishness in favor of some more universal Christ images. This tendency has had dire consequences for Christian faith and life through the centuries. No theology, even one trying to expand the purview toward nonhuman creation, can afford to bypass Jesus's Jewishness. The stakes are too high given how Christians have stereotyped, erased, and obliterated Jewish people both figuratively in written texts and actually in real life pogroms and concentration camps. If there is anything Christian theologians should have learned after the Holocaust, it is to pay attention to Jesus's Jewishness in more than a passing manner. Ecotheology and animal theology do not get a pass on this.

After all—since Clough uses Barth as a helpful resource in the endeavor to develop a theology for animals—Barth did more than highlight the Creator/creature divide and the Christocentric reading of the *imago dei*. Barth also wrote: “The Word did not simply become any “flesh,” any man humbled and suffering. It became Jewish flesh. The Church's whole doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement becomes abstract and

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(Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000); Michelle Gonzalez, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and Contemporary Feminist Theology,” *Theological Studies* 65, no. 3 (2004); Tina Beattie, “Sex, Death and Melodrama: A Feminist Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Way* 44, no. 4 (2005); Susannah Cornwall, “Sex Otherwise: Intersex, Christology, and the Maleness of Jesus,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 2 (2014); Eugene Rogers, “Supplementing Barth on Jews and Gender: Identifying God by Anagogy and the Spirit,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 1 (1998); Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “Gender, Sin and Grace: Feminist Theologies Meet Karl Barth's Hamartiology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no. 4 (1997); Rachel Muers, “A Question of Two Answers: Difference and Determination in Barth and von Balthasar,” *Heythrop Journal* 40, no. 3 (1999); Jason A. Springs, “Following at a Distance (Again): Gender, Equality, and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology,” *Modern Theology* 28, no. 3 (2012).

valueless and meaningless to the extent that this comes to be regarded as something accidental and incidental.”<sup>94</sup> However, it seems to me that much of the deep Incarnation interpretation marginalizes Jesus’s Jewishness in precisely the way Barth warns about: Jesus’s Jewishness is incidental to the Incarnation, an accident that shows the particular “deep” matrix, but not all that fundamentally important.

### **Overview of this Work**

This dissertation is a dialogue with deep Incarnation theologians’ ideas. But where they move immediately outward and upward to the cosmic Christ, I go in the opposite direction: to the flesh. My question is whether the Incarnation’s particularity, specifically Jesus’s Jewishness, maleness, and humanness might be vital aspects of Christology so that ignoring these aspects of the Incarnation does not help to develop “an ecotheology that is also a theology for animals.” Rather than retreat into the cosmos and away from Jesus’s particularity I will address some of the issues directly and turn the question around: it is precisely through Jesus of Nazareth that space opens up for the other-than-human animals Christians have been so quick to dismiss. This dissertation is not a critique of any one person’s theology or, even less, a whole school of theology. I find deep Incarnational ideas to be extremely fruitful. My work, again, supplements and contributes to the work these theologians are doing. Therefore, most of this dissertation is constructive theology. In saying this I align myself with Karl Barth, who claimed that on the basis of the Incarnation “the *sense* and *sound* of our word must be *positive*.”<sup>95</sup> A dissertation that mostly tears down other people rather than building upon their best

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<sup>94</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 166. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>95</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1960), 61.

insights would be a betrayal of what I wish to do in this work. This dissertation is part of a dialogue about how we Christians can recover a sense of our own creatureliness and affirm the goodness not only of creation itself, but also those creatures—nonhuman animals—who so often go ignored even in ecotheology.

In the first chapter I will look at the issue of the Word becoming “flesh.” The Gospel of John’s claim that the Word became flesh has been a central idea in recent literature around ecotheology and theology and nonhuman animals. Some of the authors, such as Gregersen, have placed this notion within a Greek philosophical context in order to give the notion airs of a wider significance. I do not think such a move is helpful or necessary, as I already noted. So in the first chapter I will look at how the notion of God becoming “flesh” functions in the New Testament and how it relates to ideas from the Hebrew Bible.

In the second chapter I will examine how two patristic scholars use this notion of God becoming flesh. Both Athanasius and John of Damascus use John 1:14 to speak of the Word becoming “matter.” Denis Edwards and some other modern scholars think that Athanasius therefore offers some hope for modern theologians in recovering a more balanced theology that would be more respectful of nonhuman creation. I am not so sure. Both Athanasius and John of Damascus point to the cosmic Christ at the expense of Jesus’s particularity, as do theologians I have reviewed in this introduction, but Athanasius and the Damscene do so in a context decidedly anti-Jewish. As such, their thoughts on the Incarnation, while intriguing, are of limited use. They do not pay enough attention to Jesus of Nazareth.

In the third chapter I begin my positive argument by looking at how Jesus's Jewishness is essential for any theology concerned about nonhuman animals. Jesus stands in a prophetic tradition of messianic and eschatological hope. Without the specific Jewish eschatological hope that Jesus embodies, in which predators and prey no longer interact with one another in a cycle of violence, our theologies of nonhuman animals would be much impoverished. But there is much more than eschatology at stake.

In the fourth chapter I build upon the idea that Jesus's Jewishness is essential for the Incarnation by examining his maleness. Jesus is a Jewish male. His maleness provides a very specific challenge to dominant ideas of maleness in antiquity and even in our modern American culture. The ideal male only shows a limited range of emotion, like a Stoic, but also learns the virtues by becoming a hunter and a warrior. But Jesus's Jewishness challenges these ideological performances of gender. His male body not only seems radically transgendered at times, but is also a circumcised male body. This has specific ramifications for maleness in antiquity and beyond that make his maleness helpful for thinking about how the Incarnation relates to nonhuman animals.

In the final chapter, I will take up the challenge of Jesus's humanness. Even if I can successfully address the Son's Jewish and male particularity, it would seem that the "humanity of God," as Barth called it, is the decisive particular that makes theological thinking about nonhuman animals at best a weird side-project and at worst a terrible distraction from the real work of thinking about how the Son's humanness saves humanity alone. But I think that would be a hasty conclusion. Jesus's humanity, I argue, is a kenosis of humanity: a giving up of human privilege and domination, indeed, giving up on the very idea of the human/animal distinction because that quest is one that serves

domination not liberation. Drawing on philosophical currents from Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, and others, I see Jesus as “becoming-animal” in a way that problematizes all attempts to define anthropology in a way that allows humans to dominate other creatures.

## CHAPTER 1 THE WORD BECAME FLESH

At every Roman Catholic Mass and at many Protestant worship services, Christians recite the Creed, part of which states: “I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ . . . for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate (σαρκωθέντα) of the Virgin Mary, and became man (ἐνανθρωπήσαντα).”<sup>96</sup> This is the English version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that American Roman Catholics repeat. Other churches have modernized the language from “man” to human: “and became human.”<sup>97</sup> Anselm of Canterbury titled one of his works, “Why God became human” (*Cur deus homo*). There is a long history of Christians affirming Jesus’s true humanity and emphasizing it.

However, the language used in the Gospel of John is that the Word became “flesh” (σάρξ —John 1:14). In line with common parlance, modern commentaries on the Gospel of John have generally interpreted σάρξ in John 1:14 as a synonym for “human.” In his commentary on John, for example, Ben Witherington states that John was concerned to “make clear that the Logos really took on human flesh, and that he is the only mediator between human beings and God.”<sup>98</sup> Witherington gives no attention to what σάρξ might mean but assumes it implies humanity exclusively. Likewise, Ernst Haenchen’s commentary passes over the meaning of flesh, opting instead to discuss the

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<sup>96</sup> This is the English that Roman Catholics repeat at Mass. I have added the Greek to show the original underneath. Greek text in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Greek and Latin Churches, The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1896), 57.

<sup>97</sup> For example, the United Methodist Hymnal (1989) says, “and became truly human” (p. 880).

<sup>98</sup> Ben Witherington, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 53.

absent virgin birth story.<sup>99</sup> Raymond Brown, in his groundbreaking commentary on John's Gospel, states that "'flesh' stands for the whole man" without inquiring whether the term could have broader implications.<sup>100</sup> Finally, Rudolf Bultmann attempts to show that John's statement, "the Word became flesh," counters a common tendency in the ancient world to pit the spiritual against the created material world. Yet Bultmann does not take this to its logical conclusion by drawing more creation-wide implications from it. Instead he states that σάρξ in John 1:14 refers to "the sphere of the human and the worldly as opposed to the divine."<sup>101</sup> Σαρξ has to do with what is fleeting, weak, and arrogant in the human sphere, but says little about anything else.

Theologians have generally taken a similar path. Thomas F. Torrance, for instance, interprets σάρξ as Jesus taking up humanity's "fallen flesh." For Torrance, the reason for the Incarnation is atonement.<sup>102</sup> Humanity sinned and needed God to heal the rupture between humans and God, humans and humans, and human and "nature," which could only happen through the Incarnation. The meaning of the word "flesh" is "that the Word participates in human nature and existence, for he became man in becoming flesh, true man and real man."<sup>103</sup> Part of being truly human is having flesh "marked by Adam's fall, the human nature which seen from the cross is at enmity with God and needs to be reconciled to God."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium: ein Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 128–30.

<sup>100</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 13.

<sup>101</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 62.

<sup>102</sup> "Even when we begin with his incarnation, and with his birth at Bethlehem, we are beginning right away with the atonement, for his birth, as the beginning of his incarnate person, is one end of atoning work, with the resurrection and ascension as the other end." Thomas Torrance, F., *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 37.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*



But these commentators assert rather than argue for interpreting σάρξ as “human.” Since most of these commentators do not give any arguments for this assumption, readers have no good reason to accept their position. In fact, I will argue in this chapter, we have very good reasons to think that “the Word became flesh” within a broader perspective on the Incarnation. A few modern interpreters have already begun to draw this conclusion.

As noted in the introduction, Andrew Linzey has long viewed the Incarnation as relating to nonhuman animals: “The incarnation is God’s love affair with all fleshly creatures.”<sup>105</sup> More recently, biblical scholar Richard Bauckham has pointed to “the Word became flesh” as a statement with ecological importance. While the passage clearly has in mind that Jesus became a human—with all the vulnerability, weakness, and mortality that humanity implies—the passage has wider significance. “The Word ‘became flesh’, the mortal nature humans share with all living things, in order to give the eternal life of God to all flesh.”<sup>106</sup> Some biblical scholars have argued that John’s Gospel devalues creation through a series of dualities.<sup>107</sup> But if the prologue can be read as having a wider significance than humanity, if “flesh” signifies human and nonhuman creation, then the Gospel is about opening up eternity to what is non-eternal broadly. Human and nonhuman creation share a common destiny in Christ.

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<sup>105</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Creatures of the Same God: Explorations in Animal Theology* (New York: Lantern Books, 2009), 14. I take it as a little scandalous that people arguing for deep Incarnation (aside from Deane-Drummond) have not acknowledged that Linzey spoke many years before them about John 1:14 and the Incarnation in the “flesh” as significant for nonhuman animals. In addition to what I cited in the Introduction and quoted in the text above, see also Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997), 85, 103–104 and Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 164.

<sup>107</sup> Bauckham points to Norman Habel in particular. See Norman Habel, “An Ecojustice Challenge: Is Earth Valued in John 1?,” in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, ed. Norman Habel and Vicky Balabanski (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 76–82.

Denis Edwards has also taken up this line of thought. Concerned that humans have done irretrievable damage to forests, water, soil, and the atmosphere, as well as written off other animals to extinction, Edwards has worked to place nonhuman creation within a Trinitarian framework. He argues that if God is a dynamic of mutual love in God's self, then every part of creation must be an expression of God's love. For Edwards, the second person of the Trinity is best understood as "the Wisdom of God," through whom all things were created and who became incarnate.<sup>108</sup> But the Wisdom of God became incarnate in a deeper way than merely becoming human:

The Word becomes flesh in solidarity with all flesh, and this includes not only humanity but also the whole of biological life. The cross of Christ represents not only God's identification with suffering humanity and God's will to bring forgiveness and healing to human beings, but also God's identification with suffering creation and God's promise of new creation that will bring healing and fulfillment to all things. The meaning of the incarnation, of becoming flesh, is not restricted to humanity, but involves all the networks of interconnected organisms, the whole of biological life.<sup>109</sup>

Likewise, David Clough has drawn on John 1:14 for a renewed understanding of the Incarnation. Commenting on the passage he states that, in essence, this verse means that the Word took on "the life-substance common to humans and other animals."<sup>110</sup>

Yet theologians and biblical scholars like Linzey, Bauckham, Edwards, and Clough have neither given detailed work on how the Gospel of John uses *σάρξ* nor have

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<sup>108</sup> See Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: St. Paul's, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 125.

<sup>110</sup> Clough, *On Animals*, 84–85.

they done extended work on the meaning of flesh. Like those who claim that σάρξ refers to humanity alone, these theologians also generally assert or too briefly argue their counter interpretations. Clough has done more work than others by connecting the term σάρξ to its Hebrew counterpart, a move that I will draw from and expand upon in this chapter. Connecting σάρξ to Jewish notions is essential for grounding the Gospel in Hebrew Scriptures. But on all accounts what is needed is a more extensive survey of the Fourth Gospel and a close reading of the text. Furthermore, these scholars have generally bypassed other texts that could lend support to their expansive theological agendas such as 1 John 4:2, 2 John 4:7, 1 Timothy 3:16, and 1 Peter 3:18 and 4:1.

Therefore, in this chapter I will closely examine the Gospel of John's use of the term σάρξ as well as these other passages. Throughout, I will attempt to show how understanding σάρξ influences how we understand the Incarnation. Because σάρξ carries a wider semantic range than being a synonym for human, it could very well be that there is strong biblical precedent for seeing the Incarnation in broad terms, and doing so precisely from the particularity of σάρξ. But I think it is crucial to remember the Jewish roots of "flesh" since divorcing the term from the story of Israel can lead to the opposite of respect for life.

### **Hermeneutics**

In this chapter I offer readings of various biblical passages. Although I engage with historical-critical scholarship, my readings are not bound to these methodologies, which sometimes maintain that I must base my readings in what the author originally intended or what the original audience must have heard. Modern interpreters who posit an authorial intention in the text of the Gospel of John do not agree: which original "author"

I choose would seem to depend my own inclinations as more than on actual fact. Roland Barthes announced the death of the author several decades ago. For Barthes, this absence frees the text from the constraints of elite scholars.<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, Barthes may have exaggerated his claims and assessed the author's role too negatively. In response to Barthes, Michel Foucault argues that the author is never absent from a text. Authors function in a variety of ways within our discourses. But authors always limit interpretation: they use specific genres, employ specific literary devices, and write within specific social settings. One authorial function, according to Foucault, is as "founders of discursivity."<sup>112</sup> Foucault maintains that Freud, Marx, and Engels were not just authors of specific books but also "established an endless possibility of discourse."<sup>113</sup> These authors made possible a range of discussions that align with or differ from their thinking. Even the differences belong to the discourses that these authors founded. They make it possible to diverge from their thinking within the specific discourse they founded. For example, Freud founded psychoanalytical discourse. Subsequent generations function within this psychoanalytical discourse even when concepts of libido or dream analysis are absent from later authors' works.<sup>114</sup>

Foucault argues that expanding a specific discourse does not transform the discourse a generic form that disrespects the texts. Rather, discursive expansion opens the discourse "to a certain number of possible applications. To limit psychoanalysis as a type of discursivity is, in reality, to try to isolate in the founding act an eventually restricted

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<sup>111</sup> See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–49.

<sup>112</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* edited by Josue V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 154.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> See *ibid.*, 155.

number of propositions or statements to which, alone, one grants a founding value, and in relation to which certain concepts or theories accepted by Freud might be considered as derived, secondary, or accessory.”<sup>115</sup> According to Foucault, we do not say that Freud’s statements are “false” and therefore dismiss his texts. Rather we set aside and explain some statements regardless of their current acceptability. We still use Freud’s work. Foucault calls this a “return to the origin,” which is part of the discourse and will modify our current discussions.

Foucault’s analysis of the “author-function” fits well with my reading of Scripture. The author still lurks withing the anonymously authored Gospel of John. This Gospel has founded an enormously influential discourse about God. For instance, the Gospel of John’s statement that the Word became flesh has been a theological bedrock in Christian history. In one of his catechetical addresses, Pope John Paul II stated that, “Truly, we are at the central and decisive point of our profession of faith here: ‘The Word became flesh and came to dwell among us.’”<sup>116</sup> The idea of the Word becoming flesh has created a discourse in itself. Returning to the Gospel text to re-examine this “central and decisive” idea is an essential part of the discussion.

But, as Foucault ably demonstrates, the field of discourse is bound to develop beyond simply restating and repeating statements from the Gospel. Sometimes we develop ideas that diverge from the Gospel but in the divergence are still within the Johannine field of discourse, or more broadly within Christian theological discourse. But my reading does not really seek to diverge so much as to expand the Gospel’s horizon. In

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>116</sup> Pope John Paul II, “The Prologue of John’s Gospel Synthesizes the Faith of the Apostolic Church,” (June 3, 1987), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/audiences/alpha/data/aud19870603en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/alpha/data/aud19870603en.html). (Accessed November 8, 2015).

Christian discourse, the usual way to speak about the Word becoming flesh has been to equate “flesh” with “humanity” or, even more narrowly, to “man.” I will broaden rather than narrow the meaning of flesh.

I do not claim that the following reading is based in the “authorial intentions” of the author of John’s Gospel. The Jesus of John’s Gospel shows little interest in other animals. Nevertheless, the trajectory of theological discourse that this Gospel sets into motion may expand in a direction that makes other animals essential to the discussion. Furthermore, we may expand this discussion by returning to the text and re-reading it in light of our own questions.

The text shows us a horizon and therefore limits interpretive possibilities to some degree. Again Foucault is insightful: “The author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.”<sup>117</sup> The author is a “necessary or constraining figure.”<sup>118</sup> My reading respects this constraint. My reading also sees discursive trajectories set into motion by the Gospel. So I push the theological vision of the Gospel of John into different areas. In short, my reading of the texts and my hermeneutical assumptions sit within a specific way of seeing texts and authors within postmodernity that does not simply discard authors and meaning, but also uses those texts to say new things. This is the way Christians have often used Scripture in practice as we preach and relate them to everyday life.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

## The Gospel of John

### The Prologue: The Word Became Flesh

The Gospel of John introduces the Incarnation in the prologue (1:1–18). Many studies on John’s Gospel have argued that this prologue is not a mere opening for the narrative. The prologue pervades the entire Gospel narrative as the story repeatedly circles back to the opening. John’s prologue sets up a narrative world: a time (the beginning), a place (the world), and the setting (among us). All the major characters in the Gospel narrative exist within this narrative world that the prologue establishes. Compared to Luke’s preface, which is outside the narrative structure, John’s prologue is an essential part of the narrative.

John’s prologue provides a thematic overview to the Gospel, setting out some of the Gospel’s major themes: light and darkness; sending; witness; the world; authority; rebirth; enfleshment; glory; truth; and revelation. Some important terms in the prologue do not appear in the rest of the Gospel, indicating that it likely originated as an early hymn within the Johannine community.<sup>119</sup> Whatever its origins, however, the Gospel of John uses the prologue as a starting place for the story that follows. The prologue is a beginning point that is repeatedly re-evaluated by what unfolds in the narrative

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<sup>119</sup> Tightly reasoned, the prologue contains some theological terms that do not appear elsewhere, for example, “Word,” “fullness,” “only son,” and “tabernacle.” This has led some scholars to suggest another editor added it later. See J. A. T. Robinson, “The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John” *New Testament Studies* 9 (1962–63): 120–29. Ernst Käsemann maintains that the prologue originated with Christians outside the Johannine community, and the evangelist incorporated it into the Gospel. See Ernst Käsemann, “The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John’s Gospel,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 138–67. More recently, Ben Witherington has contended that the hymn is in the style of Jewish wisdom literature. See Witherington, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, 47–58. Regardless of the prologue’s origins, however, the final form in the Gospel represents the Johannine reflection on the divinity and Incarnation of the Son in Jesus Christ.

sequence.<sup>120</sup> The idea that the divine λόγος, who has an intimate relationship with God and is God, enters into the creaturely realm to forge intimate relationships within the created order pervades the Fourth Gospel. Many commentators see John 1:14 as the high point of the prologue: “the Word became flesh (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο).” The Incarnation is something to which the Gospel returns over and over, a theme that makes sense of the entire book.

### **The Λόγος Rooted in Hebrew Scriptures**

The λόγος has at least four main semantic domains derived from the Hebrew Bible, the Gospel’s narrative world. First, the idea connects to the creation narrative in Genesis 1 (see also Psalm 34:6). John’s Gospel opens with the same words that the Septuagint uses in Genesis 1: Ἐν ἀρχῇ (“In the beginning”). In the well-balanced symmetry and movement of Genesis 1, at the beginning of each day of the first week God speaks all things into existence (Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός — LXX), names each thing, tells each thing where it belongs, and blesses each thing that God makes. From the initial chaotic waters, God makes order, beauty, goodness, lushness, and diversity. On the fifth day God creates water creatures and birds that fly through the air. They teem with life. On the sixth day God creates land animals and humans.

Alluding to the narrative world of Genesis 1, the divine λόγος in John’s Gospel provides the foundation for all that exists, causes all creatures to flourish, and is the source of all that is good. The prologue takes the idea of God speaking things into

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<sup>120</sup> Following the narrative reader-response hermeneutic of Jeff Staley, *The Print’s First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).



existence and uses the term *λόγος* in a different semantic field by giving it its own existence. But Genesis 1:1 seems to fit well as for intertextual reading with John 1.

Against this reading, Norman Habel suggests that the prologue has an anemic view of creation compared to Genesis 1, which lavishly describes creation and declares everything to be “very good.”<sup>121</sup> In contrast to Genesis 1, where the earth brings forth life of all kinds, the prologue, according to Habel’s reading, says that the Word—not the earth—creates all things, negating the earth’s role in creation and reducing the lavish diversity of creation to one word (*πάντα* in Greek). Therefore, Habel claims that Genesis 1 and John 1 have “two discrete subjects as the sources or agents of life.”<sup>122</sup>

Habel argues that John’s prologue replaces Genesis 1. Rather than replace Genesis 1, however, we can just as easily read John 1 as presupposes Genesis 1. The Fourth Gospel does not need to repeat the details of Genesis 1. Instead, John sums up the account by referring to “all things” that have been created (John 1:3). The evangelist reads Genesis 1 in light of the story he is about to tell about Jesus. Jesus is the one through whom all things all things are created. “All things” is a reference to the lavishness of Genesis 1. John does not discount the role of the earth in bringing forth other creatures. Rather, the evangelist highlights the part of Genesis 1 in which God’s word is the primary mover in the narrative. The earth brings forth other creatures only because God first verbally summons the earth to do so. That *λόγος* is Jesus in John’s Gospel.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Habel, “An Ecojustice Challenge: Is Earth Valued in John 1?,” 78.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>123</sup> Regardless of whether one chooses to follow Habel or not, even Habel agrees that Genesis 1 provides a background for reading John’s prologue, which is the main point I am making at present.

The second Hebrew domain for reading λόγος is the foundational events in Israel's history: the call and promise to Abraham; giving Jacob a new name, Israel; telling Moses the divine name and liberating Israel from slavery; giving the Torah at Mount Sinai; and the prophets who speak God's word of judgment and salvation. God's word in the prophets purifies (Mal 3:2–4), renews the covenant (Jer 31:31–34), and consoles the suffering (Isa 40:1–11). As in the creation story, God's word brings life: As the prophet Ezekiel looks into a valley of death and destruction, God speaks and long dead skeletons begin to rattle, flesh starts to re-form upon them again, and breath enters them as they hear “the word of the Lord” (ἀκούσατε λόγον κυρίου — Ezek 37:1–14).

The λόγος that judges and saves pervades John's Gospel. The word that judges and saves in Hebrew Scriptures has become incarnate in John's Gospel. In the Hebrew Bible the λόγος κυρίου or λόγος θεοῦ (LXX) comes to specific prophets at specific times with specific messages. The typical phrase in the LXX— “the word of the Lord came to” (καὶ ἐγένετο λόγος κυρίου πρὸς, e.g., Ezek 21:1 in the LXX)—almost suggests a divine visitation. Psalm 33:4, 6 suggest that the λόγος κυρίου has personal characteristics and a role in creation: “For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. . . . By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.” But John's prologue takes the idea of the λόγος a step further: rather than a message coming to a prophet the message and the messenger become the same.

The third Jewish field for the divine λόγος comes from the wisdom tradition.<sup>124</sup> Raymond E. Brown sees Wisdom personified in the Hebrew Bible as the key influence on John's Gospel. In Wisdom literature, σοφία parallels the λόγος of John's prologue in the following ways: σοφία pre-existed the created order (Prov 8:22–23; Sir 1:4; Wis 9:9; cf. John 1:1), was “with God” (Prov 8:30; Sir 1:1; Wis 9:4), actively participated in creating all things (Prov 8:27–30; Wis 7:22; and 9:9), reflects God's glory (Wis 7:25–26), is the light and life of the world (Prov 4:18–19, 8:35; and Bar 4:1), enjoys human company (Prov 8:31), dwells with humans (Sir 24:8), has grace (Sir 24:16), but some reject Wisdom (Sir 15:7 and Bar 3:12). Brown concludes his study by stating that there are therefore “good parallels for almost every detail of the prologue's descriptions of the Word.”<sup>125</sup> The Wisdom tradition sometimes even uses σοφία and λόγος as synonyms as in Wisdom 9:1–2.

Connecting John's prologue to Jewish Wisdom literature is nothing new. Already in the third century, Origen said that “just as we have learned in what sense wisdom is the ‘beginning of the ways’ of God and is said to have been created, in the sense, namely, that she fashions beforehand and contains within herself the species and causes of the entire creation, in the same manner also must wisdom be understood to the Word of God. For wisdom opens to all other beings, that is, to the whole creation, the meaning of the

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<sup>124</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond has used “wisdom” to great effect in her treatment of theology and evolution. Although she uses the idea of Wisdom in a great many writings, see in particular Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom*.

<sup>125</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I–XII*, 523. See also and Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). Scott acknowledges the similarities and the differences between the Wisdom tradition and the prologue, stating, “While we cannot quote a direct parallel from any sayings of the Wisdom school, we can nevertheless see that 1:14a stands at the end point of a line which stretches back to its origins in the Wisdom tradition.” See *ibid.*, 105. Scott thinks that the λόγος of the prologue, which becomes incarnate, is the next stage in a development of the Wisdom tradition. Rather than a logical step in the Wisdom tradition, it might be better to speak about the prologue offering a commentary or reflection on the tradition that does its own reinterpretation.

mysteries and secrets which are contained within the wisdom of God, and so she is called the Word, because she is the interpreter of the mind's secrets."<sup>126</sup> Likewise, Augustine, citing the Psalms, claimed that Jesus is "the Wisdom of God" that created all things.<sup>127</sup>

But John does not use σοφία but λόγος. Brown and others have given several plausible reasons that John's Gospel uses the masculine noun λόγος in place of the feminine noun σοφία. James D. G. Dunn summarizes the reasons: "The concept 'Word' is given preference over 'Wisdom,' perhaps simply because the masculine concept seemed more appropriate, but probably mainly because 'Word' was the more serviceable concept to provide a bridge of communication between Jewish monotheism and Greek religious philosophy (as with Philo)."<sup>128</sup>

Daniel Boyarin makes a convincing case that there was a "binitarianism" circulating in Jewish circles around the time of Jesus and Paul. In his view of the λόγος, Philo drew from a Jewish tradition that had absorbed Greek philosophy in such a way that one cannot legitimately tell the difference between what is Greek and what is Jewish. Philo, Boyarin argues, "oscillates on the point of the ambiguity between separate existence of the Logos, God's Son, and its total incorporation within the godhead. If

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<sup>126</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 1.2.3, p. 16.

<sup>127</sup> See Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 1.16.1, p. 55.

<sup>128</sup> James D. G. Dunn, "Christology (NT)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 987. Others see the change from σοφία to λόγος as already beginning in the Hebrew Bible. Craig Evans states that "there is an explicit movement from *sophia* to *logos* . . . Wisdom of Solomon begins with *sophia* (Wisdom 1.4; 9.4), it concludes with ὁ λόγος which leaped out of heaven to punish the Egyptians." See Craig Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 109.

Philo is not on the road to Damascus here, he is surely on a way that leads to Nicaea and the controversies over the second person of the Trinity.”<sup>129</sup>

Philo was not an isolated person with esoteric views, nor was he a “Hellenized” Jew in distinction from Palestinian Jews. Boyarin demonstrates that the “Memra of God” held the same place for Semitic Jews as Greek-speaking ones. He quotes Alfred Edersheim stating that “And yet, if words have any meaning, the Memra is a hypostasis,” that is, has its own personal identity alongside YHWH.<sup>130</sup> These non-rabbinic forms of Jewish faith call into question any sharp divisions we might be tempted to make between “Christians” and “Jews” at that time. These are simply later constructions, the result of an unfortunate split that was far from inevitable.

Finally, Jewish reflections on the Torah provide another field of meaning within which the prologue’s *λόγος* functions. The Wisdom tradition already connected wisdom with the Torah. Sirach 24:1–24 starts with Wisdom, moving to the idea that she “comes forth from the mouth of the Most High” (24:3), and then connects Wisdom to “the law that Moses commanded us” in verse 23. Connecting σοφία, *λόγος*, and νόμος (Torah) is common in the Septuagint, according to Naomi Cohen. She provides numerous examples where the Septuagint uses the term *λόγος* to mean Torah, for example, Exodus 20:1; 35:1; Deuteronomy 9:10; 10:4; and Leviticus 8:36.<sup>131</sup> As part of the implicit background for the *λόγος* in John’s prologue, we have yet another deep Jewish root for the Gospel, but another one that the Fourth Gospel builds upon rather than simply accepts as is.

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<sup>129</sup> Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Crucifixion of the Logos,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 3 (2001): 251.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>131</sup> See Naomi Cohen, *Philo Judaeus: His Universe of Discourse* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 179–80.

The reason I have belabored this point about the λόγος and the Hebrew Bible is to emphasize the Jewish roots of John’s Gospel because this is important for how we read the term σὰρξ later. I want to establish a strong Jewish milieu for the Gospel. This Jewish tradition is not simply one among many possible lenses through which to read the Gospel, but a very plausible lens given the importance of God’s Word in Hebrew thought.

### **A Narrative Reading**

The prologue unfolds sequentially. Starting with the first verses, we learn more and more information about the λόγος, constantly inviting us to rethink what we “know” about the λόγος. With each verse the focus narrows from the cosmic origins in the first verses to more and more specific aspects until we finally reach the name Jesus Christ in 1:17. Between the λόγος in verse 1 and Jesus Christ in verse 17 we learn that “all things” are created through the λόγος, who gives all things life and light that sustains them (1:3–5), and that the λόγος was not recognized by “the world” (ὁ κόσμος)—but those who do recognize him relate to God in a new way (1:12–13)—has entered the created order in material form and has revealed God in this created world (1:14, 16–18), and that grace and truth come through the man Jesus Christ, who is “the Word became flesh (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο).” So the final verse of the prologue circles back to the first in which the Son, who has an intimate relationship to the Father, turns toward the world and in so doing reveals God’s nature (1:18).

The prologue’s focus keeps narrowing. The λόγος is the one through whom “all things” (πάντα) are created in verse 3. As already noted, this is a way of summarizing the

lavish, detailed account of Genesis 1. “All things” is the most comprehensive statement about what has been created through the λόγος.

Verse 6 claims that God had already sent “a human” (ἄνθρωπος) named John who witnessed to the “light” (φῶς)—the φῶς equated with the divine λόγος.<sup>132</sup> This light “which enlightens every human” (ὁ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον) “was coming into the world” (ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον—John 1:9), that is, into the creaturely realm created through the divine λόγος.<sup>133</sup> The juxtaposition of light and darkness could be read in dualistic terms of two opposing forces, but given the supremacy of light being associated with the λόγος that would be a misreading. If this passage hearkens back to Genesis 1, darkness itself is under divine control, being named “night.” Theologically speaking, darkness is created as well and as God’s creation must be good. We need a little darkness on this earth. Looking directly into the sun can blind. Our eyes need the contrast between darkness and light. John contrasts light with darkness, but this contrast does not signal a fundamental binary in which light is good and darkness per se is evil. In people’s

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<sup>132</sup> Habel argues that whereas Genesis 1 describes light and darkness as complementary forces within creation, with light giving its rays to all creatures, John’s prologue spiritualizes light and darkness and makes them into opposing forces, devaluing them as natural elements. Habel, “An Ecojustice Challenge: Is Earth Valued in John 1?,” 79. Clearly the Gospel of John uses darkness and light as images of spiritual realities. Yet I am not convinced that because the Gospel does this that it devalues creation as a whole and makes gnostic-like claims about creation. Darkness and light function in the Gospel’s language not as natural elements that are evil, but as lenses through which to see a spiritual reality where wisdom, Torah, and ultimately Jesus Christ bring much needed relief to creation as a whole. Merely by using the word κόσμος, which often but not always refers to human systems of power, the evangelist reminds us that humans are but one mere part of the created order.

<sup>133</sup> I am here taking ἐρχόμενον as agreeing with φῶς as does the NRSV. Ernst Haenchen, however, takes the phrase ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον as referring to “every man,” explaining that in early Judaism “every one coming into the world” was synonymous with “every one.” See Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 117. Peder Borgen acknowledges that there are some rabbinic parallels in Hebrew, though they are not exact, but he ultimately rejects them for interpreting John because John’s Gospel as a whole makes it clear that it is the coming of the light that is intended (3:19 and 12:46). See Peder Borgen, *“Logos Was the True Light”: The True Light and Other Essays on the Gospel of John* (Trondheim: Tapir Publishers, 1983), 102–103. Given that most people would have heard this text rather than read it and therefore would not have had time to debate the intricacies of the grammar, and given Borden’s observation that the light comes into the world in 3:19 and 12:46, Borden’s reading, supported by the NRSV, seems best. Barth follows this reading as well in Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 59–60.

everyday experience of day and night, light, according to the Gospel, allows “all” (John 1:9) to see what they would not otherwise be able to see (John 11:9–10). In the final chapter, I will argue that prologue allows us to see some very specific things about creation and humanity in relationship to the divine λόγος that undercuts some of our most cherished self-definitions.

But for now, it is enough to note that the prologue has moved from an utterly cosmic scope at the beginning of all things, to a narrower picture in which the λόγος is entering into the κόσμος. The term κόσμος is a narrower term than πάντα in verse three. Whereas πάντα signifies a creation-wide statement, κόσμος in verses 9 and 10 more likely refers to “the world beneath the sky, excluding the heavens where God dwells.”<sup>134</sup>

The Fourth Gospel uses the term κόσμος seventy-eight times. Four of these are in John 1:9–10. Raymond Brown suggests that the Johannine literature uses the term with three areas of meaning: 1) cosmic order; 2) creation able to respond to God; and 3) human society.<sup>135</sup> In the prologue, the first three uses of κόσμος have positive connotations. “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9) shows the κόσμος as receiving the Light’s attention and being a bearer of light. “He was in the world” (1:10a) once again demonstrates a positive use in that the Light wills to be in the world. The meaning of κόσμος seems to be Earth. “The world came into being through him” (1:10b) is yet another positive association in that the κόσμος is created through the λόγος and φῶς, which are good. Again, the meaning of κόσμος seems to be the terrestrial planet we inhabit. The final use in the prologue, “yet the world did not know him” (1:10c) has different connotations. This is the first time the κόσμος acts on its

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<sup>134</sup> Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 162–63.

<sup>135</sup> See Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I–XII*, 508.



own, rather than receiving action from the φῶς. When the κόσμος neglects its Creator it fails miserably. Yet the prologue may not expect the world to recognize the λόγος at all since it is in darkness. The idea in this fourth use of κόσμος in the prologue suggests the text has in view human society.<sup>136</sup> But the second and third instances have broader implications given that the prologue has spoken about “all things” having been created through the λόγος.<sup>137</sup>

The overarching idea in John 1:9–10 seems to be that the Creator will enter into creation, and perhaps even more specifically, that the Creator is coming to Earth. The Creator will become a particular creature, but the prologue moves slowly, steadily narrowing to a particular focus. Here the purview seems wider when the evangelist uses the term κόσμος, with the first three uses denoting earthly creaturely reality at large and the fourth possibly zeroing in on human society.

Then in John 1:14, the author repeats the idea of the Word entering creation in the starkest of terms by unambiguously stating that the divine λόγος has become flesh: ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. The Gospel seems to use the word σὰρξ very deliberately. The text does not say that the Word became “human” (ὁ λόγος ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο). To say the

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<sup>136</sup> By restricting the κόσμος in this fourth use to human society I am not denying that nonhuman animals need redemption or can be moral. We know that dolphins, chimpanzees, wolves, and a great many other creatures have a sense of fairness, forgiveness, trust, and cooperation. See Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Frans de Waal, *Peacemaking among Primates* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Mark Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), and for theological treatments see Celia Deane-Drummond, “Are Animals Moral? Taking Soundings through Vice, Virtue, Conscience and *Imago Dei*,” in *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough (London: SCM Press, 2009), and Clough, *On Animals*, 105–119. I suppose it would not be utterly impossible to stretch the meaning to include nonhuman animals here in the prologue, but I think that κόσμος probably signals human society because the narrative to follow places the inability to recognize God in Jesus squarely with humans.

<sup>137</sup> Karl Barth also sees a distinction in the different uses of κόσμος in verse 9. Barth says that κόσμος has three meanings in John: 1) “The sum of all created things”; 2) a creature that shuts itself off from God; and 3) the human world. He thinks that the first two uses of κόσμος in verse 10 follow meaning 1, but the final use has number 3 in view. See Barth, *Witness to the Word*, 63–64. See also the analysis of κόσμος in the Gospel in Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I–XII*, 508–509.

“Word became human” is too narrow for the moment. Yet the term σάρξ fits with the unfolding sequential narrative from a wide panoramic view to focus and refocus to particulars.

### “Flesh” Rooted in the Hebrew Bible

In the prologue, the word “flesh” (σάρξ) appears twice in close proximity. In its narrative context within the prologue the second use of σάρξ refers to “Jesus Christ” (1:17). The prologue makes a particular claim about Jesus, namely, that he is “the Word became flesh.” John’s prologue is rich with scriptural allusion, as I already established by looking at the scriptural domains in Hebrew Scriptures for the term λόγος. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible provides the principal background for the Johannine literature.<sup>138</sup> Just as the primary semantic background for λόγος lies in numerous Jewish scriptures, so too does the term σάρξ.

Σάρξ in verse 14 seems to parallel the κόσμος in verse 9. That is, σάρξ represents a broader sphere than the merely human. But σάρξ is less broad than speaking about the κόσμος as a whole. Such a use of σάρξ comports with the rich allusions to Jewish scriptures in the prologue and Gospel. The Greek term σάρξ connects to the Hebrew term בָּשָׂר, which the Hebrew Bible often uses for all living creatures. The Fourth Gospel shows influence from both the LXX and a Hebrew version of the Bible, making it necessary to

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<sup>138</sup> See the summary in Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 132. Though the Gospel of John contains fewer direct quotations from the Hebrew Bible than the Synoptic Gospels, John’s Gospel has more allusions to that literature than the Synoptics. François-Marie Braun has shown that John’s Gospel reflects the great currents of Hebrew thought even more clearly than the Synoptics. See François-Marie Braun, *Jean le Théologien: Les Grandes Traditions d’Israël et l’Accord des Écritures selon le Quatrième Évangile*, vol. 2 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1964), 23–45. See also Martin Hengel’s comment: The prologue to John’s Gospel, Hengel says, “relates the entire salvation history from the very beginning ἐν ἀρχῇ *b’ere šit* to the Epiphany of the Logos ἔνσαρκος in the present.” Martin Hengel, “The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. William Stegner and Craig Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 386.

look at both the Greek and the Hebrew for “flesh.”<sup>139</sup> The phrase כָּל־בְּשָׂר (kall-beshar) has particular importance. God decides to destroy “all flesh” in a flood (Gen 6.13) and then, after the Flood, makes a covenant with “all flesh” (9:17). Jeremiah announced that God is lord of “all flesh” (Jer 32.27), while the Psalmist proclaimed that God gives food to “all flesh” (Ps 136:25).<sup>140</sup>

That the “Word becomes flesh” may also reflect deeper scriptural themes about the interconnectedness of animal life in particular. According to Genesis, the waters produce creatures that live there (Gen 1:20). The earth produces land creatures of every kind (Gen 1:24). God is said to have made them, but they come from their habitat. They have deep roots in the places they live. Yet after the water and earth initially produce these creatures, they are blessed and told to “be fruitful and multiply.” Initially, they come from their habitat. Thereafter, however, these animals produce each other. Humans are the same. God forms the first man out of the dust of the ground. Humans come from the same earth as other animals. But after this God creates the first woman from the first man, and subsequent generations of humans come from human procreation rather than from new creations out of the earth.

In Genesis 1:11–12, the earth also produces the plant life that sustains humanity and all land animals. Unlike animal and human life, however, plant life continues to come from the earth. That God tells humans and other animals to eat a plant-based diet continues to connect humans and other animals to the earth. It is through our diet that we

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<sup>139</sup> For instance, Maarten Menken shows that while several scriptural quotes align with the LXX or another Greek version others seem to come from the Hebrew version. See Maarten J. J. Menken, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel* (Kampen: Kok, 1996), 99–122 and 171–72.

<sup>140</sup> The phrase “all flesh” occurs throughout the Bible to refer to more than just humans: Genesis 6:12, 13, 17, 19; 7:15, 16, 2; 8:17; 9:11, 15, 16, 17; Leviticus 4:11; Numbers 16:22; 27:16; Deuteronomy 5:26; Job 34:15; Psalm 65:2; 136:25; 145:21; Isaiah 49:26; 66:16, 23, 24; Jeremiah 25:31; 32:27; 45:5; Ezekiel 20:48; 21:4; 21:5; and Joel 2:28.

continue the deep interconnectedness. While maintaining peaceable relations amongst animal and human life. Our bodies regenerate our cells because of the food we eat. By sticking close to the earth through eating a plant-based diet, Genesis keeps humans and other animals rooted in the earth. A peaceable interconnectedness seems written into animal flesh from a biblical perspective.

Hebrew Scriptures also uses “earthy” language for the human body. The human body comes from earth and dust and will inevitably become earth and dust again (Job 21:23–26; Ps 49). The existence of humans is dust (Job 7:21; 10:9; 34:14–15; Ps 90:3; 104:29; Sir 33:10). Humans share dusty bodies with other animals. Genesis depicts nonhuman animals as created by God’s word and the earth’s response to God’s command to the earth to “bring forth living creatures of every kind” (Gen 1:24).<sup>141</sup>

The creation stories also describe nonhuman animals with the same terms as humans: we are all *בְּדָם* (for animals see Gen 1:20–24; 2:19; 9:10, 15; for humans see Gen 2:7; 9:5). All animals have blood and it is in this blood that Hebrew Scriptures say is life. Even after God consents to humans eating other animals in Genesis 9, we are still forbidden to take in blood. When we add that nonhuman land animals were created on the same day as other humans, it is hard to avoid any other conclusion than that Genesis envisions other land animals as having very close proximity to humans.<sup>142</sup>

Hebrew Scriptures frequently use the term *בְּשָׂר* to refer to animal bodies. The term *בְּשָׂר* refers to cows (Gen 41:2), to oxen (Exod 21:28; 1 Kgs 19:21; Isa 22:13), to horses (Isa 31:3), to sheep (Isa 22:13), to pigs (Isa 65:4 and 66:17), to rodents (Isa 66:17),

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<sup>141</sup> Strikingly, nonhuman animals were here first, this place is their home, and God blessed them and calls them “good.” God also commands waters to bring forth creatures in Genesis 1:20.

<sup>142</sup> On this idea see Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 34.

to a crocodile or Leviathan (Job 41:23), and to quails (Num. 11:33). The term can also refer to nonhuman animals in general (Gen 7:15 or Deut 14:8). So while the term בְּשָׂר can certainly refer to humans (Exod 30:32; 1 Kgs 21:27; Ps 78:39; Isa 63:2), it refers both to specific nonhuman animals, to nonhuman animals in general, and to all living animals, humans included (Gen 6:17, 19; 7:21; 9:11, 15, 16, 17; Lev 17:14; Num 18:15; Job 34:15; and Ps 136:25). Hans Walter Wolff has shown that of the 273 occurrences of בְּשָׂר in the Tanak, 104 refer to nonhuman animals.<sup>143</sup>

The Septuagint often translates בְּשָׂר with σάρξ. Of the 267 occurrences of בְּשָׂר in the Hebrew Scriptures that the Septuagint translates, σάρξ is used 146 times.<sup>144</sup> For example, Psalm 136:25 says that God “gives food to all flesh” (בְּלִבְשָׂר). The Septuagint uses πάση σαρκί to translate בְּלִבְשָׂר (Ps 135:6 in the LXX). So the Septuagint used σάρξ in the same way the Hebrew Bible used בְּשָׂר: to refer to both human and nonhuman animals, collectively or individually.

So within one Jewish scriptural use, σάρξ has to do with having a common creaturely origin in the earth and soil and having a common destiny to return to dust. Our bodies are tied up with certain “spiritual” elements that enliven us and make us move around. Moreover, we are originally meant to live on a plant-based diet like all other animals, which keeps us connected to the earth. We have all of this in common with other animals according to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Taking on human flesh does not mean other flesh must necessarily be set aside as unimportant. Indeed, there is a strong current in the Bible that uses the term “flesh” in

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<sup>143</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 26.

<sup>144</sup> Daniel Lys, “L'Arrière-Plan et les Connotations Vétérotestamentaires de Sarx et de Sōma: Étude Préliminaire,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36, no. 2 (1986): 170.

such a way as to level out creaturely existence among all animals. The basic stance before God of all that exists is that of creation. By referring to all that we know about “creation” as distinct from God, the prologue affirms what Colin Gunton calls, “the homogeneity of the created order.”<sup>145</sup> When “the Word became flesh” the Word assumed a human flesh that has lots in common with the flesh of other types of creatures, an idea that has resonance within the Hebrew Bible. Using this Jewish scriptural background helps to keep us from making anthropocentric assumptions about the Incarnation.

The divine Word has come “into the world” and has become “flesh” and this points directly to a particular kind of flesh. The λόγος cannot enter the κόσμος except in some particular way. Nor can the Word become σάρξ in a generic sense. While σάρξ has broad implications, enfleshment can only be as a particular kind of creature. The prologue clearly makes the claim that Jesus Christ is the enfleshment of the divine Word (1:17). So while there is a wider meaning to the term “flesh” rooted in ancient Jewish literature, the prologue moves to making a particular claim about Jesus.

### **Sinful Flesh**

Karl Barth argues for a significant particularity to the prologue’s use of σάρξ. On the one hand, he says that σάρξ in 1:14 “simply denotes the vital animal nature.”<sup>146</sup> Becoming flesh obviously means taking on these general characteristics, according to

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<sup>145</sup> Colin Gunton, “The End of Causality? The Reformers and their Predecessors,” in *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. Colin Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 76. The idea of ontological homogeneity is by no means confined to Gunton. For example, philosopher William Desmond writes, “The notion of God as creator gives articulation to this ontological dependency of finite being as a whole.” See William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 251.

<sup>146</sup> Barth, *Witness to the Word*, 87.

Barth. The Word becomes human in general, for example.<sup>147</sup> However, in Barth's reading, the reason the evangelist uses σάρξ has to do with humanity in its fallen state. Simply becoming human was not enough. The Word has to become part of weak and sinful humanity.<sup>148</sup> This is the reason the evangelist uses σάρξ rather than another theologically rich word such as ἄνθρωπος, ἀνὴρ, or σῶμα. The Word does not take on just any flesh. The Word takes on the flesh that characterizes humans in their sinfulness. The λόγος assumes this sinful flesh in order to save it.

In *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, Barth calls upon the Hebrew Scriptures as witness to his interpretation of John 1:14, stating that “the Old Testament testifies pitilessly what is meant by ‘flesh.’”<sup>149</sup> But he neither backs up his statement with examples nor analyzes the Tanak's use of “flesh” at all. Hebrew Scriptures definitely use בָּשָׂר in ways that suggests weakness and the fleetingness of all life. For example, Isaiah 40:6–8 says: “All flesh (בְּלִבְשָׂר) is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (ESV translation).<sup>150</sup> I have cited numerous verses in my analysis above that speak about the fleetingness of life in general here on Earth. But the Hebrew Bible also uses בָּשָׂר/σάρξ in a fairly wide sense, and does not make a particular claim about humans alone.

Recognizing this, some theologians have claimed that nonhuman animals sin and therefore need salvation. Following Barth's reading that σάρξ makes a particular claim

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<sup>147</sup> “That the Word became a man is not the primary issue. Nor is it the point that the Word assumed human nature in general, *although this is also included.*” Ibid., 88, emphasis mine.

<sup>148</sup> See *ibid.*, 88–89.

<sup>149</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 171.

<sup>150</sup> Some English versions translate בְּלִבְשָׂר as “all people” covering up the wider semantic range of the Hebrew.

about Jesus's sinful flesh, Clough tries to show that nonhuman animals can sin. He points out that in Genesis 6 God sent a flood in response to the violence that "all flesh" had perpetrated. God made a covenant with the nonhuman animals and makes them accountable for killing humans (Gen 9:5–17). If sin means "missing the mark" or "covenant breaking" then it would seem that Genesis presupposes that nonhuman animals can sin. Moreover, the Torah enacts legislation to punish nonhuman animals for various actions, particularly if they kill a human or engage in sexual misconduct (Lev 15–16). And humans and nonhuman animals all repent when Jonah preached repentance to Nineveh (Jon 3:7–10).<sup>151</sup> Drawing on ethologists' observations about nonhuman animal behavior, Clough goes on to show how various animals both act altruistically by helping other creatures without any immediate reward and also selfishly by doing shocking things like killing their young. If sin means to forget God's command to flourish and multiply, then killing one's own young clearly falls under the rubric of sin, according to Clough.<sup>152</sup>

Given that the Hebrew Bible uses "flesh" to speak mostly about all animals, human and nonhuman, and given that Jewish Scriptures in particular frequently depict nonhuman animals as morally accountable for their actions before God (regardless of whether our modern sensibilities want to accept this or not),<sup>153</sup> it does not seem reasonable on biblical grounds to reduce the meaning of Jesus's flesh to humanity alone, if by flesh the Gospel means human sinfulness.

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<sup>151</sup> See Clough, *On Animals*, 107–109.

<sup>152</sup> See also Deane-Drummond, "Are Animals Moral?," 190–210.

<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, many modern ethologists and evolutionary theorists now believe that human morality has evolved out of the moralities already developing in our nonhuman kin. On morality in the nonhuman animal kingdom see Waal, *Peacemaking among Primates*; Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), and especially Bekoff and Pierce, *Wild Justice*.



Barth narrows the meaning of John 1:14 too much. He has brought in ideas that do not comport well with the prologue or the general trajectory of Scripture concerning the term *σάρξ*. While Clough has made a good case for extending the notion of sin to other animals, it is not clear that we must do so in order to make sense of the Word taking on flesh in the Incarnation. Within one story of salvation the Incarnation is a response to human sin. But the Incarnation might also be read more positively as God's intention all along regardless of human sin. For flesh to be relevant to other creatures, therefore, does not depend upon their ability to sin but on God's willingness to unite with all animal creatures through a specific human form.

Barth opens up the possibility for extending the Incarnation to nonhuman creation without importing notions of sinful flesh onto the Gospel when he states, “‘the Word became flesh’ also means ‘the Word became time...’ It does not remain transcendent over time, it does not merely meet it at that point, but it enters time; nay, it assumes time; nay, it creates time for itself.”<sup>154</sup> If “flesh” can mean that God takes up a concept like “time” why would “flesh” exclude nonhuman animals? If God even takes up time, then it makes sense to say that the Incarnation takes up nonhuman animals as well. Flesh moves through time, changing constantly from one moment to the next, shedding cells and replacing them with new ones so that flesh is always in a state of becoming in a certain sense. Becoming “flesh” does not necessarily indicate a static identity. The notion of taking on time signals the vulnerableness of the Incarnation: the Word taking on flesh that ages so that even one's visible identity changes.

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<sup>154</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 50.

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It makes good sense of the text to read σάρξ as narrower in scope than κόσμος. That scope is much narrower in that it refers to animal creatures in particular. The evangelist sets up a dramatic prologue that keeps us in suspense until we hear the name Jesus Christ. We do not have to posit that the author's intention was to deliberately connect Jesus to other animals to see how well such a reading fits within the prologue and Gospel. In this reading, σάρξ is a narrower term than κόσμος, but certainly a wider scope than speaking of the Word becoming human or male. Both κόσμος and σάρξ leave open the possibility to interpret the Incarnation from the particularity of humanity to nonspecies-specific implications. The prologue moves toward the particular claim that it is Jesus Christ that is the creator, sustainer, and redeemer spoken of in the first verses. The entire dramatic prologue points toward Jesus, who is rooted in the Jewish story that forms the background for the Gospel.

The Jewish scriptural background comes to the foreground after John states that the Word became flesh. The Jewish background comes forward in a way that can point us toward understanding Jesus's humanity in a very different way than we may be accustomed to doing. His humanity is deeply connected to other animals and the earth, because that is what it means to be human. The Word becomes flesh and "dwells among us" (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν—John 1:14b). The verb σκηνώω recalls yet another idea derived from the Hebrew Bible: God setting up a tent and dwelling "among humans" (Ps 78:60; οὗ κατεσκήνωσεν ἐν ἀνθρώποις in Ps 77:60, LXX). In Exodus 25:8–9 God tells Moses to make a tent (σκηνή, LXX) so that God can dwell among Israel. Christ's flesh, then, is the new dwelling place of God on earth who later in the Gospel replaces the temple (John

2:19–22). That the prologue says we see God’s “glory” (δόξα) in Christ’s flesh confirms this connection even further since “the glory of the Lord” fills the tabernacle that Moses erects in Exodus 40.

In sum, John’s prologue begins with a wide view to show that the λόγος was the one who created all things in Genesis 1, and that this same λόγος has moved to become part of creation. With an increasingly narrow focus, the prologue leads its reader from the κόσμος, to σάρξ, and finally to Jesus Christ, circling back to the idea of God the Creator at the end of the prologue. The statement that the Word became flesh is a wide theological statement with broad implications. Its background lies in the Jewish scriptural use of רֶפְשֵׁת to denote all animals, human and nonhuman, and in the idea that human and nonhuman animal life (σάρξ) is unable to sustain its own life apart from God’s providential care. Even if flesh denotes rebellion as well, this does not limit the term to humanity alone as there is plenty of Scriptural warrant—let alone the ethological evidence—to see σάρξ as meaning all animal creatures.

Now I will read other passages from the Fourth Gospel, noting how the Gospel uses the term σάρξ in a way that sharpens the Incarnation’s connection with humans and other creatures, which makes my reading of the prologue even more plausible.

### **John 3: Flesh and Spirit**

Jesus’s “flesh” becomes an important aspect of John’s Gospel. After the prologue, the next explicit use of σάρξ in the Fourth Gospel comes in chapter 3. There, Jesus speaks of “flesh” in the context of new birth as he responds to Nicodemus’s statements that Jesus is a man from God. Jesus responds in a cryptic manner by saying that a person had to be “born again” (γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν—John 3:3). Nicodemus fails to see that Jesus is using

birth differently than a literal biological sense. John's Gospel uses ἄνωθεν as "from above" rather than "again," which connects the term to the Holy Spirit (3:6).<sup>155</sup> Jesus speaks in eschatological tones about how a person must be transformed. Every human is born "of the flesh" but to enter God's kingdom requires a birth from the Spirit (3:6). By contrasting σὰρξ with πνεῦμα Jesus does not set up a dualism in which spirit and flesh compete with one another. Nor does he say that the flesh is evil or imply a pejorative meaning for the flesh. A person has to be born in the flesh to even receive the Spirit. That is the ground or condition for being "born again." This use of σὰρξ connects to the prologue (1:13), where children of God are "not born of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God." In both cases, flesh is not evil. Flesh is powerless. Only God can rebirth a person in the Spirit. But this transformation does not mean a person becomes disconnected from their earthly life. Rather, Jesus suggests that this new birth draws out the true meaning of birth in the flesh so that a person can live differently.

### **John 6: Eating Jesus's Flesh**

The next explicit use of σὰρξ in the John's Gospel is in chapter 6 in Jesus's discourse on the bread of life. The larger context connects Jesus's speech to his miraculous feeding of five thousand people (6:1–15). In that miracle, Jesus takes a meager offering from a little boy of a few loaves and a couple fishes and somehow Jesus is able to distribute a large enough quantity to the crowd that the people were not only satisfied but the disciples gathered up twelve baskets full of left-over bread (6:13).

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<sup>155</sup> See the entry for ἄνωθεν in Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 92.

The story is rich with allusion: the time of the feeding is near the Passover (6:4) but the people do not go to Jerusalem, but to Jesus, foreshadowing a shift in the locus of worship from the temple to Jesus.<sup>156</sup> The place is on a mountain (6:3, 15), bringing to mind the various stories taking place on mountains such as Moses and the burning bush (Exod 3:1–4:17), the Mount Sinai theophany (Exod 24:15–18; 32:15–16), Elijah’s theophany where God comes in a silence or quiet wind (1 Kgs 19:8–18), and Elijah being fed bread by ravens (1 Kgs 17:89). The food calls to mind the bread from heaven in Exodus 16–17 but also a Jewish eschatological banquet in which the elect would “eat and rest and rest with that Son of Man forever and ever” (1 Enoch 62:12–14). The Messiah would gather “from the four quarters of the world” the kingdom of Israel to eat with him (1 Enoch 48:10). The food at this eschatological banquet is often bread, which they refer to as manna or “heavenly food” (2 Bar 29:8).

While the meals seem to be largely vegetarian (bread and grapes), 2 Baruch thinks that the elect will also eat the great sea monsters of chaos, Leviathan and Behemoth (2 Bar 29:4–5, see also Psalm 74:13 where God gives the sea monsters as food for wild animals but not for humans). The fish, then, are part of the traditional imagery of an eschatological banquet that is otherwise plant-based.<sup>157</sup> But the fish in John’s telling play a minor part and disappear entirely once Jesus speaks. The bread (ἄρτος) plays the most important role. Both in the leftovers and in the later telling about why the crowds have followed Jesus, the evangelist emphasizes the bread alone (John 6:23, 26).

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<sup>156</sup> On the chronological problems with the Passover in the Gospel of John see Michael Daise, *Feasts in John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 104–52. Lining up John’s Gospel with actual historical events is difficult. But my analysis is not dependent upon any historical reconstruction of Jesus’s life from the Gospel of John. I am more interested in how the Johannine community used the word ἄρτος in an expansive manner that is not anthropocentric, thus opening up the possibilities for seeing the Incarnation more broadly than many theologians have.

<sup>157</sup> Perhaps this eschatological image is one reason we find Jesus using fish to feed others and even eating a piece of some kind of fish in Luke 24:42–43.

After this miracle, Jesus retreats in solitude so the crowd cannot “take him by force and make him king” (6:15). After walking on water to find the disciples, according to John’s Gospel, Jesus and the disciples go to the other side of the lake, but the crowd followed them in boats. Jesus accuses the crowd of following him only because he gave them bread (6:26). The crowd responds by asking for more bread, this time explicitly calling upon the manna story from Exodus 16 (John 6:31). At this point Jesus gives the famous bread of life speech.

Jesus tells the crowd that he is “the bread of life” and that the manna people ate in the wilderness did not keep them from dying. But Jesus is the bread of life that can keep people alive forever: “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh (ἡ σὰρξ μου)” (6:48–51). This confuses the crowd: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (6:52). Undeterred, Jesus declares the necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood (6:52–58).<sup>158</sup> In the discourse, the word σὰρξ comes up six times, the word αἷμα (blood) four times, and each time that Jesus speaks the words have the pronoun “my” attached, making it clear that the “flesh and blood” the people must consume is Jesus himself.<sup>159</sup> Jesus’s flesh dies and rises again. It gives and sustains life. But Jesus does not mean that his flesh and blood only give and sustain our physical lives in the present, but that his flesh gives us an eschatological life (eternal life). Jesus’s flesh becomes “meat.”

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<sup>158</sup> Bultmann sees John 6:51–58 as a later insertion that we can delete from the text without taking anything away from the narrative flow. Instead of ἐσθίω, this section uses τρώγω for “eating” and connects Jesus’s flesh with the Eucharist like other New Testament passages (Mark 14:23; Matt 26:27; Luke 22:17; and 1 Cor 11:24). So the discourse is a patchwork of redaction rather than a unity. See Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 234–37. Other commentators, however, resist Bultmann’s suggestion seeing the entire discourse as an increasing disclosure with repetition. Peder Borgen, for example, sees the entire discourse as a commentary on Exodus 16:15, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.” See Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 40–42.

<sup>159</sup> In particular, the idea of “drinking blood” would have been offensive to Jewish hearers. Leviticus 17:10–14 explicitly forbids drinking blood. The covenant between God and Noah forbids Noah and his family to consume an animal’s blood (Gen 9:4–5). See Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 303.

The Word becomes “meat.” This meat replaces the paschal lamb. This grotesque imagery begins to problematize the divisions between human flesh and nonhuman animal “meat.”

Here in John 6, σάρξ has a broad significance as Jesus speaks about himself as “bread.” Jesus, the risen Christ, becomes present to the community as they partake in the Eucharist.<sup>160</sup> John does not associate the Eucharist with the Last Supper as do the Synoptic Gospels (see Mark 14:12–21; Matt 26:17–25; Luke 22:14–23). Instead John’s Gospel associates the Eucharist with the feeding of the five thousand and the subsequent bread of life discourse. In John 6:11 we read, “Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted” (ἔλαβεν οὖν τοὺς ἄρτους ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ εὐχαριστήσας διέδωκεν τοῖς ἀνακειμένοις ὁμοίως καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρίων ὅσον ἤθελον). Key words from this verse appear in the Synoptic accounts: ἔλαβεν . . . τοὺς ἄρτους and εὐχαριστήσας. All three Synoptic Gospels use εὐχαριστήσας (Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17; see also 1 Cor 11:24). The Synoptics and 1 Corinthians 11 depict Jesus as claiming the bread is his body and the wine is his blood, while John 6 parallels the idea about bread saying that his “flesh” is the bread of life.<sup>161</sup>

The most important point is that σάρξ in the Gospel of John can readily be interpreted in a way that severely problematizes any attempt to focus on Jesus’s humanity as set apart from other types of creatures. In this case, Jesus’s flesh becomes the plant-based diet that sustained Israel during a trying time of sojourn through a hostile

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<sup>160</sup> On the Eucharistic undertones see *ibid.*, 84–85; Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I–XII*, 248; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 163 and Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 99–100.

<sup>161</sup> In the Synoptics, Jesus tells the disciples to eat (ἐσθίω) his body (σῶμα) while John heightens the language by saying that followers must “crunch” (τρώγω) his “flesh” (σάρξ). On τρώγω see the entry in Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1019.

environment. In the Exodus story as well, God sends some quail at one point, and in the evening God sends “manna” which the Israelites ate for forty years (Exod 16:35). The narrative emphasizes the bread. The quail barely get a mention and have no real importance in the story since it is the heavenly bread that sustains the Israelites. It is important to note that Jesus does not compare his flesh to the fish or the quail, a natural thing to do with the word σάρξ given how it is used in Hebrew scriptures to refer to nonhuman animals. Instead, Jesus speaks about his flesh as bread that does not require the disciples to intentionally kill other animal creatures for human spiritual survival.

Jesus, in the Gospel of John’s telling, uses σάρξ in a very different way than the Hebrew Bible normally used it for human and nonhuman animal life. But this does not mean that σάρξ in this context has no bearing on nonhuman animal life. It is noteworthy that Jesus does not compare his flesh to dead animal flesh that people might have eaten as well. His flesh, in some sense, saves nonhuman animals from becoming ritual victims in the worship life of the community and re-establishes “bread” from Exodus 16 and the plant-based diet from Genesis 1 as the important element for sustaining life.<sup>162</sup> I will return to this theme in later chapters.

### **John 17: All flesh**

The next reference to σάρξ in the Fourth Gospel comes in Jesus’s long prayer in chapter 17. In the prayer’s opening, Jesus says, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh (ἐξουσίαν πάσης σαρκός), to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (John

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<sup>162</sup> Clement of Alexandria compared the Word become flesh to the Tree of Life in Genesis 2. See *Stromateis*, 5.11.72.2–4. It is not unheard of or novel, therefore, in Christian reflection, to refer back to the accounts of creation in the first chapters of Genesis when thinking of Jesus’s flesh.



17:1–2). The phrase “all flesh” could refer to all humans or more broadly to all living creatures. The NRSV makes human beings alone the focus of Jesus’s words, translating πάσης σαρκός as “all people.” Yet the phrase echoes the Hebrew לֶכֶּל־בָּשָׂר that the Septuagint translates with πᾶσα σὰρξ. To give yet another example, Leviticus 17:14 says that when a person hunts an animal and kills it for food, the person should not eat or drink the creature’s blood because the blood of “every creature” or of “all flesh” is its life (ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ πάσης σαρκὸς αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, LXX).

The NRSV masks another problem with its translation of the next phrase: “to give eternal life to all (πᾶν) whom you have given him.” The underlying Greek word for “all” is in the neuter case. But we would expect a masculine form if the phrase referred solely to humanity (ὁ ἄνθρωπος). Brown and other commentators resolve the discrepancy by saying that the neuter “all” in 17:2 refers to the later neuter “one” in John 17:21–23.<sup>163</sup> But other commentators suggest that the neuter πᾶν in 17:2 suggests, like “all flesh,” a wider scope than humans alone.<sup>164</sup> Dorothy Lee argues that a wide purview makes sense because of parallels between John 17:1–5 and the prologue. Authority, life, glory, preexistence, and an intimacy between the Father and Son preoccupy both passages.<sup>165</sup> Lee comments that Jesus “turns toward” (John 1:18) the Father in prayer, addressing the Father intimately as the source of life who gives the Son authority over all things.

Reading the prayer in light of the Prologue thus makes a difference to the way we interpret 17:2. Apart from anything else, it is clear that there is nothing negative

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<sup>163</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John, XIII-XXI* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 741. See also Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 502.

<sup>164</sup> See Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2002), 44.

<sup>165</sup> See *ibid* and Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel according to St. John* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), 198.

about the understanding of flesh as it is presented here. As with the Prologue, Johannine Christology is rooted in creation as the fundamental manifestation of the Son's dominion. Thus, while at one level, flesh in 17:2 refers to human beings and their capacity to enter a knowing relationship with God through Jesus, at the same time, understood more comprehensively, "all flesh" is synonymous with "all things" in creation, for which the Logos is the source of life.<sup>166</sup>

Following Lee and other commentators' reading, therefore, Jesus's words about "all flesh" in John 17 hearken back to the prologue, which states that ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. The same Redeemer who has taken on flesh has authority over all flesh. "Flesh addresses flesh in this cosmic context," writes Lee.<sup>167</sup>

The most compelling case, however, from within the Fourth Gospel for interpreting σὰρξ in a non-species specific manner comes from the bread of life discourse in which Jesus explicitly expands the meaning of σὰρξ to refer to nonhuman creation: bread. That Jesus's flesh becomes bread, and the bread becomes Jesus's flesh, confounds a species barrier and opens up the Incarnation to a broader purview than saving humanity alone. All of this has resonance with the interpretation of John 1:14 beginning with Andrew Linzey's insight that the passage would surely have relevance to all mammals and to more recent interpretations of a "deep Incarnation."

### **1 John 4:2**

Other passages in Johannine literature also speak of σὰρξ in connection to the Incarnation. 1 John 4:2 states: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in

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<sup>166</sup> Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 44–45.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

the flesh is from God (ὁ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔστιν).” Commentators and translators have read the statement in 4:2 in several ways. The debate surrounding the passage centers on two issues: first, the grammatical construction, which bears on what content a person should confess, and second, whether the author intended to emphasize an aspect or rule out other expressions. Scholars have interpreted the passage in four primary ways:

1. *That Jesus is the Messiah who has come in the flesh.* The emphasis here is on confessing that Jesus is the Messiah. The secessionists from the Johannine community, in this view, were denying that Jesus the man was the Messiah. The issue is Jesus’s identity. Some interpreters think that the author is opposing a group that distinguished between the historical Jesus and the heavenly Messiah. The author of 1 John is saying that the historical fleshly Jesus is the divine Messiah. The problem with this translation is that it adds both a definite article to Christ and the verb “is” neither of which are in the Greek. Instead, “Jesus Christ” seems to function as a proper name itself in 1 John (1:3; 2:1; 3:23; and 5:6, 20).<sup>168</sup>

2. *That Jesus Christ has come/having come in the flesh.* The emphasis is on Jesus Christ coming to us. There is more stress in this translation in the belief in the Incarnation as a fact. The Son’s “coming into the world to bring salvation” is what is most important in the confession.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> See Neil Alexander, *The Epistles of John* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 103; C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Harper, 1946), 100–101 and John Stott, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 157–59. This is an older view out of favor with modern interpreters who all argue for one of the following three options.

<sup>169</sup> David Rensberger, *The Epistles of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 69. See also J. L. Houlden, *The Johannine Epistles*, 2nd ed. (London: A & C Black, 1994), 106–107; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 205; Jay E. McDermond, *1, 2, 3 John* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 208–209; Rudolph Schackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (New

3. *That* Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh*. This interpretation stresses that Jesus took on flesh. The secessionists the author is preaching against may have denied that the Son could take on the material world but only “appeared” to be human. Because these opponents treat the material world as evil, the author of 1 John is making the fleshiness of Jesus a confessional issue.<sup>170</sup>

4. Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. In this view the entire statement is the confession. The emphasis is on the confession itself, highlighting the person of Jesus with no separation from the role of Christ, and Jesus’s ministry in the flesh.<sup>171</sup>

Regardless of which interpretation(s) one finds most compelling, the text still states that Jesus Christ came ἐν σαρκί (“in flesh”). Commentators who view the third option as most plausible have said the most about why the author might have used the term σάρξ. For them the issue is Docetism. Raymond Brown, by contrast, argues that there is very little textual evidence for a docetic teaching to which the statement would be responding.<sup>172</sup> The issue is not that some people are denying the material reality of the Incarnation, but that “they are denying that what Jesus was or did in the flesh was related to his being the Christ, i.e., was salvific.”<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, σάρξ still has to be interpreted even if the other interpretations are plausible readings.

The only other place the term appears in this letter is in 2:16, where it carries a negative connotation: “lust of the flesh” (ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκός). Lust of the flesh belongs

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York: Crossroads, 1992), 200–201; Stephen Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 212.

<sup>170</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 38, 62; Thomas Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 95; Colin Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 15–18; D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, and Third John* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 99 and Robert Yarbrough, *1-3 John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 223.

<sup>171</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 492–94 and Peter Rhea Jones, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2009), 165–66.

<sup>172</sup> Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 493–94.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 505.

to what is in the world and is fleeting. According to Bultmann, 1 John 2:16 uses flesh in a way that opposes God and is incompatible with what is of God.<sup>174</sup> But God has challenged the oppositional way of seeing the world and flesh by sending the Son “into the world” (4:9, 14). Just as the false prophets went “into the world” (4:1) and the antichrist “came” and “went” in the world (2:18-19; 4:1, 3), so too God has sent the Son into the world, removing any doubt about what any appearance from the Son might mean. Jesus Christ was here in a physical form, in this world. But this is a different use of σάρξ from what we find in 1 John 4:2.

In my view, “flesh” in 1 John 4:2 should be interpreted within a broader range of biblical and early Christian affirmations in which “flesh” denotes the sphere of creaturely activity. In addition to the passages already examined above, 1 Clement uses the term σάρξ in ways that have bearing on biblical interpretation because they show us a sphere of use in the ancient world. 1 Clement speaks about the way God as “Creator of the universe” and the “primal source of all creation” can forgive sins and save people from their destructive tendencies. “You alone,” Clement prays, “are the Benefactor of spirits and the God of all flesh” (θεὸν πάσης σαρκός).<sup>175</sup> Through God’s works God has “revealed the everlasting structure of the world” (τὴν ἀέναον τοῦ κόσμου).<sup>176</sup> Because of this God is able to give “harmony and peace” to “all who dwell on the earth” which includes every creature.<sup>177</sup> The “Lord of all flesh” (κύριος πάσης σαρκός) is a God of peace and will grant it to creatures.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, 33–34.

<sup>175</sup> *1 Clement*, 59 in Michael W. Holmes, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 2nd, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 94, 95.

<sup>176</sup> *1 Clement*, 60, in *ibid.*, 96, 97.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *1 Clement*, 64, in *ibid.*, 100, 101.

Regardless of which interpretation makes the best sense of 1 John 4:2, *σάρξ* should not be strictly limited to Jesus's humanness as most commentators have done. For instance, David Rensberger says that this "rather obscurely worded formulation" seems to mean "Jesus, the divine Christ and Son of God, entered the world as a physical, mortal human being."<sup>179</sup> In other words, the main point for the author of 1 John is that Jesus became human.

Jesus was human. But focusing exclusively on the Word becoming human as an interpretation obscures how the term *σάρξ* connotes something broader than the word *ἄνθρωπος*. Even if Brown is correct that the original context involved denying Jesus's earthly ministry any salvific value, not denying the material reality of the Incarnation, that does not preclude theologians today from seeing in this passage a further pattern. Humans are part of a larger material world. Georg Strecker, for example, suggests this when he interprets "flesh" as "the sphere of the tangible and mutable."<sup>180</sup> Humans are part of this sphere but not the only part.

Whether at the time of 1 John or later, some Christians saw the material world as too problematic for the Son to truly assume. Brown argues that the docetic denial of Jesus's bodily reality is a later phenomenon. Later Christians used the Johannine statements about "flesh," which originally were not about denying physical reality but

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<sup>179</sup> Rensberger, *The Epistles of John*, 5. See Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 95; Smith, *First, Second, and Third John*, 99; Marianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 114 and Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 223.

<sup>180</sup> Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 134-35. Peter Rhea Jones, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2009), 165-66 steers clear of any anthropocentric statements. He does not state that "flesh" equals "humanity," thereby excluding a wider viewpoint. Instead, he sticks to the biblical term and discusses how early Christians viewed it as well as modern interpretations. J.L. Houlden also avoids anthropocentric statements, preferring instead to discuss the way some Christians would have seen "flesh" as a hindrance to true salvation which is spiritual. See J.L. Houlden, *The Johannine Epistles* 2nd ed. (London, A and C Black, 1994), 106-107. Judith Lieu, likewise, avoids interpreting flesh in this passage in such a way that would exclude a wider understanding. Judith Lieu, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 165-70.

salvific value to Jesus's earthly ministry, in this new context. The later interpreters were not misreading the text, but using it for different purposes. The later patristic arguments were, according to Brown, arguments with those who did not identify Jesus of Nazareth with the Son of God and regarded the bodily form of Jesus as a mere apparition. The Son of God only "seemed" to be in a material body. The Son of God could not become trapped in a body and soul, which were made by lesser, demonic spirits. Instead the Son of God appeared as a human, without truly becoming part of the material world, so as to release true human spirits from their imprisonment in bodies and souls. The human spirit is related to the Son by virtue of its light nature and once released would fly to the heavens. But only the spirit that knows how to break free would do so.<sup>181</sup>

For these later Christians, the issue was not simply whether the Son could or would become a human body, but whether God created this material world, whether this material world is therefore good, and whether salvation means redeeming this material world or escaping from it. Patristic authors used the Johannine Epistles and the Gospel of John to combat this view, regardless of its original intent. It meant something new in this new context.

We should not be bound today by the original intent, about which we are unsure in any case. We can follow the patristic method of using these Scriptures in our own context. We can admit and respect the texts for what they were, while still pressing them into service today for a broader argument in light of new insights and new problems. Today, in light of what we know about the deep biological and evolutionary connection humans share with other creatures, we can legitimately say that those who deny Jesus's

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<sup>181</sup> On these ideas in relation to Johannine literature see Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

connection to all other creatures are in some sense denying his “flesh,” even if that is not the original meaning of the passage.

Flesh stands in for a larger material reality. Today we can even interpret it as having to do with the bodies we have in common with all other animals. God created this animal flesh and took it on so that we might have a chance to move beyond such things as murder, a sin Cain committed (1 John 3:12). If there is any term in 1 John that refers primarily to the human world it is “world” (κόσμος). In 1 John, unlike the Gospel of John, which has a more complex use of the term κόσμος, here it seems to mean human society and culture over against “flesh,” which is the material reality that God created. Flesh can serve the κόσμος or God. Jesus shows us the way of the flesh within God’s reign.

So here in John’s First Epistle, σάρξ stands in for a reality that includes humanity but is also beyond humanness and refers to creaturely animality in general. Animality can be something that is joyous, but it can also be painful and community breaking. The Son took on this animality and redeemed this flesh so that we can have joy and fellowship.

## **2 John 7**

2 John reaffirms what 1 John states about the Incarnation. “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (ἐν σαρκί); any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!” (2 John 7). One way to read this is that these are people who “do evil” as a result of their denying the Incarnation’s material reality.

Once again, Raymond Brown argues that the issue is not docetic views that deny Jesus’s material body, but that some people denied his earthly ministry had any salvific



value. The Johannine community insists that “the coming was not completed by the incarnation but continued in the kind of life Jesus lived (‘in the flesh’).”<sup>182</sup> Moreover, the opponents who deny “the coming one” in the flesh also deny the eschatological second coming, according to Brown.

This is a very short letter to a group of believers that centers on this exhortation to confess that the Word has come in flesh and to deny fellowship to those who do not. Even if Brown is correct that the opponents of the Johannine community were denying Jesus’s ministry salvific value and perhaps also denying the second coming, theologians have always used this passage and parallels like it in new contexts to address new concerns without necessarily distorting the sense of the passage. We can do so today as well. Jesus’s flesh connects with other creatures in a larger creaturely reality. This respects the context and brings in Jewish notions of this connection into our own time, where it is desperately needed in theological debate.

### **1 Timothy 3:16**

Johannine literature is not the only place that refers to the Incarnation in terms of “flesh.” 1 Timothy 3:16 contains an early seventeen-word Christological hymn.<sup>183</sup> The author presents the hymn as if it is well known in the community rather than as a novel

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<sup>182</sup> Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 686.

<sup>183</sup> Once again the commentators generally read “flesh” in a purely anthropocentric way. See Raymond Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 108; Benjamin Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 85; W. Hulitt Gloer, *1 and 2 Timothy–Titus* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2010), 162; William Hendriksen, *1-2 Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 140; George Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 184; George Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 88–89; William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 227; Thomas Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 44; Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 276; Risto Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 73 and Robert Wall, *1 and 2 Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 115.

composition. The author says that the community confesses this hymn as part of their traditional worship. In his commentary, Robert Wall says that 1 Timothy 3:16 “is arguably the passage of *gravitas* in this letter, if not of the Pastoral Epistles as a collection.”<sup>184</sup> Philip Towner says that this hymn is a “capsule summary of the gospel.”<sup>185</sup>

The hymn begins with a basic affirmation: “he was manifested in the flesh (ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί).” The earliest Christians interpreted this phrase as referring to the Incarnation. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, for instance, uses this phrase several times (5.6; 6.7, 9; 12.10).<sup>186</sup> On the one hand the phrase indicates that the Son pre-existed the Incarnation. On the other hand, the phrase emphasizes Jesus’s bodily reality. The phrase could both refer to the life of Jesus and also the bodily Resurrection.<sup>187</sup> There is no good reason to exclude either, nor is there any good reason to see them as mutually exclusive. As a form of poetry, the references run deeper than single referents.

But the hymn uses the term “flesh” rather than “human.” “Flesh” contrasts with the “vindication” the Son receives in “the Spirit” (ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι). So the hymn uses “flesh” to refer to a material reality writ large, and “spirit” to refer to another reality that bears upon the material. Jesus was both “flesh” and “spirit.” Flesh and spirit do not oppose one another *per se* in this letter.

So the term σάρξ in this hymn refers to something broader than humanity. The Son was “manifested” in the realm of “flesh” which would include all kinds of creatures.

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<sup>184</sup> Wall, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 111.

<sup>185</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 276.

<sup>186</sup> See *The Epistle of Barnabas* in Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

<sup>187</sup> Collins presents both views. See Collins, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 108–109.

### 1 Peter 3:18 and 4:1

1 Peter contains some further clues to seeing the Incarnation in broader terms than just dealing with humanity. 1 Peter 3:18–22 contains early hymn material.<sup>188</sup> Like the hymn in 1 Timothy 4, this hymn-like passage also speaks of Jesus’s “flesh”:<sup>189</sup>

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. *He was put to death in the flesh*, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

This passage contains some of the most enigmatic Greek in the New Testament and is the most debated passage in 1 Peter due to some of the doctrinal issues that arise (for instance, whether the dead can repent). Even the line that is most pertinent for my argument—“He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit”—is much debated.

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<sup>188</sup> On this passage as an early hymn that has been redacted and pressed into prose see M. Eugene Boring, *1 Peter* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 137–38.

<sup>189</sup> Several scholars have noted the similarities between 1 Timothy 4 and 1 Peter 3:18–22. See Craddock, *First and Second Peter and Jude*, 61; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 253; David Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Peterborough, UK: Epworth Press, 1998), 70 and J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London: A & C Black, 1969), 151.

For most of Christian history, theologians have interpreted this passage as referring to different aspects of Jesus. “Flesh” refers to Jesus’s human aspect while “spirit” refers to his soul, or more precisely, his soul united with his divinity. Augustine, for instance, wrote a long letter dealing with the issues in 1 Peter 3:18-22. He was particularly disturbed by the ideas of Jesus preaching only to those up to the time of Noah and the idea that the dead might repent of their sins. But Augustine also took pains to make sure his reader did not interpret Jesus’s death “in the flesh” to mean that his “soul” died as well. “When Jesus was put to death for us in the flesh, who would dare assert that His soul was also killed, that is, his life-giving principle as man, when there is no death for the soul except through sin.”<sup>190</sup> Peter meant only that Jesus’s body died, but Jesus’s soul lived on to preach to the dead. Jesus’s body was revived when his soul was reunited to the body by an action of the Spirit. But the Son “created a soul for Himself as He creates for the rest of mankind, but His did not mingle with sinful flesh . . . For He took the true substance of flesh from the Virgin.”<sup>191</sup>

Modern scholars have largely abandoned the traditional reading that sees the flesh and spirit as different aspects of Jesus. To modern readers, this way of reading 1 Peter imports an anthropology that too sharply splits a person into two “parts.” That split is foreign to the biblical thought. Instead modern scholars read, “He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” in several different ways:

1. Some scholars interpret “in the flesh” as a dative of agency so that  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$  refers to “humanity.” Read this way, the passage would say that Jesus was “killed by

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<sup>190</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 164. In *St. Augustine’s Letters 131-164* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), 395.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

humans, but made alive by the Spirit.”<sup>192</sup> Although this interpretation reads the datives in a parallel manner and gives personal agency to the term “spirit,” σάρξ appears a few more times as a dative in 1 Peter 4:1, and the clear meaning is not to “humanity” but to Jesus’s material body.

2. Most contemporary scholars interpret “in the flesh” to mean Jesus’s mortal nature as a creature in general. The datives are datives of “sphere” that denote ways of living: in the flesh or in the spirit. These are modes of existence not parts of Jesus.<sup>193</sup> William Dalton states this view well: “the flesh-spirit distinction . . . refers to two orders of being, the flesh representing human nature in its weakness, its proclivity to evil, its actual evil once it opposes the influence of God; the spirit representing the consequence of God’s salvation, the presence and activity among us of the Spirit of God.”<sup>194</sup> In this reading, we should interpret the datives σαρκί and πνεύματι in different ways. But 1 Timothy 3:16 most likely does this as well.

3. A slightly modified view of the second reading interprets “flesh” as referring to Jesus’s body, without it being an issue of mortality per se.<sup>195</sup>

4. Some modern scholars interpret the fleshly “sphere” in decidedly anthropocentric terms. Joel Green states, “‘human’ translates σάρξ (*sarx*), which for Peter

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<sup>192</sup> See Paul Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 250; Douglas Harink, *1 and 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 98n14; Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 70 and Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2010), 174.

<sup>193</sup> See William Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), 138; Peter Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 136–37; Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 201; Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 253–54; Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 135; Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 156; Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 150–51; C.P. Senior, Donald P., *1 Peter* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 101 and Duane F. Watson and Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 88–89.

<sup>194</sup> Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits*, 138.

<sup>195</sup> See Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 113 and J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 204.

has to do with ‘life as it is reflects and/or pertains to this world’ (1:24; 3:18, 21; 4:1, 2, 6).”<sup>196</sup> Likewise, J. N. D. Kelly says, “By flesh is meant Christ in His human sphere of existence, considered as a man among men.”<sup>197</sup> For these scholars, *σάρξ* means “human” and they do not discuss what this dative of “sphere” might mean for other creatures.

5. Other scholars either avoid making such anthropocentric statements, or better, connect “flesh” to a wider issue beyond humanity. Commenting on this passage, Fred Craddock states, “When the church seeks to express in today’s terms and categories the convictions of this hymn, it suffers the poverty of language. Christ is Lord of all life. The truth about God revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is that no one—past, present, or future—lies outside or beyond that seeking and saving love. In fact, not only human life but also all life is the object of God’s care. Thoughtless exploitation of the earth, sea, and sky are therefore acts contrary to the love and providence of God.”<sup>198</sup> While Craddock brings out a reading that has implications for how humans treat inanimate creation, it is striking that he says nothing about the main creatures that would have “flesh” in common with humans: nonhuman animals. Instead Craddock highlights environmental concerns.

Indeed, the hymn as a whole beckons the hearer beyond his or her personal suffering, beyond their own community, beyond the Mediterranean world to consider the cosmic significance of Christ’s death and resurrection.<sup>199</sup> 1 Peter 3:20 mentions that eight humans were saved in Noah’s ark and then oddly compares this to Christian baptism. The

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<sup>196</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 135.

<sup>197</sup> Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 151.

<sup>198</sup> Craddock, *First and Second Peter and Jude*, 64.

<sup>199</sup> This reading opens up the cosmic Christ focus that Clough and Deane-Drummond highlight in their respective work. My argument is not that we should ignore the cosmic Christ interpretation, but that it has to pass through the filter of particularity first. We see the cosmic significance from a particular vantage point.

mention of the ark, in which God not only saved humans, but also saved all other animals, coincides well with interpreting “flesh” as a term that includes but also reaches beyond the human body. 1 Peter does not mention that God also saved other creatures, but then his use of the ark story is not systematic. He merely refers to the larger story. While the author may have overlooked the other creatures, in light of his own reference it is neither illegitimate to point out that the God of all flesh saved humans and nonhuman animals alike in the ark, nor to point out that this idea coincides well with his own use of *σάρξ*, regardless of whether he intended to bring this wider meaning to the foreground.<sup>200</sup>

#### **Excursus: 1 Corinthian 15:38–41**

Although the passage from 1 Corinthians 15:38–40 does not deal directly with the Incarnation, it is possible that somebody might object to my reading based on this lone passage. In it the apostle Paul says: “Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory” (1 Cor 15:39–41). One way to read this is to make a sharp distinction between humans and all other creatures. Each type of creature has its own “flesh” so that the Word takes on this particular human flesh, not other flesh. The issue is about identity. We can be recognized by our flesh.

Yet by talking about flesh at all, Paul has recognized that there is a category or genus called flesh. He uses the term flesh to describe different types of animals: humans,

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<sup>200</sup> Indeed, such a reading may allow us to interrogate 1 Peter in helpful ways as to why he would leave out the other creatures that are so important to the story of Noah and the ark.

“animals,” birds, and fish—the various categories from Genesis 1 (and uses the term “body” for inanimate creation). This is in line with the Jewish scriptural use of “all flesh.” Flesh here is nearly equivalent to the term “animal.” Paul is only saying there are different kinds or species of the genus flesh. There are different types of animals. Not everyone is the same. Paul is making a fairly basic claim that in no way overshadows the all-encompassing sense of flesh that we see in the Tanak and that I am arguing is present elsewhere in the New Testament with regard to the Incarnation and flesh. Flesh is the genus of the different types: human flesh, “animal” flesh, and bird flesh, fish flesh. But human, animal, bird, and fish are modifiers, that is, they are not the genus but the species.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined the use of σάρξ in key biblical passages that deal with the Incarnation or confessing the Incarnation in church life. The Gospel of John provides the most useful material for grounding all of creation in Christology and the Incarnation. Opening with broad strokes, John’s Gospel states that the λόγος who created all things has become part of the world in which we live. From there the evangelist narrows the focus further stating that the “Word became flesh,” a statement with exciting possibilities since the term σάρξ connects so well with Jewish scriptural ideas about flesh and animality being unable to sustain its own life without God’s care. Flesh has Jewish roots.

The Gospel of John uses σάρξ fairly consistently with these broad outlines. Jesus’s bread of life discourse explicitly opens up σάρξ to the nonhuman world by connecting his flesh to a plant-based food. By doing so Jesus connects his own life as the Incarnate Son of God to a wider purview than humanity alone. But it is not just in what



Jesus says his flesh is (bread), but what he does not say: σάρξ in the Tanak connects to animality. It would have been easy for Jesus to connect his flesh to eating other animals, since σάρξ generally has that connection. But Jesus replaces animals with bread, hearkening back to the manna episodes in Exodus 16 and the plant-based diet mandate in Genesis 1. In Christian worship, killing other animals whom the Hebrew Bible connects with humans in very intimate ways has no place in Christian worship. This is an issue I will return to in chapter 3 when I look at animal sacrifices in Jewish thought.

First, however, it seems useful to look at how a few patristic authors used the statement that the “Word became flesh.” So in the next chapter I will look at Athanasius and John of Damascus who explicitly used the prologue’s central statement to talk about the Incarnation in ways that open up the possibility to see the Incarnation’s particularity as having relevance for how we think about other animals theologically.

## CHAPTER 2 THE WORD BECAME MATTER

In the first chapter I looked at how the New Testament uses the idea that the “Word became flesh.” I argued that the term has deep roots in Old Testament notions that connect human and nonhuman animal life, along with ideas that connect the Incarnation to nonhuman creation: Jesus is the bread of life, which not only connects him to plant life but also has relevance for nonhuman animals in that consuming them is no longer the focus of messianic life. Flesh is a term that covers the deeply interconnected layers of all life: human life cannot exist without the rest of creation. So the Incarnation must touch upon and have relevance for nonhuman animals for humans to be saved: we are all in this together. This is a deeply Jewish idea rooted in Scriptures. But the idea seems radically new today. If it is such a traditional idea, how did the early Christians see the idea of the Word becoming flesh?

In the patristic era, authors often cited John 1:14. So in the first section of this chapter I will describe the how patristic authors used the Gospel of John’s statement that the Word became flesh. Broadly speaking, when Christian authors in the first three centuries used “the Word became flesh” they do so in a polemical setting to demonstrate the reality of the Incarnation over against other Christologies. That is, they generally used it in apologetics rather than in constructive theology. This, I believe, kept the doctrine of the Incarnation from developing its fullest potential.

Yet there were two theologians who attempted to broaden constructively the idea of the Word becoming flesh to include the nonhuman world: Athanasius (ca. 296–373 CE) and John of Damascus (d. 754 CE). For Athanasius, the statement that the Word

became flesh had special prominence. For example, in his *Orations against the Arians*, Athanasius quotes John 1:14 at least 42 times.<sup>201</sup> He uses John 1:14 as hermeneutical key to scriptural interpretation against the Arians. Yet my interest in Athanasius is not in his explicit quotations of “the Word became flesh” but in how he expanded from the Gospel of John to speak about the Incarnation in a way that can include more than humanity. Similarly, John of Damascus uses John 1:14 as a key element in his defense of using icons in Christian worship. But he does so in a way that suggests that the particularity of the Incarnation is not tied to humanity alone. Both of these authors provide a resource and example of Christological thinking on the Incarnation that moves beyond anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, at the same time that they represent a direction toward an expansive Incarnation, they both make moves that undermine their best theological trajectories. They do this, I will argue, by not paying enough attention to Jesus’s particularities. So they stand as examples of positive directions that deep incarnation theology is now taking, but their theologies are also a warning about ignoring the Incarnation’s particularities.

### **The Word Became Flesh: Early Christian Uses**

When Christians in the first three centuries used John 1:14 they did so within the context of debates about God’s relationships to creation. How could God have created a world so full of evil? Various Gnostic groups came up with slightly different answers to this question, but all of them distanced the Creator from creation through some kind of mediating entities. These Christians attempted to make sense of Jesus within a

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<sup>201</sup> James Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 154. Ernest says that John 1:14 is a “touchstone” text that Athanasius uses as a hermeneutical key by which to interpret other Scriptural passages such as Philippians 2. Athanasius and the Arians largely argued over interpretation of the Bible. On this see Peter Leithart, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 33–39.

philosophical framework. I will briefly review the Valentinians as a good example of Gnostic thinking.

Valentinians radicalized Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus*.<sup>202</sup> Plato maintained that a benevolent deity, the Demiurge (craftsman), created the Cosmic Soul to animate the body that the Demiurge had fashioned from eternal, unformed material.<sup>203</sup> As a superlative principle, the Cosmic Soul is another deity: "a perceptible god which is an image of the intelligible, as the greatest and best, the most beautiful and most complete."<sup>204</sup> The Demiurge created other lesser deities to populate the heavens and charged them to fashion animal bodies to populate earth, leaving to the Cosmic Soul the single task of animating and giving rationality to its cosmic body as a whole. But the Demiurge did not then withdraw and watch the lesser deities make earthly beings. Instead, the Demiurge created and implanted rational souls—made from a similar mix as the Cosmic Soul and united to a star—into the earthly bodies. Therefore, all souls are immortal. Well-trained souls will return to their native star; those that failed to adequately live rightly and contemplate the forms would be reincarnated as women, the first time, and thereafter would become suitable animals according to the vices the souls had

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<sup>202</sup> Irenaeus accused Valentinus of being more Platonist than biblical. See Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, vol. 2 (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 2.14.3–4. Third-century theologian, Hippolytus also charged Valentinus of being a Platonist. Citing the *Timaeus*, Hippolytus says, "Valentinus' heresy is certainly, then, closely associated with the Pythagorean and Platonic theory." See Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, ed. Miroslav Markovich (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 6.21.1 (p. 229): "Ἐστὶ μὲν οὖν ἡ Οὐαλεντίνου αἵρεσις Πυθαγορικὴν ἔχουσα καὶ Πλατωνικὴν τὴν ὑπόθεσιν.

<sup>203</sup> See Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Desmond Lee and T. K. Johansen (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 30a; 52d–53c; and 69b–d. For an overview of the various interpretations of the *Timaeus* and creation see Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 268–75. For a recent and compelling interpretation, see Sarah Broadie, *Nature and Divinity in Plato's Timaeus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7–26. Philosophers in Antiquity argued about whether Plato meant this creation myth literally so that the world was created in time, or metaphorically to describe relationships upholding the world to be eternal.

<sup>204</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 92c.

developed as humans.<sup>205</sup> Thus Plato thought the world was good, but that the Demiurge's good will finds a limit in the physical world since material bodies cannot fully mimic the Demiurge's or the Cosmic-Soul's eternal goodness (otherwise the body itself would be God) and therefore has a tendency toward evil due to the ways in which the world's laws cause bodies to crash around, interrupting rationality. Indeed, Plato thought the world we live in requires every kind of living animal possible so that it would be complete. Cosmic completeness, therefore, seems to necessitate moral imperfection and predation.<sup>206</sup>

For the Valentinians, a world that necessitates moral imperfection and predation cannot come from a good God. Attempting to uphold God's goodness and transcendence, these Christians contended that God did not create the physical world, which is rife with evil. Another deity, who is part of a long chain of deities between the true God and the world, created physical reality, but did so out of fear, ignorance, and grief, all of which characterize the physical world: "irrational animals, wild beasts, and people came from fear."<sup>207</sup> With Jesus, however, we learn about the highest and true God as well as other deities above the Creator-God in the Tanak, whom they identified with the Demiurge of Platonist cosmology. One of those higher deities had planted "seeds" in the world, which meant that some elite humans, the spiritual (*πνευματικοί*), possess a divine spark that makes them outsiders to the world's creaturely community. Spiritual people are by nature saved, regardless of how they behave.<sup>208</sup> Earthy people (*χοϊκοί*), however, correspond to Cain and are ontologically evil. Jesus came to save rational people (*ψυχικοί*), the common church person who fits between the spiritual and earthy classes and who must

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 42b–d.

<sup>206</sup> See Broadie, *Nature and Divinity in Plato's Timaeus*, 105n47.

<sup>207</sup> Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, vol. 1 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 1.5.4—translation slightly altered.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 1.6.2.

behave well to get the knowledge necessary for salvation.<sup>209</sup> The common rational person must take a huge leap of faith in an effort to focus on spiritual things, becoming less at home in this world as the person travels spiritually upwards back to their true home: we are pilgrims and nomads on this earth. People are born into one of these three classes.<sup>210</sup>

This low view of creaturely life led popular Christian leaders like Marcion (85–160 CE)—who was not a Gnostic per se, but he agreed with them on important points—to view animal life negatively. For example, Marcion considered insects such as mosquitoes, flies, gnats, and others to have no other purpose than destruction and annoyance. A benevolent God would not create such creatures; they either come from a lesser, malevolent deity or arise from the nature of matter itself.<sup>211</sup> The true God has nothing to do with the material world. Such a view leads Marcion to excise New Testament passages where God cares about anything beyond spiritual and rational souls. For example, he removed Luke 12:6–7, which states that God loves sparrows.<sup>212</sup>

The Valentinians divided God into different deities. They also divided humanity into the spiritual, rational, and earthy people. Further, they divided the individual person into the soul and the material body. Finally, they divided creation into the spiritual and the material. In each case, good and evil characterize one side or the other in such a way that by its very nature only a portion of creation merits salvation and only a portion of the divine deserves worship. Creation and salvation are completely separate.

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> On the three classes of people see *ibid.*, 1.7.5. Greek text from Irenaeus, *Contre les Hérésies*, I, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1979)—it also contains the Latin.

<sup>211</sup> See Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. Ernest Evans, Latin text with English translation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.14.

<sup>212</sup> See Sebastian Moll, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 94.

Against Valentinian divisions, Irenaeus and Tertullian stressed unity. God is one. Humanity is one. The individual is one. Creation is one. Jesus is the creator, and there is no other God.

Irenaeus and Tertullian found Valentinian and Gnostic cosmological Christologies and explanations of creation out of step with what the tradition they received had taught. But the Valentinians and the Marcionites helped shape what would become “orthodox” theology by forcing thinkers like Irenaeus and Tertullian to wrestle with the nature of creation, God’s goodness, and how these come together in Jesus of Nazareth.

### **Gnostic Views of the Incarnation**

The Valentinians could affirm that the Word became flesh, but they interpreted “flesh” as a “spiritual flesh.” Irenaeus claims that the Valentinians teach that the Word “en clothed himself with a body of the ensouled substance . . . but he did not take on any material element, since material substance is incapable of receiving salvation.”<sup>213</sup>

Irenaeus’s summary lines up with Valentinian sources from the *Nag Hammadi Library*. *The Tripartite Tractate*, for instance, claims that the Word conceived of Jesus’s flesh in such a way that it would not share in the passions of human flesh; Jesus has a spiritual flesh.<sup>214</sup> Valentinus purportedly wrote about Jesus: “A body, therefore, was spun for him out of invisible psychic substance, and arrived in the world of sense with power from a divine preparation.”<sup>215</sup> We find a similar teaching in Marcionite theology. The Marcionite

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<sup>213</sup> Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 1, 6.1 (p. 36).

<sup>214</sup> About the flesh of the Incarnation the text says, “above all that it derives from the spiritual logos.” See Einar Thomassen, “The Tripartite Tractate from Nag Hammadi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary” (PhD Dissertation, University of Saint Andrews, 1982), 173.

<sup>215</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Excerpta Ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 59 (p. 79).

Apelles, for example, claimed that though the Word took on flesh, that flesh was derived from stars.<sup>216</sup> In other words, the Word only seemed to take on human flesh.

Sometimes these Christians change the wording of John from “flesh” to another term. I already quoted Valentinus who said that Jesus had a “body” made from a “psychic substance.” The Gospel of Truth, a Valentinian text, says, “When the Word appeared, the one that is within the heart of those who utter it—it is not a sound alone but it became a body—a great disturbance took place.”<sup>217</sup> This shift from the language of “flesh” to the language of “body” may seem insignificant on first read. There are Gnostic texts that make even more dramatic changes in terminology. For instance, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, has the Word saying, “the third time I revealed myself to them [in] their tents as Word and I revealed myself in the likeness of their shape. And I wore everyone’s garment and I hid myself within them, and [they] did not know the one who empowers me.”<sup>218</sup> Here the change from flesh to “tents” and “the likeness of their shape” is far more dramatic than the shift to “body.” The theology underneath the shift in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* is easier to discern. The shift to “body,” however, is subtler. Jacquelin Williams believes, however, that the shift from “flesh” to “body” represents the shocking theology of the Gospel of John to the Gnostics, “who intentionally substituted the word ‘body’ for ‘flesh.’”<sup>219</sup> They probably did this, according to Williams, to make their theology more palatable to ordinary Christians.

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<sup>216</sup> See Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, 6.

<sup>217</sup> “The Gospel of Truth (I, 3 and XII, 2),” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 26:4–9.

<sup>218</sup> “Trimorphic Protennoia (XIII, 1),” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 47:13–19.

<sup>219</sup> Jacquelin Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth from Nag Hammadi* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 203.



Irenaeus notices the subtle shift in language as well. He says of the shift from “flesh” to “body”: “For, according to them, the Word did not directly become flesh; but Savior put on an ensouled body, they say, which was fashioned out of the Economy by an unutterable forethought, so that he might become visible and tangible. Flesh, however, is the ancient handiwork made by God out of the earth as in Adam. But it is this which John point out that the Word of God became.”<sup>220</sup> Consequently, Irenaeus claims, “they speak the same language we do, but intend different meanings.”<sup>221</sup> Irenaeus insists, however, on the language of flesh from the Gospel of John since the term “body” means something very different in the Valentinian interpretation.

Likewise, Tertullian goes to great lengths to argue that Jesus was born from Mary’s womb. She was truly his mother if that word is to mean anything at all. He also claims that the Valentinians and Marcionites who denied Jesus’s true humanity also “yet they deny the inferior substance of Christ, though he declares himself not even a man but a worm’ [Ps. 22:6].”<sup>222</sup> In other words, Marcionites and Valentinians deny humanity’s common origins in the earth with other animals when they deny Christ a true human nature. They deny that God’s creation is good. They deny that animal life is good.

These are important points for modern theology. When Sallie McFague—whom I introduced in the Introduction—for example, claims that the cosmos is God’s body, this is not the same as the Gospel of John’s statement that the Word became “flesh.” The language is similar but the meaning is very different. The change from “flesh” to “body” in this instance signifies a shift away from the particularity of flesh, upon which

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<sup>220</sup> Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 1, 9.3.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, 2.

<sup>222</sup> Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, 15. I am working from the following translation that also contains the Latin text: Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, trans. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1956).

Christians like Irenaeus insisted. To update Irenaeus: flesh signals solidarity with all animal creatures in a way that the language about a cosmological “body” does not. Moreover, the term “became” is different from “is” in the two theologies because the Gospel of John suggests that the later doctrine of two natures (divine and human) in one person (Jesus) is perfectly in line with the intention of “the Word became flesh.” McFague collapses these in a way that seems to blur the lines between the Creator and created.

Where Gregersen would be helpful in this discussion is to point out that the flesh-in-solidarity-with-all-animal-creatures does not exist in isolation from cosmology either. According to some of the most current cosmological theories, our universe began approximately 14 billion years ago from an unfathomably compact zero size yet infinitely hot state with no space or time.<sup>223</sup> From that searing, dense state, what we know of the universe has been expanding and cooling ever since. Our sun emerged as one of the stars in the Milky Way galaxy around 4.6 billion years ago. From the dust and gas that circled the Sun, planets began to form. Earth is made from these particles that collided and were held together by gravity. More and more collisions with comets and asteroids revolving the Sun slowly built up the Earth’s mass and the impacts caused the mass to become hotter. The heavier elements such as iron sank toward the center and the lighter elements rose toward the surface. Catapulted from supernova explosions, comets carried ice and organic material to the surface where oceans formed. Around 4 billion years ago, the bombardment slowed, the Earth had a steady crust, the surface had cooled, the seas were formed, and an atmosphere developed. Our planet is made from stardust that was catapulted out from the explosions of older stars.

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<sup>223</sup> See and Woolfson, *Time, Space, Stars, and Man*, 66–67.

In this modern scientific story, humans, like all other creatures, are literally made from stardust. Paul Davies says that “our bodies are therefore built from the fossilized debris of once-bright stars that annihilated themselves aeons before the Earth or sun existed.”<sup>224</sup> Our bodies are 65% oxygen, 18% carbon, 10 % hydrogen, and 3.3% nitrogen. Except for the hydrogen that predates the stars, all of the elements come from the atoms hurled into space by aged stars. This is our common story. It is a story we share with all living creatures, planet Earth, and the cosmos in general.

So the flesh-that-all-animal-creatures-share has its common origins in cosmology and links with our habitat here on Earth. But connecting the statement “the Word became flesh” to a narrative of interdependence so that humans never exist in isolation is very different from claiming that all of this “is” God’s body in some kind of metaphysical sense. What Gregersen and others who use the language of “deep Incarnation” are doing is a kind of narrative theology in which the Gospel story links up with stories we tell about ourselves in the modern world. The two stories are not the same, yet the science story helps us see Genesis and the Gospel of John in a way that makes us more aware of our common creatureliness. McFague’s story takes away the common creatureliness to a large extent, since everything is divine somehow.

So the debates about language derived from the Gospel of John in early Christianity have relevance to our modern ecological debates. But the links go further. Gregersen and others suggest that “flesh” signals a radical interdependence and commonality amongst all of creation. Yet they do not begin with the particularity of animal flesh and rarely point out this commonality as the actual starting point. It is not that this negation is wrong and that we cannot find it in the tradition—Irenaeus and

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<sup>224</sup> Paul Davies, *Superforce* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 171.

Tertullian both emphasize the commonality of all creatureliness without specifically focusing on flesh as a common animality. What I will argue is that this shift away from the particularity of flesh in all animals does not do full justice to the commonality that the Christian tradition argues for vis-à-vis God.

### **The Word Made Flesh: Body, Matter, and Particularity**

The issue of nonhuman animals and the Gospel of John's flesh became more acute over the centuries. The change in language away from the particularity of flesh, and hence common animality, began to show up in those who took up Irenaeus's theology. While Irenaeus insisted on "flesh" against Valentinians, his successors in the fourth and sixth century changed their language to take up the Valentinian language and subvert it. Athanasius and John of Damascus affirmed that God became human. But they went further: against Irenaeus and with the majority of philosophers they accepted a material substrate for creation. God became that too. This will have some widespread implications. They use the idea of John 1:14—the Word became flesh—in a slightly new way. So I will turn to a more detailed account of both Athanasius and John of Damascus in order to show both the promise of this turn, which relates directly to modern theologies of a deep Incarnation in relationship to nonhuman animals, and to show some potential drawbacks in this shift, historically speaking.

#### **Athanasius**

In modern ecological theology Athanasius has become a source of inspiration and a way to connect modern concerns for creation deep within the Christian tradition. Athanasius's *On the Incarnation* generally serves as a theological foundation for thinking

about Christology. So connecting ecological concerns with Athanasius's view of the Incarnation helps modern theologians make the case for the orthodoxy of their positions. In what follows I draw from some of this research. What modern theologians have done with Athanasius is needed in a context in which Christian care for the environment can be seen as heterodox at best. That one of the great thinkers of Christianity argued for the redemption of all creation and pointed to a common creatureliness is a welcome addition to ecological theology in the modern world.

While I think theologians have now shown what we can learn today from Athanasius in terms of theology and creation, I also think that they have sometimes missed the moves in Athanasius's work that are less than good when it comes to developing a theology that cares for creation and nonhuman animals in particular.

### **Athanasius's Theology of Creation**

In *Against the Greeks*, Athanasius discusses how humans lost their ability to know God and then began to worship idols. In his second part, *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius focuses on how the Incarnation brings redemption and restoration. Both books begin with a preface in which he explains his purpose for writing each book. In the preface to *Against the Greeks* he states that people who have mocked the cross "do not see that its power has filled the whole world, and that through it the effects of the knowledge of God have been revealed to all. For if they had applied their minds to his divinity they would not have mocked at so great a thing, but rather have recognized that he was the Saviour of the universe and that the cross was not the ruin but the salvation of

creation.”<sup>225</sup> So from the outset Athanasius speaks of Jesus as “the Savior of the universe” and the cross as “the salvation of creation,” suggesting that he has more than humanity in view.<sup>226</sup>

Athanasius primarily focuses on God and God’s relationship to humanity. Yet Athanasius did not see humanity as something completely set apart from the rest of creation. Every created thing needs another created thing: “If one were to take the parts of creation by itself and examine each one separately—like the sun alone by itself, or the moon separately, or again earth or air, or the hot and cold, the dry and moist—and isolate them from their mutual connection, and take each one by itself and examine it separately, then he would find no one of them self-sufficient, but all in need of mutual service and only subsisting through mutual support.”<sup>227</sup> Creation is composed of parts, and humans are part of creation who cannot live without the rest. Creation stands as a whole in a relationship to God.<sup>228</sup> In this sense, there is a decidedly non-anthropocentric logic to Athanasius’s focus.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, trans. Robert Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1, p. 3–5.

<sup>226</sup> Michael Northcott seems to miss this type of statement when he charges that: “when we come to his treatment of redemption in *De Incarnatione*, we find no mention of the redemptive purposes of God for the created order as a whole, which, according to *De Incarnatione*, is inherently unstable and corruptible because of its contingency, its finitude, its creation out of nothing. Instead, humanity is the exclusive object of God’s redemptive action in the incarnation of the Son.” For Northcott, Athanasius limits redemption to rational humans. See Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 211.

<sup>227</sup> Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 27, p. 74.

<sup>228</sup> This distinction between God and creation, between created and uncreated, is basic for Athanasius’s ontology, according to Khaled Anatolios. On the centrality of the Creator/creature distinction in Athanasius see Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 31–35.

<sup>229</sup> Anatolios, whose work I have found helpful in interpreting Athanasius, does not make this point. “We remarked earlier that, while the relation between created and uncreated is the governing paradigm in Athanasius’s ontology, it is the relation between God and humanity that is of the most central significance.” See *ibid.*, 34. This statement, while true in that Athanasius indeed focuses on God’s relationship to humans, nevertheless elides just how important the non-anthropocentric element is in Athanasius’s overall project. Anatolios may very well agree with this point by saying that his view does not deny that other elements are also important.

In *Against the Greeks*, Athanasius examines the origins of evil from the vantage of the cross. God created humans to commune with God by contemplating the Word. God did not intend for evil to fill the world. Evil did not exist from the beginning of creation but came through human sin. Instead of contemplating the Word in creation, humans committed idolatry by making creatures into gods. Christians, however, do not worship creatures but recognize the one true God who created all things through the Word. “Who then is he, if not the all-holy Father of Christ, beyond all created being, who as supreme steersman, through his own Wisdom and his own Word, our Lord and Saviour Christ, guides and orders the universe for our salvation, and acts as seems best to him.”<sup>230</sup> This Wisdom/Word is not a creature but “the living and acting God, the very good God of the universe, who is other than created things and all creation.”<sup>231</sup>

Athanasius states that “the power of God and wisdom of God, turns the heavens, has suspended the earth, and by his own will has set it resting on nothing. Illuminated by him, the sun gives light to the world, and the moon receives its measure of light. Through him water is suspended in the clouds, rains water the earth, the sea is confined, and the earth is covered with verdure in all kinds of plants.”<sup>232</sup> The universe was created out of nothing and now tends toward dissolution into nothing. But since God is good and does not compete with the created order for existence, God has acted to keep everything from falling into nothingness.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 40, p. 111. Emphasis mine.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 40, p. 113.

<sup>233</sup> In modern times, several theologians have queried whether the confession that God created everything from nothing implies a God of love or a God of pure power and might. John Caputo, for example, charges that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* borrows from Platonism the idea of a God who “is the most powerful and superlative power, which imposes a hierarchical order upon lower being.” Such a “*summum ens* towering over finite beings” is the God of “ontotheology.” See John Caputo, *The Weakness of God* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 37. Rowan Williams, by contrast, suggests that

But God does more than this. God brings all things into harmony. God is like “a musician, tuning his lyre and skillfully combining the bass and the sharp notes, the middle and the others” producing a “single melody.”<sup>234</sup> God “reconciles opposites” in the created order “producing in beauty and harmony a single world and a single order within it.”<sup>235</sup> Yet every individual within this harmony retains its individual identity, just like individual instruments retain their identity in a symphony. This “wonderful and truly divine harmony” has a divine director, the “Wisdom of God,” who is “unmoved with the Father.”<sup>236</sup> Because humans are created from nothing, according to Athanasius, we cannot know God who is beyond all being. Because God loves humans, however, God has created the world in such a way that rational creatures like humans can know of God through looking at the harmony in creation. Once again, Athanasius’s ontology in which the fundamental distinction in Christian faith is between the uncreated Word and everything created forms the backdrop for his anthropology and creation theology as a whole.

Creation, including humanity, comes from nothing and tends to return to nothing. But God does not want to see creation dissolved and so resolved to become a human in order to save the “universe.” Athanasius is worth quoting at length at this point:

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“creation is not an exercise of divine *power*” since power is exercised over something. To be a creature is not defined by a struggle against God’s attempts to impose roles upon us rather than ones we would naturally choose. Furthermore, Williams argues, creation does not entail a monarchy since God creates freely and doesn’t need that kind of power anyhow. Williams calls our attention to the fact that the idea of God’s transcendence inherent in creation *ex nihilo* does not posit an antagonistic dualism. Creation is not in a competitive relationship with God, because God is completely and totally other than created reality. Because God does not need to struggle against and compete with creaturely beings, God can be present to and with creatures without violence and domination. See Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 67–69.

<sup>234</sup> Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 42, p. 117.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.



For the nature of created things, having come into being from nothing, is unstable, and is weak and mortal when considered by itself; but the God of all is good and excellent by nature. Therefore he is also kind. For a good being would be envious of no one, so he envies nobody existence but rather wishes everyone to exist, in order to exercise his kindness. So seeing that all created nature according to its own definition is in a state of flux and dissolution, therefore to prevent this happening and the universe (τὸ ὅλον) dissolving back into nothing, after making everything (τὰ πάντα) by his own eternal Word and bringing creation (τὴν κτίσιν) into existence, he did not abandon it to be carried away and suffer through its own nature, lest it run the risk of returning to nothing. But being good, he governs and establishes the whole world (τὴν σύμπασαν) through his Word who is himself God, in order that creation (ἡ κτίσις), illuminated by the leadership, providence, and ordering of the Word, may be able to remain firm, since it participates in the Word who is truly from the Father and is aided by him to exist, and lest it suffer a relapse into nonexistence, if it were not protected by the Word. “For he is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, because through him and in him subsist all things, visible and invisible, and he is the head of the church,” as the servants of the truth teach in the holy writings.<sup>237</sup>

In this passage near the end of *Contra Gentes*, Athanasius forefronts the fundamental distinction between the Creator and creation. God transcends creation but God’s love manifests itself in acts that sustain and ultimately redeem creation from

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 41, p. 113-115. Anatolios quotes this entire passage as well. See Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 41-42.

nothingness.<sup>238</sup> It is God's loving nature to be involved with creation, a love that culminates in the Incarnation. God's goodness and love are not impersonal principles that generically pervade all things, but are manifest in acts of providential care that reach a pinnacle in the Incarnation.<sup>239</sup>

So Athanasius gives a first hint as to the reason for the Incarnation: so that creation/the universe/the whole world might not fall into nothingness. In this first intimation from Athanasius in his two-part work, the reason for the Incarnation has to do with God's action on behalf of creation as a whole. Creation is "weak and mortal" in itself and needs God's providential care to keep it in existence at all and keeping the entirety of creation from falling into utter dissolution is ultimately the wondrous reason "why the Word of God really came to created beings." There could hardly be a stronger statement about the Incarnation that focuses on creation as a whole rather than humanity alone.

In *Orations against the Arians*, Athanasius claims that "creation itself will at a certain point be delivered 'from the bondage of corruption in the glorious freedom of the children of God' (Rom 8, 19, 21). The Lord will be the firstborn of this creation which is delivered and of all those who are made children, so that by his being called 'first,' that which is after him may abide, united to the Word as to a foundational origin and

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<sup>238</sup> This relates to the importance Athanasius attaches to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. For a brief historical overview of the doctrines development in Irenaeus and Athanasius, see Paul Gavriluk, "Creation in Early Christian Polemical Literature: Irenaeus against the Gnostics and Athanasius against the Arians," *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 22–32.

<sup>239</sup> See especially Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 17. Alwyn Pettersen goes further and claims that "It would seem therefore that, for Athanasius, quality of existence is of as much importance as continuance of existence for a right understanding of the God who is good, or rather, the source of all goodness, and who has no envy for anything." See Alwyn Pettersen, "A Good Being Would Envy None Life: Athanasius on the Goodness of God," *Theology Today* 55, no. 1 (1998): 62. "None" is in the original title.

beginning.”<sup>240</sup> Creation itself will be transformed and liberated along with human beings in Christ, who became a human being, but in so becoming also became matter and a material body.

Athanasius’s participation language, however, is also grounded in his doctrine of God, according to Anatolios.<sup>241</sup> In the background is a relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son does not participate in the Father: “He is the power of the Father and his wisdom and Word; not so by participation, nor do those properties accrue to him from outside in the way of those who participate in him and are given wisdom by him, having their power and reason in him; but he is absolute wisdom, very Word, and himself the Father’s own power, absolute light, absolute truth, absolute justice, absolute virtue, and indeed stamp, effulgence, and image. In short, he is the supremely perfect issue of the Father, and is alone Son, the express image of the Father.”<sup>242</sup> Because the Son is the perfect image of the Father, the Son contains all the meta-qualities that sustain creation.

Creation participates in the Son and thereby has access to the Father without any hint of subordination within God. Creation exhibits the order and Wisdom of the Son that leads to knowledge of the Father and Son. Creation shows this inner relationship within God.<sup>243</sup> Creation, therefore, has a twofold character: on the one hand creation comes from nothing and rests on the abyss of nothingness. On the other hand, by God’s sheer grace creation participates in God’s own inner life. Athanasius’s view of the nature/grace distinction, according to Khaled Anatolios, belongs within his wider understanding of the

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<sup>240</sup> Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians*, 2.63. In Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 157.

<sup>241</sup> See Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 104–109.

<sup>242</sup> Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 46, p.131.

<sup>243</sup> In his great double-work, Athanasius has a binary description of God and God’s relationship to the world. He focuses on the Father-Son relationship and creation’s participation in the Son. He ignores the role of the Holy Spirit.

distinction between the Creator and created.<sup>244</sup> Creation by its very nature tends toward the nothingness from which it came, but by grace participates in the divine life. All of creation participates, but humans are able to participate in our own particular manner because we are “rational” and therefore have a special affinity to the Word. Yet the proper context for interpreting humanity’s relationship to God is in the radical dependency that all creatures have for God’s grace and providential care. Even though God has a “special care” for humans, it is fitting to describe the Incarnation in terms of the Word becoming matter since this prior Creator/creation distinction undergirds theological anthropology as well.

Athanasius makes the ontological status of creatureliness vis-à-vis God the basis of his anthropology very clear in his work, *Orations against the Arians*.<sup>245</sup> The Arians, according to Athanasius, call Jesus a “creature” but then go on to say he is a special creature that is unlike other creatures. For Athanasius this kind of statement misunderstands the basic ontological distinction between what is made and what is not made, between the Creator and creation. No “creature” has a special mediator status in this relationship. Athanasius says:

But even if the Son has a relative precedence over the others, he would still be nonetheless a creature, just as they are. For even among those who are creatures by nature, there is to be found those who have precedence over others; thus ‘star differs from star in glory’ (1 Cor 15:41) and everything else differs from the others when one makes comparisons. *But that does not mean that some are lords and others do service to those who are superior*; nor that some are efficient causes

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<sup>244</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 55–56.

<sup>245</sup> On Athanasius’s theological anthropology see *ibid.*, 53–67.

and others come to be through their agency. Rather, all have a nature which comes to be and is created, and they acknowledge, of themselves, their own creator.<sup>246</sup>

The basic ontological status of humanity is as a creature before God. In this sense, Athanasius could have spoken of the Word becoming a creature. He shied away from that language because the Arians claimed that Jesus was merely a creature with a special status. They did not maintain the proper Creator/creature distinction according to Athanasius and therefore their Christology was flawed.

### **The Matter of Christology**

In *On the Incarnation*, the second part to his *Against the Gentiles*, Athanasius continues to explicate the Incarnation's purpose as significant for more than humans. He opens with a reference to the Word's "Incarnation." The Greek word Athanasius uses, however, is ἐνανθρώπησις, more properly translated as the Word "becoming human."<sup>247</sup> He starts with ἐνανθρώπησεως because he wants to clarify why the Word would become human rather than some other created being or "body." So in the second chapter he explains that God created matter (ὕλη) out of nothing (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων)—contrary to Platonic notions that God created things from some eternal but formless matter by putting "forms" to it.<sup>248</sup> Athanasius carefully explains that he had to give an account of the origin of all things rather than launching straight into a Christological reflection because he needed to say why the Word would become human of all other creatures.

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<sup>246</sup> Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians*, 2.20, in Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 115. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>247</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 1, p. 50.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, p. 54.

First of all, matter stands in a Creator/created relationship with God and as such it was important for the body of Jesus to be from “matter” (ὕλη). In this context, Athanasius uses ὕλη in a philosophical sense. In one meaning of the word, ὕλη is the stuff out of which something is made: clay is the matter out of which a bricks are made, and in turn, bricks are the matter out of which houses are made. “Matter” is a relative term.<sup>249</sup> Matter is what survives change from one form to the other. It is what remains the same when all the properties (size, weight, color, etc.) are taken away. There is also a substratum to all things, which philosophers called “prime matter” that has no form and only really exists in specific things.<sup>250</sup> While Aristotle and others considered this prime matter to be eternal, Athanasius maintains that God created this primal material substrate, which means that prime matter also stands as creation in relationship to the Creator. As he already stated at the end of *Against the Gentiles*, God’s very nature is such that God becomes present to and active in creation for creation. In this sense, the reason for the Incarnation is fundamentally grounded in God’s desire to bridge the difference between creation and God so that creation as a whole can flourish. Becoming the fundamental stuff of all creation thus signals God’s good and loving nature that manifests in action toward creation as a whole. In becoming a body the Word becomes matter: “Therefore the body, as it had the common substance of all bodies, was a human body.”<sup>251</sup>

The question arises immediately as to what it would mean for the Word to become “matter.” Athanasius seems to accept a kind of Aristotelian sense of matter as the substratum of all that exists. But Aristotle’s definition of matter leaves as many questions

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<sup>249</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 194b8.

<sup>250</sup> Athanasius does not discuss the issue of “prime matter” as a pure potentiality as does Aristotle and in another sense Plotinus. On Aristotle and prime matter see H. M. Robinson, “Prime Matter in Aristotle,” *Phronesis* 19, no. 2 (1974): 168–88. For Plotinus and matter see his *Enneads*, 2.4.

<sup>251</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 20 (p. 95).

as it might answer. He says that matter is that which is left when we take away all the properties like color, shape, and weight: “If all attributes are removed, nothing but material appears to remain.”<sup>252</sup> Matter is that which transcends all individuals. Matter is “that which is in itself not a particular thing or a quantity or anything else by which things are defined.”<sup>253</sup> In other words, matter is not something anybody can see, hear, taste, smell, or touch. According to Aristotle, we cannot even define it negatively because “the negations, too, would belong to it only accidentally” and matter has no “accidents” at all.<sup>254</sup> What then is matter if it is not anything we can really know? For Aristotle it is a concept that explains continuity in a world of change, but it has no real existence. “Υλη is pure potentiality. It is something we can imagine if we think away all properties.”<sup>255</sup>

Perhaps this is why, long before Athanasius, Irenaeus denied the existence of matter. The Cappadocian fathers, Basil of Caesarea (330–379 CE), Gregory of Nyssa (c.332–395 CE), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389 CE), denied the existence of matter as well. Basil’s statement is paradigmatic:

These same thoughts, let us also recommend to ourselves concerning the earth, not to be curious about what its substance is; nor to wear ourselves out by reasoning, seeking its very foundation; nor to search for some nature destitute of qualities, existing without quality of itself; but to realize well that all that is seen around it is related to the reason of its existence, forming an essential part of its

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<sup>252</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 1029a10.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 1029a20.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 1029a25. For Plato, matter was something different. It was the way the Demiurge arranged the world of hierarchical relationships, with lighter “matter” being closer to the Forms than the Earth or animal bodies.

<sup>255</sup> This is what led Plotinus to argue that material existence is something of an illusion since all material reality comes from this non-being or matter. Matter simply does not have reality, so the body is not all that important. The body, which combines matter and form, has no reality. Matter is a mere “shadow upon a shadow.” On this see Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 162, 292–93.

substance. You will end with nothing if you attempt to eliminate by reason each of the qualities that exist in it. In fact, if you remove the black, the cold, the weight, the density, the qualities pertaining to taste, or any others which are perceptible, there will be no basic substance.<sup>256</sup>

In Athanasius, by contrast, the Λόγος both creates ὕλη and takes it on in his body, since all bodies are made of matter. Matter (ὕλη) plays a rhetorical role in his theology to unite all creaturely existence. There is something unchangeable that underlies all individual physical bodies. That unchangeable element is ὕλη. But philosophically, it has no existence, and this is one reason why some of the early Christian theologians rejected the concept. This empty concept, according to Irenaeus, actually functions as a mediator between God and all individual creatures since it is this potentiality that God originally creates, not individual creatures. Matter removes God from individual creatures and calls into question God's loving sustaining presence in this world.

But ὕλη does more than this. Matter, as a "shadow upon a shadow," becomes a synonym for the body. Because, according to Athanasius, what is unique to the human person is our rationality what ends up being real about the human person is our thoughts and concepts. According to Richard Sorabji, there is an early idealism in some of the Eastern theologians precisely because this idea of ὕλη is so shaky.

Athanasius could have claimed that matter, as the underlying but formless substance under creaturely physical reality, is taken up in Christ so that it no longer functions as a mediator, as Irenaeus charged. The nothingness that is ὕλη is taken up in Christ's body and the threat that it represents is neutralized. Athanasius says exactly this

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<sup>256</sup> Saint Basil, "On the Hexaemeron," in *Exegetic Homilies* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1963), 1.8 (p. 14).



about “nothingness,” though he does not apply it to matter. But matter is not “nothing” for Athanasius, but a real thing of some sort underlying all physical bodies, since it was “created out of nothing” in Athanasius’s theology.

In terms of the Incarnation and creation, therefore, it is hard to know how the Word becoming or taking up “matter” does much good for a theology of creation. Matter is a far cry from the positive physical flesh we share with nonhuman animals. Matter is a step removed from direct contact with other creatures since it is an empty concept, as Basil of Caesarea argued. Moreover, when coupled with the idea that humanity is really defined by rationality the idea of the Word taking up matter starts to lose its potency. For if in reality “matter” is a pure concept to describe what remains the same despite change, but has no actual existence, then the “flesh” of the Hebrew Bible is reduced to human thought. Matter and flesh are simply not equivalent concepts.

By contrast, Irenaeus argued that God created humans “taking the purest and finest of earth, in measured wise mingling with the earth His own power; for He gave his frame the outline of his own form, that the visible appearance too should be godlike—for it was as an image of God that man was fashioned and set on earth— and that he might come to life, he breathed into his face the breath of life, so that the man became like God in inspiration as well as in frame.”<sup>257</sup> The earth that humans are made from is stamped with a form that is somehow divine. It was a common argument in early Christian theologians that our human bodies somehow reflect the divine image; whereas later the divine image became associated with our thoughts and concepts rather than the body. The mud and clay, the “finest of the earth,” from which God made humans is the same earth

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<sup>257</sup> Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Joseph P. Smith (New York: Paulist Press, 1952), 11 (p. 54).

that produced all of the living nonhuman animals in Genesis. This same earth is the precondition for creatures who can glorify God. This is not the pure potentiality of philosophical speculation but a story rooted in Jewish tradition and shows a kind of radical interdependence of all creatures. The concept “matter” is far less rich in that sense.

### **Embodied Christology**

After arguing that God created the common element underlying all creation (matter) Athanasius then states that “we were the purpose (ὑπόθεσις) of his embodiment (ἐνσωμάτωσις).”<sup>258</sup> By switching from ἐνανθρώπησις to ἐνσωμάτωσις, Athanasius signals a wider issue in Christology: by becoming human the Word also takes on a body. As I noted earlier in the chapter, Valentinians and some Marcionites had claimed that the Word became a “body.”<sup>259</sup> Their change in terminology from “flesh” to “body,” however, signaled a theological shift away from earthly human flesh: Jesus’s body was not like ours. Athanasius shifts meanings as well, but not in a Gnostic direction.

Here Athanasius seems to take up this idea and turn it around. The Word took a body, which is common to all created existence. Bodies are necessarily subject to death. He even affirms that the Son could have taken on a sidereal body just as some Gnostics had claimed. If God only wanted to become part of creation in a body, God could have done so “through some better means.”<sup>260</sup> God could have become one of the “more noble

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<sup>258</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 4, p. 58, 59.

<sup>259</sup> I have not found any commentators on Athanasius who make this point that Athanasius’s change in terminology could have been a conversation with “heretical” ideas and subverted them. In fact, I have not found any commentators who note the shift in terminology in the Incarnation as I am doing.

<sup>260</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*., 8 p. 67.

parts of creation” or used “some nobler instrument, as the sun or moon or stars or fire or air.”<sup>261</sup>

But God was not trying to show off. Rather the Son came “to heal and to teach those who were suffering” because humans had sinned and had lost their way in this world.<sup>262</sup> No other part of creation, according to Athanasius, had gone astray. “Neither the sun nor moon nor heaven nor stars nor water nor air altered their course, but knowing their Creator and King, the Word, they remained as they were made.”<sup>263</sup> Humans alone have sinned. Such a picture hardly reflects a triumphistic view of humanity in relation to other creatures.

Greek philosophers, Athanasius claims, “speak truly” when they say that the whole of creation is one big body.<sup>264</sup> And since the philosophers affirm that somehow the divine has “come into the whole, and illumine[s] and move[s] all things” by providence, they affirm that the universe as a whole, as a large body with parts, is somehow a fitting way for us to know the divine. Athanasius argues that just as God can be known through the whole, so too it is fitting for God to become a particular part of the whole. For “if the part is unsuitable to be his instrument towards the knowledge of his divinity, it would be most absurd that he should be made known even through the whole cosmos.”<sup>265</sup> Although the Word became human because only humans had sinned, God also touches every other part of creation, bringing redemption to the whole.<sup>266</sup> As Athanasius stated at the end of

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 41, p 143. Athanasius may also be referencing scriptural theophanies in which God “appeared” in thunderstorms and in other frightening guises. If all the Word did was take a body and use it, then these other forms would have sufficed. A theophany would suffice. The Incarnation, however, signals something deeper than the mere use of the material world to appear.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 41, p. 139.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 41, p. 141.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 45.

*Against the Gentiles*, the totality of God’s good creation needed God to become a creature so that God could overcome the nothingness into which all creatures slide. Athanasius assumes that the only way for the Incarnation to happen is through a particular part of creation. Humans have sunk to the lowest depths, and it was therefore fitting that God become human to rescue that which has fallen farthest away.

Athanasius uses σῶμα throughout *De Incarnatione Christi*, which helps him to establish, yet again, a common creatureliness. The body is subject to death by its very creatureliness. Σῶμα is one of Athanasius’s more important words for the Incarnation. He uses some form of σῶμα 185 times in *De Incarnatione Christi*.<sup>267</sup> Some representative statements include:

ὁ Λόγος . . . ἐν ἀνθρωπίνῳ σώματι ἡμῶν πεφανέρωται (1).

ὁ Λόγος . . . ἐν ἀνθρωπίνῳ γενέσθαι καὶ φανῆναι σώματι (4).

ὁ Λόγος . . . λαμβάνει ἑαυτῷ σῶμα (8).

ὁ Λόγος . . . ἔλαβε σῶμα θνητόν (13)

The Word “appeared” and “took” a body: these verbs represent Athanasius’s normal way of speaking about the body in relation to the word. The Λόγος assumes a body to Godself, which is the part of humanity that is closest to us, according to Athanasius.<sup>268</sup>

Anatolios notes that Athanasius here departs from philosophical tradition, which would treat the soul as that which defines our humanness, the body being its prison.<sup>269</sup> Here Athanasius makes the body the definition of humanity. When humanity turned away from contemplating God, we fixated on what is most properly our own: our bodies.

Bodies are not evil as in Gnosticism. But fixating on ourselves does not allow the kind of

<sup>267</sup> I derived this from searches of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database.

<sup>268</sup> See Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 3.

<sup>269</sup> See Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 63–64.

self-transcendence needed to live a good life. In focusing on our bodies and its sensations we then become trapped in a tragic cycle.

The Word takes a human body to break this cycle of self-indulgence. Anatolios notes that the redemption offered in Christ is not one that transcends the body, which is what is “closest to us,” but one in which the whole person becomes oriented toward God and the body becomes divinized.<sup>270</sup> So σῶμα has great importance for Athanasius’s Christology.

But again, though there is a sense in which σῶμα could be equivalent to σάρξ, they are not the same. In *De Incarnatione Christi*, Athanasius only uses a form of σάρξ seven times. Three of these are in biblical quotations.<sup>271</sup> Three others uses occur in chapter 37 and he uses the term once in chapter 40. It is σῶμα that dominates Athanasius’s Christology. Outside of this work, however, Athanasius does use σάρξ though again only about half as much as σῶμα.<sup>272</sup> In Athanasius, σῶμα is what all of creation must have. It is the precondition for any relationship to God. The entire cosmos, he claims, could be said to be one large body. Σῶμα is never a synonym for human.<sup>273</sup> By contrast, Athanasius uses σάρξ as a synonym for human. Here Athanasius is forthright: “For ‘the Word,’ as John says, ‘became flesh’ (it being the custom of Scripture to call man by the name of ‘flesh’).”<sup>274</sup> And again in his letter to Epictetus, Athanasius writes,

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> See *De Incarnatione Christi* chapters 2, 10, and 25.

<sup>272</sup> In his entire body of works, Athanasius uses some form of σάρξ about 944 times. He employs some form of σῶμα 1,609 times.

<sup>273</sup> This is George Dragas’s conclusion. He studied Athanasius’s words for body, flesh, and human in relationship to Christology in great detail. See George D. Dragas, “Ἐνανθρώπησις, ἢ ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος: A Neglected Aspect of Athanasius’ Christology,” in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Elizabeth Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985).

<sup>274</sup> Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 4, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 3.30 (p. 410).

“For to say ‘the Word became flesh’ is equivalent to saying ‘the Word became man.’”<sup>275</sup>

Athanasius does not use the verb “became” with σῶμα as he does with σάρξ in relationship to the Incarnation, implying that the Word takes up σῶμα in a different way than σάρξ.

In either case, both terms, σῶμα and σάρξ, have little connection to nonhuman animals for Athanasius. In the previous chapter I demonstrated that the Septuagint uses σάρξ in such a way to connect human life with all nonhuman animal life. The same could be said for σῶμα. While the primary translation in the Septuagint of רֶשֶׁת is σάρξ, sometimes the Septuagint translates רֶשֶׁת as σῶμα.<sup>276</sup> In the Septuagint, according to Eduard Schweizer, σῶμα is a concept that is not very developed. It does not mean σάρξ. “For one thing it [σῶμα] does not have intrinsically the character of creatureliness or corruptibility or even sin. Angels, too, have σῶμα . . . but no σάρξ.”<sup>277</sup> In the Septuagint, σῶμα does not reflect the “realm” of creatureliness or a part of humanity in distinction from another part. When Jewish apocryphal literature use the term they use it to mean human or animal bodies only, never plants or inanimate creation.<sup>278</sup>

Athanasius, however, uses the term differently than Jewish Scriptures. For him it is a philosophical issue of how the immaterial and incorporeal can relate to the material and body. This is not an illegitimate concern, but it is not the focus of John 1:14. The language also changes from a common kinship in animality to largely a focus on humanity with some commonality in “matter,” which turns out to be a vacuous concept.

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<sup>275</sup> Athanasius, *Ad Epictetum*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 4, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 8 (p. 573).

<sup>276</sup> Approximately one out of every seven uses of רֶשֶׁת is translated with σῶμα in the LXX. See Edward Schweizer, “σῶμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 7, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1971), 1045.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 1047–1048.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 1049.

Equating “flesh” with “human” in John 1:14 is equally problematic. In the first chapter I showed that this is not at all what John’s prologue did by using flesh.

While it is true that the Word took on human flesh in the Gospel of John, it is simply not true that “human” exhausts the meaning of “flesh” in the prologue. Indeed, when Athanasius makes his statements about σὰρξ being equivalent to ἄνθρωπος in John 1:14, in both cases he cited Joel 2:28, which declares that God will pour out the Spirit on “all flesh.” Athanasius takes this as a reference to humanity alone. But, in Joel 1:18–20 we read this:

How the animals groan! The herds of cattle wander about because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep are dazed. To you, O Lord, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flames have burned all the trees of the field. Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Joel is not concerned with humanity alone, and the term “all flesh” in Hebrew Scriptures quite often refers to all animal creatures. There is no reason to see it as referring to only humans in Joel 2:28 given what we read in the first chapter of the common human and nonhuman animal travails.

To the extent that Athanasius speaks about creation he tends to speak in large sweeping terms, dealing with planets as more perfect bodies than human bodies and the universe as a whole body in relationship to the particular human body that Word assumed. Other creatures, creatures more related to human animals, get no mention at all. Again, I believe this has to do with his change away from the language of the Gospel of John, which says ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. It does not say ὁ λόγος ὕλη ἐγένετο or ὁ λόγος

σῶμα ἐγένετο. Both of these ways of speaking abstract humanity from their animality in ways that the language of σὰρξ does not because σὰρξ is connected with Jewish scriptural notions of רֶשֶׁת־לֶבַד. Athanasius’s shift in language from σὰρξ to ὕλη, when combined with the idea that humans have a special status because of our rationality (λόγος), undermines some of his best insights.

It is easy, in sum, to see how modern ecological theologians would be drawn to Athanasius’s theology. His theology makes a clear distinction between God and creation. Humanity stands with all other creatures in this regard. The rest of creation will be delivered from suffering because of Christ’s work as well. But the change in language from a biblical understanding of the World became flesh to notions of “matter” and “bodies” and an exclusive interpretation of “flesh” as meaning “human” tends to undermine some of Athanasius’s best insights.

### ***Life of St. Antony and Following Christ***

Fortunately, however, Athanasius is better at *showing* what the Incarnation means with regard to human-nonhuman animal relationships. Later in his career Athanasius came under the influence of desert monasticism, and he was especially drawn to Saint Antony the Great. In honor of the ascetic master, Athanasius wrote *Life of St. Antony* to promote the discipline that Antony and his followers lived. In his own letters, Antony repeatedly refers to the spirit-filled life of prayer in the Holy Spirit and how it trains a person to overcome their self-centered temptations.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> See Sarah Coakley, “Prayer, Politics and the Trinity: Vying Models of Authority in Third–Fourth-Century Debates on Prayer and ‘Orthodoxy,’” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66, no. 4 (2013): 389–90.



Seemingly influenced by the Spirit-fueled vision of desert monasticism, Athanasius clarifies the Holy Spirit's sanctifying role in creation in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*. He says: "It is in the Spirit that the Word glorifies creation (τὴν κτίσιν) and presents it to the Father by divinizing (θεοποιῶν) it and granting it adoption. But the one who binds creation (τὴν κτίσιν) to the Word could not be among the creatures (τῶν κτισμάτων) and the one who bestows sonship upon creation (τὴν κτίσιν) could not be foreign to the Son."<sup>280</sup> Strikingly, Athanasius speaks of the Holy Spirit divinizing creation as a whole. What we can see in this renewed interest in the Spirit is a view of the Incarnation that becomes more fully Trinitarian than Athanasius had been in his *On the Incarnation*. What the Word became and did was through the power of the Holy Spirit, uniting the Son to the Father in a kind of embrace that was wide enough to include every part of creation.

For Athanasius, Saint Antony's life is "an adequate guide in asceticism" that others should earnestly desire to imitate.<sup>281</sup> Simply reading about Saint Antony's life will help nonChristians to believe that Jesus is God and help Christians to more fully imitate Christ in this life.<sup>282</sup>

Part of Antony's discipline involved what Danielle Nussberger calls "a spiritually germinated vegetarianism" that trained a person to control "selfish human appetites that wage violence against the peaceable kingdom by halting its all-inclusive solidarity and thereby impeding union with God in Christ."<sup>283</sup> In Nussberger's reading, Saint Antony

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<sup>280</sup> Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, 1.25. In Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 225. The Greek text is in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 26, 589B.

<sup>281</sup> Athanasius, "Life of St. Anthony," in *Early Christian Biographies*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington D.C.: Fathers of the Church, 1952), 133.

<sup>282</sup> Life, 94

<sup>283</sup> Danielle Nussberger, "Vegetarianism: A Christian Spiritual Practice," in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures*, ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 167.

embarked on a spiritual path of self-emptying that allowed others to be God’s beloved creatures rather than objects for Antony’s desires and plans. How Antony treated other animals—letting them be, not using them for his own passions and lusts (as food or entertainment, for example), and refusing to harm them even when they threatened him—was an integral part of the monastic discipline of imitating Christ’s kenosis.

As part of his Spirit-filled Christocentric life, Antony eschewed using other animals for food. Athanasius states that it was unthinkable that Antony would eat an animal. Instead he lived on a frugal plant-based diet consisting of mostly bread and water, but also vegetables and fruits. “His food was bread and salt; his drink, water only. Of meat and wine there is no need to even speak, since nothing of the sort was found among the other holy men.”<sup>284</sup> But even in this plant-based diet, Antony did not demonstrate a tendency to lavishness. After all, it is possible to live on a vegetarian diet and eat extremely well with a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and nuts to combine. As Nussberger tells it, part of Antony’s discipline was to purge himself of the common temptation to see another as here for his purposes rather than having goodness in its own right as created by God. This certainly applied to nonhuman animals. But the ascetic diet extended even to his vegetarian diet. He refused, it seems, to satisfy his desires for newer and greater tastes and lived a contented life on what he could either grow in his own garden or on the bread and vegetables that people brought to him. (There is no hint in Antony that he would eat a dead animal if somebody brought it out of hospitality).

Creation is filled with God’s good beings. Antony, it seems, felt he had no right to take “possession” of anyone or anything. This included the land upon which he lived. At one point in Athanasius’s narrative, Antony plants a garden in the wilderness where he

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<sup>284</sup> Athanasius, “Life of St. Anthony,” 141.

had gone to live. He raised his own vegetables because he noticed that people were going to great lengths and hardship to bring him food and he did not want to use them in this way.<sup>285</sup> Instead, he grew vegetables for himself and to feed people who came to him, not using them for his own purposes but giving to them instead.

Because he had settled near water, wild animals would come and drink the water and occasionally they would eat or trample the vegetables that Antony had planted for his own sustenance. So Antony caught one of the wild creatures. The narrative lumps all of them together and does not differentiate kinds. Was it a rabbit that Antony caught? A woodchuck? A deer? A bear? The narrative does not say. He caught one of the wild creatures and said to it and its companions: “Why do you harm me when I do you no harm?”<sup>286</sup> Just as he did not want to harm his human companions, so too Antony sought to do no harm to the nonhuman animals that surrounded him. He did not seek to own other human and nonhuman animal creatures. Antony’s only weapon against even the more threatening wild animals was prayer: “at night they saw that hill filled with wild beasts, and they saw him fighting as with invisible foes, and praying against them.”<sup>287</sup>

In telling Antony’s story, Athanasius recounts Antony’s daily habits with particular care and detail. Unlike his musings on the Incarnation, which do not really delve into the narratives as told in the Gospels and where Athanasius speaks in broadly philosophical and theological terms, here Athanasius speaks about a particular habit designed to purge the believer of self-centered behavior toward others so that they might

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<sup>285</sup> See *ibid.*, 180. “But, when Anthony saw that because of the bread some were being put to trouble and hardship, he decided to ask some of those who came to him to bring him a two-pronged hoe, an axe, and a little grain. . . . He did this every year, and had bread as a result, rejoicing that he would trouble no one on this account, and that he was keeping himself from being a burden in any way.”

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

hear and experience God more fully. And this habit, Athanasius argues, is extremely worthy of imitation because it conforms to Christ's life, lived in the Spirit in communion with the Father.

Athanasius was aware that Jesus did not live in the desert as a hermit. Antony exhibited "a patient disposition" and was "humble of heart."<sup>288</sup> We are supposed to look at Antony's "virtues" and discern "what kind of man Anthony, the man of God, was." Antony did not fall into the trappings of fame and glory, even exhorting the emperors to remember "the judgment to come, and to know that Christ alone is the true and everlasting King. He begged them to be lovers of their fellow men, to show concern for justice, and to care for the poor."<sup>289</sup>

For Athanasius, it was the disposition that Antony exhibited toward others and his prayer life that truly demonstrated his Christ-like life that others should imitate. Antony's virtues and habits involved an attitude that eschewed seeing others as his possessions, there to be exploited for his self-centered pleasures. So Athanasius ends the *Life* with an admonition to his readers about believing and worshiping Jesus Christ. Antony's life provides a pattern of Christ-like behavior that lead us to contemplate the Incarnation because the life of the monks continues the attitude and disposition of Jesus.

So Athanasius at first tended to speak of the Incarnation in broad strokes: The Father sends the Son to take up matter in a human body and lift up the basic "stuff" of creation so that the good work of God might not fall back into the nothingness from which it came. The Son becomes a human because humans have sinned and have therefore fallen to the lowest depths that a creature can fall. In these broad sweeps

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 206.

Athanasius speaks grandly, starting from the “stuff” of all creation to the planets that orbit the skies. Very little about other creatures comes into Athanasius’s sight. The switch in language from “flesh” to “matter” and “bodies” in *On the Incarnation* allows Athanasius to bypass them. In the *Life of St. Antony*, Athanasius becomes more focused on the lived experience of God in a person’s life as he or she follows Christ through a Spirit-filled prayer life. The Incarnation, no longer cut off from the Holy Spirit, leads directly to an ethic of “letting-be” with regards to other humans and nonhuman animals.<sup>290</sup>

However, it is not clear that this “letting-be” is really grounded in a real respect for nonhuman animals. Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference in the story between the wild animals and the demons with which Antony supposedly wrestled. Moreover, Athanasius’s change in language from flesh to matter and bodies signals a fundamental shift in Christianity more broadly toward an anti-Jewish position. In his Festal letters, Athanasius repeatedly expressed anti-Jewish sentiments. While these statements were directed toward Christians, and aimed primarily at Christian who disagreed with Athanasius, the characterization of “the Jews” in these letters is troubling:

Therefore, my beloved, since we have our souls nourished with divine food, that is, the Word, according to God’s will, and we are fasting bodily with respect to external things, let us keep this great and saving feast as is fitting for us. Even the ignorant Jews received this divine food, through the pattern, when they ate a lamb in the Passover. But since they do not understand the pattern, they eat the lamb

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<sup>290</sup> Coakley points us to Athanasius’s more Trinitarian view of the Incarnation in his encounter with asceticism, but she misses how this translates into a robust theology and ethic toward creation in general and toward human and nonhuman animals in particular.

even to this day, going astray since they are without the city and without the truth.<sup>291</sup>

In this passage, Athanasius draws a distinction between Jewish practice and Christian practice: Christians no longer eat the flesh of a dead lamb on Passover, but the “flesh” of Christ in the bread and wine; whereas Jews eat a real lamb. This polemic, however, did not reflect reality. Many believers in the Messiah Jesus thought that Easter was a type of Jewish Passover, “suitably interpreted with Jesus as the Lamb of God and paschal sacrifice.”<sup>292</sup> Moreover, in 70 CE the Romans destroyed the temple where the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. After this catastrophe, Jewish rabbis reconfigured the Jewish celebration of the Passover without a lamb. The celebration would go on but without a lamb: it was the bitter herbs and other elements that would be central going forward. Athanasius’s polemic, therefore, was not based in a lived experience with real Jewish celebrations and practices. Instead he characterized “the Jews,” who became a trope for those who focus on earthly matters rather than the spiritual ones. To be Jewish was one thing, to be Christian another, for Athanasius.

David Brakke argues that Athanasius depicts the Jews as clinging “to what is ‘fleshly’ (terrestrial, material, temporal) while the Christians look to what is ‘spiritual’ (heavenly, immaterial, eternal). In other words, the Jewish Passover is ‘unseasonable and parochial’; the Christian, ‘timely and universal (ecumenical).’”<sup>293</sup> This anti-Jewish polemic corresponds in some ways to his change in language from σάρξ to ὄλη. It is a shift from a deep rootedness in the Jewish story and its particularity to a more universal

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<sup>291</sup> Quoted in David Brakke, “Jewish flesh and Christian spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 4 (2001), 462.

<sup>292</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012).

<sup>293</sup> Brakke, “Jewish flesh and Christian spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria,” 462.

philosophical story that Christians supposedly embody.<sup>294</sup> Without embedding the Incarnation in the Jewish story, there is a strong temptation to lose the particularity of the Incarnation, and with it the universal as well. Even in the *Life of St. Antony*, it is not Jesus's Torah observance that grounds St. Antony but something less grounded in Scriptural narrative. If Athanasius were less bent on attacking Jewish laws and practices, he may have found in them something that pointed to Christ's redemption of all creatures. Athanasius does not draw out the radical potential in the *Life*. Antony follows Jesus by becoming a hermit in the wilderness and living at peace with the wild animals, much like Jesus in Mark 1:14, a passage I will examine in chapter 4.

### **The Word Becomes Matter: Christian Philosophy and Anti-Judaism**

While there is much in Athanasius to admire and work from, the problems in his work only become stronger as subsequent theologians took on some of the ideas that he developed. In particular the idea that somehow the Incarnation takes up "matter" became a way for John of Damascus to interpret the Word becoming flesh.

#### **John of Damascus**

Not much is known about John. Historians are fairly sure that his grandfather, Mansur ibn Sarjun, not only negotiated Damascus's surrender to the Umayyad caliphate in 635 CE but also was in charge of fiscal administration in Damascus under the new Muslim rule. John's father, Sarjun ibn Mansur, succeeded his father in the public office and John inherited the high public office when his father died. But John retired around

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<sup>294</sup> Daniel Boyarin argues that this shift was fairly typical in the fourth century: "The place of difference increasingly becomes the Jewish place, and thus the Jew becomes the very sign of discord and disunity in the Christian polity." Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 230.

706 CE to a monastery in Muslim-ruled Palestine, where he finally took the name “John” instead of his birth name Yanah ibn Mansur ibn Sarjun. John lived out the rest of his days as a monk and prolific theologian.<sup>295</sup>

During John’s lifetime an iconoclast controversy began, lasting from 726 to 843 CE.<sup>296</sup> Somewhere between 726 and 730 CE, Emperor Leo III forbade churches from using icons in worship. “Icons” meant any representation of Jesus, Mary, or the saints “made from colors, pebbles, or any other material that is fit, set in the holy churches of God, on holy utensils and vestments, on walls and boards, in houses and in streets.”<sup>297</sup> Leo removed and destroyed an image of Christ that hung above a palace gate in Constantinople. In its place he hung a cross and the following inscription: “The Lord God does not allow the fashioning of an image of Christ that is lifeless and without breath, made of earthly matter despised by the sacred writings. Leo, together with his son the new Constantine, signs the royal portals with the thrice-blessed sign of the cross, the glory of all believers.”<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> For an overview of John of Damascus’s life see the Introduction in Saint John of Damascus, *Writings* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), v–xxxviii and Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3–14. It is interesting that John seems to have lived in relative peace in Muslim-ruled territories and was probably Syrian by birth. The Catholic Emperor Herakleios during John’s time promoted monothelism and did not take kindly to John’s writings, nor did Emperor Leo III when he forbade images in 730 CE. But since John lived outside the Roman Empire, he was out of Christian imperial reach. Under Muslim rule, Christian theology was no longer subject to an emperor’s whims and fancies and so John, a host of Christians who did not accept Chalcedon, Jews, and Muslims could exist side-by-side without fear of an imperial edict against them. The early Muslim caliphates seem surprisingly tolerant in comparison, for example, to the Justinian codes that made baptism mandatory. So John’s theological orthodoxy has nothing to do with imperial edicts and bans that characterized so much of previous attempts to define and impose orthodoxy. Rather, his work is part of a Palestinian monastic community that had little to do with Roman or Byzantine triumphalism.

<sup>296</sup> For a historical overview, see Edward Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

<sup>297</sup> This is the definition of an icon as pronounced by the Seventh Ecumenical Synod held in Nicaea in 787. See Louth, *St John Damascene*, 194.

<sup>298</sup> Quoted in Christoph Schonbom, *God's Human Face: The Christ Icon* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 151.



In this inscription Leo outlines three reasons for taking down the icons. First, God forbids images. Leo clearly has in mind Scriptural injunctions such as Exodus 20:4: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” Second, icons do not have life. The synod at Heireia (754 CE) elaborated this claim by stating that lifeless icons tempt believers to replace “depicting in ourselves the virtues of the saints as told in the writings, and thus becoming living icons.”<sup>299</sup> Living humans are icons. Inanimate handmade icons distract from virtuous living. Finally, Leo III says that icons are made of “earthly matter” that Scripture “despises.” This reason seems to deny the goodness of all creation by making “matter,” the stuff people like Athanasius believed humans are made from, a thing from which humans need to be saved. Perhaps Leo had in mind older platonic notions that matter imprisons the soul and the goal of life is to escape from it and return to a more spiritual source. Leo does not say that, but given the history of the belief in matter as a prison-house for the soul it seems reasonable to infer that something like this lies behind the statement about matter.<sup>300</sup> Shortly after Leo II banned the icons, John wrote *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* to articulate a defense of icons.

The *Three Treatises* are really three different versions of the same defense. The second and third treatises lift word for word from his first treatise. The second treatise is

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<sup>299</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 152.

<sup>300</sup> Emperor Leo’s edict would not have affected the monastic communities in Muslim-ruled Palestine, but it nevertheless had to be dealt with amongst the Palestinian monastic communities as a theological issue. Archaeological evidence suggests local Palestinian iconoclasm. See Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), 180–219.

a simplified version of the first treatise, and the third is more of a systematic treatment of the issue than the first and second. Yet there are important differences.

### **First Treatise**

John begins his first treatise by discussing prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible concerning idolatry and citing several New Testament passages that distinguish Christ's revelation from that of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible. He then confesses that by worshiping the Incarnate Son of God, he worships the one true God who reveals love for creation in the Incarnation. Then John asserts the orthodox position that although it is impossible to make an image of God in Godself, it is possible and necessary to depict God as incarnate. After this, John begins to answer the iconoclast objections to images, which were largely based in Jewish prohibitions against idolatry. John's first reply is to note that the Hebrew Bible was concerned with idolatry, not with images as such. The Hebrew Bible prohibited the people of God from worshiping creation rather than the Creator. He briefly mentions that this prohibition was necessary because Jews as a whole were prone to idolatry. He develops this argument at length in the second and third treatises, and it is one to which I will return. But it shows up even in his first treatise.

John claims that Christians show respect and honor for certain special created things by bowing down (*προσκυνέω* [v.] and *προσκυνητής* [n.]). This veneration is not the total worship (*λατρεία*) due to God alone, and has a basis in Jewish veneration for the tabernacle and respect for other people. The old covenant allowed material images such as the tabernacle, the mercy seat, the utensils, the altar and its basin and other artistic elements for worship. All of these were acceptable though they were made of what iconoclasts like Leo called "contemptible matter." In doing so, John said that his

opponents “abuse matter and call it worthless.”<sup>301</sup> In response to the objection about matter, he cited Genesis 1:31, in which God declares everything very good.<sup>302</sup> In addition to icon-like items in the Hebrew Bible such as the ark, the staff, and the mercy-seat, which all came from matter, John pointed to Exodus 31:1–10, in which God told Moses that Bezalel and Oholiab had been gifted with skills “to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft.” They would make the Ark of the Covenant and the other worship instruments.<sup>303</sup> John also cited Exodus 35, in which Moses asks the Israelites to give their precious metals and jewels so the artistic elements could be made.<sup>304</sup> John goes on to proclaim that if such lowly elements as color—made then from what we today call “earth pigments” because they were found in common and not-so-common minerals<sup>305</sup>—were to be part of the cherubim in the temple, then matter could not be “detestable.”<sup>306</sup>

But John’s central argument that matter is an acceptable vehicle for seeing the divine is the Incarnation:

Of old, God the incorporeal and formless was never depicted, but now that God has been seen in the flesh and has associated with human kind, I depict what I have seen of God. I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through

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<sup>301</sup> See Saint John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, ed. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 1.15, p. 28. See also *ibid.*, 2.13, p. 69.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.13.

<sup>303</sup> See *ibid.*, 1.16.

<sup>304</sup> See *ibid.* 1.16 and 2.13.

<sup>305</sup> Earth pigments occur naturally in rocks and soils. Different mixtures of minerals—from which the pigments are derived—make for unique colors in local landscapes. Earth pigments include ochers, sienna, and umbers. For thousands of years people have used these minerals to make paint. On pigments and color for paint see Phillip Ball, *Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

<sup>306</sup> See Saint John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 1:16 and 2:14.

matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter,  
through which my salvation was worked.<sup>307</sup>

If people wanted to take matter out of worship, they would have to take down their crosses, shun the holy places, throw out their Bibles, pitch their Eucharist tables and elements, and deny the body and blood of Jesus itself. “Either do away with reverence and veneration for all these or submit to the tradition of the Church and allow the veneration of images of God and friends of God, sanctified by name and therefore overshadowed by the grace of the divine Spirit.”<sup>308</sup> According to John, the Christian gospel cannot be separated from matter because the Son became matter and his entire ministry was in and through the material world. Scripture repeatedly attests to matter being good and useful for gaining knowledge about the spiritual world.

The Incarnation, which bridges the ontological divide between the Creator and creature, is for John a crucial aspect of venerating icons. In Jesus, the created world has been united with God via Christ’s humanity. Therefore the material world is due respect

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<sup>307</sup> See *ibid.*, 1.16, p. 29. Sergius Bulgakov accuses John of reducing the body to mere matter in this passage. That is one possible reading. If so, then John affirms the presuppositions of the iconoclasts in which the visible and invisible in Christ are two poles. See Sergius Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 23–24. The iconoclasts developed Chalcedonian Christological arguments that basically said that if the icon portrays only the Son’s human nature, then it divides the two natures, resulting in a Nestorian heresy. On the other hand, if the icon seeks to depict God’s divinity as well as humanity, then it runs against Scripture, but also seems to fuse the two natures, which is Monophysite heresy. So the iconoclasts developed a Christological argument that none of the icon defenders answered decisively because they usually accepted the premises of an antinomy between God and the world. The icon defenders accepted this argument but placed an emphasis on the Incarnation’s visibility. But by doing so the iconoclasts were the ones who had the upper hand in the dogmatic arguments. The iconophiles never resolved the issue. Bulgakov argues that all parties placed two very different things in relation resulting in a false antinomy. The issue of God’s invisibility is on a different logical plane than the visibility of matter. “To unite them in one antinomy is the same thing as to put together yards and pounds simply because both of them are measures (though of course they measure totally different things).” They confuse that God in Godself is invisible, which is one logical level of inquiry, with the fact that God in the cosmos is revealed in the Son, which is another level of logical inquiry. Combining the two levels leads to an unresolvable dilemma. See *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>308</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 1.16, p. 30.

and honor because it is through this material world, says John, “that my salvation came.”<sup>309</sup>

In other places, John speaks about the nonhuman world as having a great significance for our knowledge of God. For instance, in his greatest theological achievement, *The Fount of Knowledge*—consisting of three different books: the *Dialectica*, *On Heresies*, and *On the Orthodox Faith*<sup>310</sup>—John quotes Wisdom 13:5, “for by the beauty of his own creatures the creator is by analogy discovered” and Romans 1:20, “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”<sup>311</sup> Though God is completely other than creation, God created all things out of an overflowing love and imprinted beauty, truth, and goodness in all things. As such, it is possible to see hints of the divine in created beings.

Indeed, through the act of creation, God has made all things in such a way that by existing they participate in God’s goodness. There is no such thing as creation apart from God’s activity. John says, “All things participate in his goodness by the fact that they have being. For he is being to them all, since ‘in him are all things,’ not only because he has brought them from nothing into being, but because it is by his operation that all things he made are kept in existence and held together.”<sup>312</sup> God has created out of the sheer overflowing love within God’s own inner life. Because of this abundant goodness, God “was not content to contemplate himself, but by a superabundance of goodness saw

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> The *Dialectica* are titled *The Philosophical Chapters* but are always cited as *Dialectica* in the sources. Andrew Louth shows that John’s original intention was to keep the three works together even though the manuscript tradition did not always do so. See Louth, *St John Damascene*, 31–35.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>312</sup> *Orthodox Faith*, 4.13

fit that there should be some things to benefit by a participation in his goodness. He brings all things from nothing into being and creates them both, both visible and invisible, and man, who is made up of both.”<sup>313</sup>

The goodness of created things and the distinction between God and creation is the bedrock for John’s view of the Incarnation. If created material were “detestable,” as the iconoclasts have said, then the Incarnation itself would be impossible. God would not be Creator. God would not have fellowship with creation because it would be a type of second evil god rather than an expression of God’s goodness and love.

Moreover, for God to become incarnate, God had to become a particular creature. God could not become creation in general or a species in general. In his *Dialectica*, the primary term with which John was concerned was ὑπόστασις.<sup>314</sup> John says that there are two distinct uses of ὑπόστασις, which he draws from earlier Christian theologians. The first use means οὐσία (being), the second use means “the individual and the distinct person.”<sup>315</sup> Greek philosophers, according to John fought about the difference between οὐσία and φύσις, but the church Fathers ignored the philosophers and simply distinguished between the common and the particular. The common they called οὐσία (substance or being), φύσις (nature), μορφή (form), and εἶδος (species). They called the particular ἴδιος (individual), πρόσωπον (person), or ὑπόστασις.<sup>316</sup> John goes on to say that “substance which is devoid of form does not subsist of itself, nor does an essential difference, nor a species, nor an accident. It is only the hypostasis, the individuals, that is,

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<sup>313</sup> Orthodox Faith, 2.2

<sup>314</sup> Andrew Louth says that the *Dialectica* are not a superfluous part of the *Fount of Knowledge*. Though John largely copies from philosophers for this volume he did not take over their use of hypostasis but used it in an unusual way that is helpful to theology. He drew from Church Fathers, who used the terms in different and confusing ways sometimes and tried to clarify what *hypostasis* in particular means for theology.

<sup>315</sup> John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, 29.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

that subsist of themselves, and in them are found both substance and the essential differences, the species and the accidents.”<sup>317</sup> In other words, the primary ontological reality for John and the Greek fathers was in the particular individual, not in the abstract universals like “being” and “species.” Species exist because there are individuals that share some common characteristics. In other words, universals like species only exist in specific creatures (ὑποστάσεις).<sup>318</sup>

The Incarnation, therefore, has to be particular. God could not become a “species” in general or “creation” in general because these abstract universals do not exist apart from individual ὑποστάσεις. For John, reality is fundamentally hypostatic; everything exists in relationship to a ὑπόστασις. When John defended use of icons this philosophical commitment was in the background: we do not start from universals and work our way to the particular. We start from the particular and see how the individual instantiates more universal and common things like species and such. John does not restrict the term ὑπόστασις to humans. He applies it across the board to all individual creatures.

### **Second Treatise**

Though John used large parts of his first treatise to complete the second, there are some significant differences between the two. John stated that he wished to simplify his arguments. But he does more than this. In the first ten chapters, John argued that Satan invented idolatry, which had special power over Jewish people. John points to Exodus 32

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>318</sup> It is important to note that for John, the universals do exist within a particular hypostasis. Otherwise, one could fall into an error of thinking that all universals beyond the individual are constructs of the mind to make sense of the world and ultimately of God. Theologically, this would mean that speaking of three “persons” or individuals in the Trinity and one “substance” or “being” would be false because the latter “substance” is a figment of human imagination when in reality there are three individual gods that we call the Trinity.

and 33, where a Jewish crowd melted down their precious metals and made idols for themselves as Moses met God on Mount Sinai.<sup>319</sup> Because Jews were prone to idolatry, John argued, Moses had to legislate against making any images. Jewish people were “still infants and ill with a diseased inclination to idolatry.”<sup>320</sup> With the advent of Christ, however, things change. Christians know that it is impossible to make an image of the invisible God and also know that the Creator alone is due worship.

John goes on to accuse the emperor and iconoclasts of Manichaeism. “You abuse matter and call it worthless. So do the Manichees, but the divine Scripture proclaims that it is good.”<sup>321</sup> Scripture proclaims everything that God has created to be good. Since “matter is something made by God” matter is also good, according to John.<sup>322</sup> If the emperor wants to call matter evil, he would need to say that God did not create it, or else say that God creates evil. Even Moses knew that matter was good and could be honored when he took up a free-will offering of “gold, silver, bronze, aquamarine, porphyry, scarlet twill and twisted flax and goat’s hair and rams’ skin dyed red and spices for incense and carnelians and precious stones for engraving and for the shoulder-piece and the robe.”<sup>323</sup> Therefore, John said, Christians can honor matter by veneration.

But John once again brings the Incarnation into the argument as the most powerful example. Quoting John 1:14—“For the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”—John states, “It is clear to all, that flesh is matter and is a creature.”<sup>324</sup> Because the Son took on a body of flesh, which is matter and created, John says he reverences matter.

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<sup>319</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 2.8.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.6, p. 63.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.13, p. 69.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.13, p. 70.

<sup>323</sup> Quoting Exodus 35:4–10. See *ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.14, p. 70.



Moreover, the cross, the holy places, the “ink and parchment” of the Gospels, the Eucharist table, and the bread and wine of the Eucharist are all matter. The Law was for the Jews. The Incarnation changed things.

Yet in the Tanak, according to John, God made an image and showed images. God made humans in the image of God. But God also used images to reveal Godself. “Abraham and Moses and Isaias and all the prophets saw images of God and not the very being of God. The [burning] bush is an image of the Divine Mother, and God said to Moses when he was about to approach it, ‘Loose the sandals of your feet, for the ground, on which you stand, is holy ground.’ If, therefore, the ground on which the image of the Mother of God was seen by Moses is holy ground, how much more is the image itself?”<sup>325</sup>

Yet John once again falls into an anti-Jewish polemic, stating that Moses forbade Jews to make images. “Moses, on account of the hardness of heart of the sons of Israel, ordered them not to make images, for he knew their tendency to slip into idolatry.” But things have changed since the Incarnation and Christians “stand securely on the rock of faith enriched by the light of the knowledge of God.”<sup>326</sup> In this second treatise defending icons, John has a much more thoroughgoing anti-Jewish polemic as well as a more developed anti-Manichaean argument than he did in the first. Even John’s argument from the Incarnation takes on an anti-Jewish tone in this second treatise.

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 2.20, p. 75–76.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 2.20, p. 76.

### Third Treatise

The third treatise differs from the previous two in structure and format. It is a slightly more “systematic” presentation. In the first ten chapters of this treatise, John reproduces large sections from his second treatise. These sections vehemently argue that Christianity superseded Judaism. John then recounts his anthropology: humans, being body and soul, stand midway between heaven and earth. Based on this anthropology, John surmises that Christian faith mediates between heaven and earth.<sup>327</sup>

Repeating from his first Treatise, John says, “We see images in created things intimating to us dimly reflections of the divine; as when we say that there is an image of the holy Trinity, which is beyond any beginning, in the sun, its light and ray, or in a fountain welling up and the stream flowing out and the flood, or in our intellect and reason and spirit, or a rose, its flower and its fragrance.”<sup>328</sup> These statements lead John to claim that God was the first maker of images. He develops at length his brief statement from the second treatise that God made and used images in the Tanak.

The Father “begat” the Son, “his living and natural image.”<sup>329</sup> Here he grounds images in the Trinity. From this eternal image, God made humans. God also used images in the theophanies. Jacob wrestled with God, who appeared like a human. Moses saw God but only as a “human back.” Isaiah saw God as like a human seated on a throne. Daniel too saw God in the likeness of a human. But none of these prophets saw God’s nature. They only saw an image of the Son who would later become incarnate. Daniel

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<sup>327</sup> On this aspect of the third treatise see Louth, *St John Damascene*, 207.

<sup>328</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 3.21, p. 99.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.26, p. 101.

and Jacob saw an angelic being, and they venerated the angel. But “God did not become an angel, but in nature and truth God became a human being.”<sup>330</sup>

Humans partake in the divine nature in ways that angels cannot, according to John, because humans consume the Eucharist. The bread and wine become the body and blood of the Son. This hypostatic union allows those who consume the bread and wine to “share in the two natures, in the body in a bodily manner, and in the divinity spiritually, or rather in both in both ways, not that we have become identical [with God] hypostatically (for we first subsisted, and then we were united), but through assimilation with the Body and Blood.”<sup>331</sup> In this way, Christians are “images” of the Son in ways that are not open to other creatures.

### **John’s Eschatological Vision**

One of John’s most powerful statements has to do with his claim that the Word became matter and a creature by becoming flesh. In the Incarnation God overcomes the most fundamental ontological distinction: that between God and all creatures. John uses this argument to defend the use of images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints in Christians worship.

However, John does not argue the fuller significance of his own argument at least partly because he falls into anti-Jewish polemic. In the first treatise John speaks disparagingly about how Jewish people have adorned their temples and synagogues with “cherubim and phoenixes both inside and out . . . and also oxen and lions and

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

pomegranates.”<sup>332</sup> But Christian churches have “much more valuable” images because Christian churches are “adorned with the forms and images of saints, rather than animals and trees.”<sup>333</sup>

What John misses is the Jewish eschatological vision that might undergird such images in Jewish worship. For example, a synagogue in Meroth (in Galilee) had a mosaic installed on its hall floor in the early seventh century. The central panel depicts a scene with a wolf and a lamb along with a quotation in Hebrew of Isaiah 65:25: “The wolf and the lamb shall graze together.”<sup>334</sup>

In addition to the creation-wide peace vision from the Isaiah 11 and 65, Jews sometimes depicted peace between and with nonhuman animals in other ways that were equally messianic and eschatological. For instance, a synagogue in Gaza-Maiumas installed a floor mosaic between 508–509 CE that depicts a huge lion bowing its head before the King David playing his harp. Nearby, a cobra peaks up its head to watch the psalmist.<sup>335</sup> Next to the lion and cobra stands a giraffe. Giraffes, according to Moshe Barasch, were widely seen as “particularly tame and peaceful” and highlight the peaceableness of the scene as it stands next to an otherwise carnivorous lion and venomous snake.<sup>336</sup> In the original mosaic there were likely other animals listening to David play the lyre, but the damaged mosaic now only shows these three.

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 1.20, p. 33.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues—Archaeology and Art: New Discoveries and Current Research* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 421.

<sup>335</sup> The date is firmly fixed by an inscription in the mosaic that dates the piece. See Paul Corby Finney, “Orpheus-David: A Connection in Iconography between Greco-Roman Judaism and Early Christianity,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1978): 6.

<sup>336</sup> Moshe Barasch, “Animal Metaphors of the Messianic Age: Some Ancient Jewish Imagery,” in *Visible Religion, Vol. 4–5* (Leiden: Brill, 1985–86), 242. A good image of the mosaic can be seen in Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 416.

Likewise, Jews at Dura Europos, a city destroyed in 256 CE, depicted King David as bringing a creation-wide peace to the world. In the middle of the synagogue, the congregation installed a mosaic that depicts King David playing a harp. Again, in the surviving mosaic nonhuman animals surround him and listen to the music. A lion and a dove are the only two that scholars can surely identify, but that is enough to see the role that nonhuman animals played in Jewish art and imagination sometimes.<sup>337</sup> The scholarly consensus is that Jews had recast King David as an Orpheus-like character who could tame wild creatures by playing music. In the background to the art is the Jewish messianic and eschatological hope for a creation-wide restoration and peace.<sup>338</sup>

Jews not only depicted nonhuman animals as part of an eschatological vision but also painted nonhuman animals to tell biblical stories. Noah's ark and Daniel in the lion's den are stories that require nonhuman animals to tell the biblical stories in images. Nonhuman animals also often appear next to depictions of the Torah in panels, which may also reflect some eschatological hope that when the Torah is fulfilled the earth will be transformed.

Though John of Damascus derides Jews for depicting nonhuman creatures in their places of worship, such images were in fact not uncommon in Christian churches either. For example, the Church of the Acropolis at Ma'in, Jordan, installed a floor mosaic around 719–720 CE. Though only portions of the original scene now survive, the mosaic

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<sup>337</sup> On the Dura Europos synagogue and the Davidic peace mosaic see Paul Finney, "Orpheus-David: A Connection in Iconography between Greco-Roman Judaism and Christianity," *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1978): 6–15 and Erwin Goodenough, *Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue*, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. 9 (New York: Pantheon, 1964), 78–123.

<sup>338</sup> There are many other such depictions of messianic peace in Jewish synagogues. In another image from Meroth, for example, a soldier has removed his helmet and thrown down his weapons, which are strewn about, depicting according to Asher Ovadiah, Jewish hopes for the cessation of war. See Asher Ovadiah, Sonia Mucznik, and Carla Gomez de Silva, "The Meroth Mosaic Reconsidered," in *Art and Archaeology in Israel and Neighbouring Countries: Antiquity to Late Antiquity*, ed. Asher Ovadiah (London: Pindar Press, 2002), 569–78.

depicted a lion and a zebu (a type of ox) near a tree. Inscribed in Greek above the scene is Isaiah 11:7: καὶ λέων καὶ βοῦς ἅμα φάγονται ἄχυρα (“And the lion shall eat straw like the ox”). Michele Piccirillo maintains that this scene depicts “the messianic reign of peace as foretold by Isaiah and thought to have been realized by Christ.”<sup>339</sup> At least four other mosaics on church floors survive that explicitly depict Isaiah 11:6–8 and its creation-wide peace vision where predator and prey gather in harmony, leading archaeologist Rachel Hachlili to the conclusion that “This group of mosaics shows episodes in which pairs of animals that are acknowledged enemies are peacefully portrayed; they are depicted facing each other, accompanied by the inscribed verses of Isaiah 11:6 or Isaiah 65:25; the scene apparently illustrates biblical verses relating and emphasizing peace on earth. This is an unusual rendition, expressing a conceptual perception of a messianic vision of peace rather than a biblical story.”<sup>340</sup>

Likewise, Christians depicted biblical stories such as Jonah and the whale, Noah’s ark, Daniel in the lion’s den, and Adam naming the animals in Genesis 2. Jonah and the whale is by far the most popular early Christian story for images, followed by the story of Noah’s ark.<sup>341</sup> Adam naming the animals, for example, is depicted in the North Church in Haouarté, Syria, which installed a mosaic somewhere between 486 and 502 CE. The mosaic is mostly destroyed but what survives depicts Adam surrounded by birds, snakes, a lion, a phoenix, and a griffon all of whom he gives names (Gen 2:19–20).<sup>342</sup> Adam naming the animals is also beautifully depicted on an early fifth-century Christian

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<sup>339</sup> Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, Jordan: American Center of Oriental Research/Jordan Press Foundation, 1993), 201.

<sup>340</sup> For a discussion of these four churches and the Isaiah peace vision see Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 422.

<sup>341</sup> Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69.

<sup>342</sup> For a discussion and image see Hachlili, *Ancient Synagogues*, 500–501. Hachlili notes that “The image of David of Gaza is similar to the figure of Adam, notably in dress, in the presence of a throne, in the choice of animals—the lion and the snake, and in the name inscribed above the scene.”

diptych. Lions, a leopard, a wild boar, an elephant, a donkey, a mountain goat, a stag, a doe, a bull, a snake, a lizard, a grasshopper, a fox, an eagle, and a small bird surround Adam, whose right hand gestures in such a way as to indicate naming them. At the bottom of the frame, four rivers flow through the garden.<sup>343</sup>

In addition, two persons of the Trinity—the Son and Holy Spirit—have often been depicted as or with nonhuman animals. The single most popular way to depict the Holy Spirit was as a dove. This image appears in numerous Christian images ranging from early catacombs to later carvings of Jesus’s baptism.<sup>344</sup> Moreover, Jesus was often depicted in ways that required other animals. In the catacombs and in later art Jesus was often depicted as the Good Shepherd, bringing home a lamb that was lost and carrying her on his shoulders.<sup>345</sup> Another popular image for Jesus was to depict him as Orpheus, as Jews did with King David. In these depictions, Jesus plays music to nonhuman animals, pleasing and taming them.<sup>346</sup> Yet another widely popular and very ancient way to depict Jesus was to substitute an image of a lamb for the human Jesus. This way of depicting Jesus drew directly from the Gospel of John, where John the Baptist declares Jesus to be “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36; see also Rev 5:6, 12; 12:11; and 22:1).<sup>347</sup>

John of Damascus missed these ways of depicting nonhuman animals not only to tell a biblical story but also to depict an eschatological hope for the renewal of all

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<sup>343</sup> For an extended description and color image see Jeffrey Spier, ed. *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (Fort Worth, TX: Kimball Art Museum, 2007), 264–65.

<sup>344</sup> Peacocks and the mythical phoenix were also very popular images with early Christians. These creatures appear over and over from the earliest catacombs through later more elaborate art. The peacock was thought to have incorruptible flesh, prefiguring in the natural world Christ’s incorruptibility. The phoenix, which Christians thought to be a real creature, was thought to prefigure in the natural world Christ’s resurrection because it could die and come back to life. On the peacock, see Augustine, *City of God*, 21:4. On the phoenix see 1 Clement 24:6 and Tertullian, *On the Resurrection*, 13.

<sup>345</sup> See Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 37–41 and “Shepherd, The Good,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture*, ed. Peter Murray and Linda Murray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 486–88.

<sup>346</sup> See Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 41–44.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 141–43.

creatures, including nonhuman animals, and even to depict the Incarnation and the Holy Spirit. To be sure, the Damascene thought it was acceptable to depict any creature: “we can make images of everything with a visible shape.” Only the divine nature is unable to be rendered into an image.<sup>348</sup> Yet it is the realm of the saints and images of Jesus that he thought are the high and proper form of iconography. Depicting nonhuman creatures is a “Jewish” and “infantile” thing.<sup>349</sup>

For John, God could not become creation in general. God became a particular hypostasis. God became a human. But John did not emphasize the particular enough. God became a male, Jewish human, and, as I will argue in the following chapters, these have special importance for how we interpret Jesus’s humanity. Just as God could not become creation in general, so too God could not become “humanity” in general but had to instantiate a particular hypostasis within a particular time and place and amongst a particular people. John does mention that Jesus came from the “tribe of Judah,” but this is within a discussion of his being born from Mary and having fully human and fully divine natures hypostatically united into one person.<sup>350</sup> He gave no attention at all to the significance of Jesus’s Jewishness. He used the fact of his birth to show his full humanity and to defend a Chalcedonian Christology. But Jesus was a Jewish person within a tradition that looked toward a time when peace will run so deep that even lions, bears, wolves, and other predators will experience a transformation in their bodies to be able to

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<sup>348</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 3.24, p. 100.

<sup>349</sup> In line with this thinking, in 692, the Council of Trullo forbade depicting Jesus as a lamb because they thought it undermined the reality of Christ’s full humanity in the Incarnation. I will examine this council in chapter 5. For now it is enough to note that this council’s decision did not make a great impact as Jesus continued to be depicted as a lamb and still does. Nevertheless, the council expresses uneasiness with the potential species boundary crossing that the image conveys for the redemption of all creatures. John of Damascus, I surmise, would have been in agreement with the council against the majority tradition beforehand and afterward.

<sup>350</sup> See John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, 3.2.



eat the lush vegetation God provides. Deer and lambs will no longer fear being killed and eaten. Humans and nonhuman animals will be able to live at peace with and unafraid of one another.

### **Nonhuman Animals and Rationality**

However, John excluded nonhuman animals from eschatological renewal by denying that they could experience resurrection because they do not have “rational souls.”<sup>351</sup> Human beings are rational mortal animals who die when their souls separate from their bodies. Nonhuman animals are irrational and simply die without the hope of resurrection. For this reason, humans who lack knowledge and who act contrary to reason are worse off than nonhuman animals because they will burn in hell forever rather than simply dying like the irrational animals.<sup>352</sup> But nonhuman animals do not share in the resurrection because they do not have rational souls; they simply die without hope for a new life in God.

The purpose of nonhuman animals on this earth is to serve humans in various capacities. Because humans are rational and are microcosms of the created order who image God on earth, humans should “rule like kings” over other creatures. According to the Damascene, God created everything for human use: “At the Creator’s command there came forth every sort of animal: creeping things, and wild beasts, and cattle. Everything was for the suitable use of man. Of the animals, some were food, such as deer, sheep,

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 4.27.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

horses, asses, and the like; still others for diversion, such as monkeys and such birds as magpies, parrots, and the like.”<sup>353</sup>

For John of Damascus, nonhuman animals are good because they participate in the Creator’s goodness: “all things participate in His goodness by the fact that they have being.”<sup>354</sup> In the Damascene’s view, the Christian doctrine of creation also includes God’s continued providential care. By God’s activity “all things are sustained and held together by the power of the Creator.”<sup>355</sup> Following John’s logic about creation and providence, if nonhuman animals have inherent goodness by the mere fact that they exist and participate in God’s goodness and sustaining care, then it follows that God is also concerned for their continued well-being as Scripture repeatedly attests (for example, Ps 104; Job 38–39; and Matt 6:26). God cares about these creatures who even in John of Damascus’s view can feel physical and emotional pain and suffering. It follows from John’s own view of creation, providence, and his limited view of what other animals are capable of (sentience), that a loving God would want them to flourish and lead joyous lives rather than to suffer. Therefore, even if John of Damascus were right that animals simply die without hope for resurrection and eschatological renewal, then it would seem all the more prudent for humans to make their short and hopeless lives as good as possible in our “kingly” rule. It would seem that Genesis 1:29–30, where God tells humans to eat a plant-based diet, would be the best way to ensure this. Ignoring the Genesis passage does not really do justice to God’s good creatures.

John of Damascus’s argument seems to be that because nonhuman animals lack rationality this proves that they do not have souls, which is the basis for the kind of

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 2.10.

<sup>354</sup> John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, 4.13

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 2.10.

immortality necessary to participate in eschatological renewal and resurrection. But if eschatological renewal is a gift from God every bit as much as creation itself, then Jesus's reconciling and redeeming work is the deciding factor of resurrection, not any natural human possession or attribute.

Moreover, the Damascene unjustly denies souls to nonhuman animals. Even on the basis of Aristotle, upon whom John draws heavily, nonhuman animals have irrational souls, but souls nonetheless. The kind of soul a creature has does not necessarily dictate whether they participate in the resurrection and eschatological renewal. There is plenty in the Jewish and Christian traditions to argue for nonhuman animal souls. 2 Enoch 58, for example, claims that not only do nonhuman animals have souls, but also on Judgment Day they will accuse humans for the things we have done to them. Furthermore, Ecclesiastes 3:19–21 says, “For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?”<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> My argument agrees with that of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who claimed that Christianity has hope “on a universal scale.” Balthasar notes that the whole creation groans for redemption, which means that “it is a process of central concern to the gospel.” See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, V*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 419. Humans are the first fruit of the renewal brought about by Jesus Christ, but everything has been drawn into the drama so that even now the world experiences something like “pangs of childbirth.” Therefore, Balthasar maintains, theologians like Thomas Aquinas and John of Damascus have pronounced a “cruel verdict” by excluding nonhuman animals from the resurrection. Their “cruel verdict” blatantly “contradicts the Old Testament sense of the solidarity between the living, subhuman cosmos and the world of men . . . the prophetic and Jewish ideas of divine salvation in images of peace among animals . . . and it also goes against a deep Christian sense that Joseph Bernhart has vividly expressed in his work *Heilige und Tiere* (Saints and animals); finally one can refer . . . to the role of animals in the biblical heaven—the lamb, the dove, the living creatures with animal faces before the throne of God—and to their indispensable employment in Christian art” (ibid., 421).

John of Damascus certainly understood that Jesus's particularity matters. But he abstracted the Incarnation from Jesus's actual particularity. His Jesus was not Jewish. Because of this the Damascene does not emphasize the particular enough. His anti-Jewish polemics reflect a lack of understanding of just how important particularity is. His particularity is *against* some people and creatures rather than being for them. His Jesus is less of a light for the nations (Isa 49:6) and more of a polemic against the nations: nations here including human and nonhuman creatures.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have looked at some patristic uses of the notion of the Word becoming flesh. Many patristic authors, I argued, used this notion within an apologetic polemic. Their purpose was to demonstrate that Jesus's humanity was real. He had a physical body and was not a mere phantom. Nor was Jesus a "ghost in a machine" in that his divinity somehow filled his body like air fills a balloon. While these apologetics were necessary to defend the goodness of creation as a whole, these uses seem to have impeded more constructive theological ideas that could expand the idea of "flesh" to more than just humans. Yet the kernel for this move is already present in these authors as they argue for the goodness of creation based on Jesus's physical body.

Athanasius and John of Damascus are the theologians who began to take John 1:14 in new and creative directions beyond apologetics. Their use of the Incarnation can broaden our understanding of the doctrine so as to include other creatures. I chose them because they explicitly speak about the Incarnation in its particularity as having creation-wide implications and provide a way to speak that draws upon John 1:14.

For Athanasius, the Incarnation is best seen within an ontological divide between the Creator and creation. The first significance, then, is that the Son overcomes this ontological divide in order to deify all creatures and renew all to its intended purpose of communion with God. So he speaks about the Word becoming “matter” and the Son taking on a “body” well before he speaks about the Word becoming human.

Giving priority to the rest of creation is a crucial move in Athanasius because the Word becomes human specifically because humans sinned. Our disobedience has left us far from God moving in the direction of nothingness, which is not fitting for God’s good creatures. Our sin has wreaked havoc on the rest of creation, and coming to humans is a way to restore humanity to its rightful place in communion with God. Through Jesus all creation will be restored. Jesus Christ, in this view, had universal significance by becoming the basic building blocks of all creation.

Yet Athanasius largely ignored what this might mean for nonhuman animals. He focused on Christ’s redemption of humanity from the bondage of sin. He never really looked at what this might mean in terms of eschatological renewal for all creation, but given his debt to Irenaeus, who explicitly taught that creation as we know it would be renewed rather than recreated, and a great sign of this renewal would be peace between nonhuman animals, it would not be a stretch to say that he probably envisioned Isaiah’s peaceable kingdom in a similar way. Humans would be the first fruits of this creation-wide peace, but the Incarnation is not limited to humans. Precisely in the Word becoming a particular creature to restore us from our lostness to communion with God, the Word takes up all the rest.

We begin to see this view come forward when he encountered the desert fathers and mothers in his later years. In his later writings Athanasius comes to a more Trinitarian account of the Incarnation, where he could advocate a specific discipline and attitude toward all other animal creatures based on a prayerful life of learning about one's own self-centeredness and turning toward the other.

Yet his anti-Jewish polemics abstract Jesus from the particularity within which he moved and breathed. By switching from the biblical language of the Word became "flesh" to statements about the Word becoming "matter" Athanasius abstracted the Incarnation out of its deep connections to nonhuman animals and the Jewish story connecting all creatures. Instead he opts to speak about large "bodies" like planets and stars, and does not indicate that humans and other creatures are interdependent in the way Hebrew Scripture does. By ignoring Jesus's Jewishness, Athanasius impoverished his Christology and theology of the Incarnation, making it less helpful than it might otherwise have been for modern theologians.

John of Damascus, likewise, speaks eloquently about creation participating in God's goodness. He developed the idea of God becoming matter in some helpful ways when it came to defending the goodness of creation for pointing people toward God. Icons are literally made of the earthy "stuff" that so many iconoclasts explicitly despised, and that very "stuff" made up the body of Jesus Christ as it does every other creature.

But John did not see how this view might translate into a more robust account of other creatures. Instead, he mimics his critics at times by dismissing depictions of other animals as "Jewish" infantile behavior, ignoring contemporary Christian practices and robust Jewish eschatology. The Incarnation, for the Damascene was largely cut off from

the Gospel stories and from Jewish eschatology. Once again, an early Christian theologian stands as a warning to all of us who would develop a theology for creation and nonhuman animals more specifically: we ignore Jesus's Jewish particularity at our own peril.

### CHAPTER 3 THE WORD BECAME JEWISH

In the first chapter I examined the idea stressed by Andrew Linzey, David Clough, Elizabeth Johnson, Niels Gregersen, and others (each in his or her own way), that the “flesh” the Word becomes has roots in the Tanak, connecting the Incarnation to nonhuman animals in particular. Throughout the New Testament, when statements are made about the Word becoming flesh there is a larger-than-human purview that connects to a long story within Jewish tradition. So taking on human flesh is not necessarily an act that privileges humanity over other creatures.

In the second chapter I looked at two prominent patristic theologians who took up the idea of the Word becoming flesh. Athanasius and John of Damascus took the idea from the Gospel of John and used it in more philosophical ways, often disconnected from the rich Jewish tradition. They spoke of the Word becoming “matter.” But flesh is not matter. The switch in terminology reflected a shift away from human connection to other animals at the same time that it reflected a de-Judaizing of the Incarnation. It is possible the two shifts are connected given how Jewish people have historically been depicted as “bestly.” The second chapter, therefore, stands as a kind of historical warning to theologians to work through the Incarnation’s particularities rather than pass them by quickly or outright dismiss them as unimportant.

The Incarnation is specific. The Son became a Jewish, male human who lived in first-century Palestine. Do any of these specific aspects mean that we must limit the Incarnation’s significance to only specific groups? The scandal of particularity—especially the Son’s humanity—seems to preclude including nonhuman creatures as



important for Christian faith. But my argument is that the Incarnation's particularity opens up room for nonhuman creatures. This claim seems so counterintuitive that most theologians working on the issue have emphasized Christ's cosmic lordship over Christ's humanity.

What significance for Christian life and doctrine, for example, does the fact that Jesus was Jewish have for Christian life? Did Jesus only come to save Jewish people or, at best, those who undergo conversion into the Jewish life and rituals (Matt 15:21–28)? In his monumental, two-book theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence*, David Kelsey has no major reflection on Jesus's Jewishness. One of Kelsey's concerns in the work is to counter a tendency in Christian theology to view humans as superior to other creatures.<sup>357</sup> Yet Jesus's Jewishness seems to have no role to play in Kelsey's admirable endeavor.

Likewise, David Clough, concerned to expand our view of the Incarnation in relation to nonhuman animals, claims: "even within the New Testament canon, the church argued about the significance of the Jewishness of Jesus Christ and of his disciples, but it eventually came to the conclusion that the religious identity of the incarnate God should not be construed as defining a boundary of salvation."<sup>358</sup> With this one statement on Jewishness, Clough moves on to broader concerns. Clough states his case negatively: "the religious identity of the incarnate God should *not* be construed as defining a boundary of salvation." However, the New Testament Church, including the apostle Paul, concluded that it is precisely through the Jews and through Jesus's Jewishness that non-Jews can be part of God's salvation. Gentiles are "grafted" onto the

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<sup>357</sup> See David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

<sup>358</sup> Clough, *On Animals*, 83.

vine already growing, according to Paul (Rom 11:17).<sup>359</sup> While the New Testament church did eventually conclude that Jesus's Jewishness does not exclude non-Jews, Clough may overlook ways in which Jewish particularity helps to make the case for expanding our view of the Incarnation in a positive manner.

### **The Fluid Boundaries of Jewish/Christian Identity**

The first thing modern readers have to wrestle with in the question about whether Jesus's Jewishness offers a positive impact on a theology of the Incarnation in relationship to nonhuman animals, however, is the notion that the boundaries between Jew and Christian in the first three centuries were fluid. They were not a binary opposition. Daniel Boyarin writes, for example, that "the evidence that we have for the presence of Christians and other sectarians in the synagogue and the efforts of the Rabbis to detect them and prevent them from serving as preceptors suggests that the problem of 'Who is a Jew?' was as fraught for the Rabbis as the question of 'Who is orthodox?' was for the Christians. Jerome's important notice that the sect of Nazarenes are to be found 'in all of the synagogues of the East among the Jews' and that they consider themselves 'neither Christians nor Jews,' is highly revealing."<sup>360</sup> Boyarin notes that the Jewish/Christian schism was a later split read back into early Jewish history in the first centuries CE. For the first several hundred years (or more) a person did not necessarily

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<sup>359</sup> I also wonder about describing Jesus's Jewishness as a "religious identity." Does Clough mean that Jewishness is part of some broader phenomenon called "religion"? By describing Jesus's Jewishness as a "religious" part of his identity, does this not mark off his Jewishness as just some disposable set of ideas and practices that have no bearing on the rest of his life? Did Jesus have a nonreligious identity that would be more important than his religious one? Moreover, all the problems that come up with trying to define "religion" come to bear on Clough's statement: what is it that Jewishness has in common with all the "world religions" that make them part of the same genus of religion? On the problem with defining religion, see William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57–122.

<sup>360</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 17.

have to leave the synagogue if he or she believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Boyarin quotes Jerome in full noting that Jerome acknowledged that the Nazarenes who were neither Jew nor Christian in Jerome's mind could confess the Nicene Creed sincerely. But the mere fact that they worshiped in synagogues disqualified them from Christianity in this post-Nicene faith.<sup>361</sup> The question about Jesus's particularity, therefore, is not about a binary between Judaism and Christianity, which are later constructions. Jesus's particular faith and culture relate to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. The question of how Jesus's Jewishness may expand or constrict our understanding of the Incarnation relates to the particular way in which Jewish-Christian faith envisioned the good life and embodied that vision within the context of an ever-expanding Gospel from Jewish people to Gentiles. This particular vision may point us toward ways we can include nonhuman animals in our theological reflections.

A further preliminary caution relates to how we conceptualize Jewishness. It is important not to homogenize Jewish people. Of the many expressions of Jewish faith, Jesus seems to have embodied some particular ways and not others. Scholars do not agree about what kind of Jew Jesus was. Second Temple Judaism had at least twenty different types, including baptist groups (e.g., John the Baptist); Essenes; Pharisees; Qumranites; scribes; various armed revolutionary movements; and many other groups.<sup>362</sup> And, of course, each of these groupings had still further differences within themselves in beliefs and behaviors. Scholars still debate whether Jesus had more or less affinities with some

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<sup>361</sup> Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 15–20. Boyarin ably demonstrates that even “the ideas of Trinity and incarnation, or certainly the germs of those ideas, were already present among Jewish believers well before Jesus came on the scene to incarnate in himself, as it were, those theological notions and take up his messianic calling.” *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>362</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 46.

of these groups. Perhaps Jesus and his disciples represented their own particular brand of Jewish life and adopted ideas and practices from a variety of Jewish people as they saw fit rather than fitting into any preconceived mold.<sup>363</sup>

### **Jesus's Eschatological Messianism**

The particular strand of Jewish faith and life that Jesus embodied may have more to do with a trajectory than a particular sect within Jewish faith. John Howard Yoder thought that Jesus lived out a particular vision of Jewish life that had large ramifications for interfaith dialogue as well as our ethical vision for the faithful life.<sup>364</sup>

It was the Jewishness of Jesus, the rootage of His message in the particular heritage of Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah, which as we have seen made it good news for the whole world. There were other peace philosophers and peace prophets in the Ancient Near East. Only the Jewish world vision, effective in Jochanan and the entire stream of nonZealot rabbinism which he catalyzed, could make of accepting powerlessness not only a viable compromise but an identity, to make Jewry, beyond the collapse of the Jerusalem polity, into a new kind of culture viable without a state. Only the Jew Jesus, by announcing and accomplishing the fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews, could send out into the world a people of peace open to the Gentiles. Only the Jewish claim that the one true God, known to Abraham's children through their history, was also the

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<sup>363</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> I am using John Howard Yoder's work with caution and a critical eye in this section. Given the public record in which it has been demonstrated that he sexually assaulted a number of women, I only turn to Yoder's work here because I find it to have a unique contribution to the discussion. Having read much of Yoder's published and unpublished work, as well as having edited several of his posthumously published works, I cannot completely disentangle my thought from his work. What I am offering here, however, is not an exercise in exegeting his work but in showing his contribution and limitation to thinking about Jesus's Jewishness. He provides a particularly instructive example on both accounts.

Creator and sustainer of the other peoples as well, could enable mission without provincialism, cosmopolitan vision without empire.<sup>365</sup>

For Yoder, because Jesus was enmeshed in the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish tradition—out of all the other possibilities through time and space—his life, death, and resurrection have universal relevance; the Jewish trajectory he embodied expands to include everyone. Yoder wanted to avoid a supercessionist understanding of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism and did not want to use Jesus’s particularity to exclude categories of people.<sup>366</sup> We are unable to dismiss Jews as irrelevant after Jesus. For Yoder, the Hebrew Bible includes many different voices that generally point in a particular direction: trust God for leadership; do not put trust in any single human ruler; avoid the nations’ ideas of power and responsibility, which leads God’s people to unfaithfulness; embrace humble service as a posture of global witness; and accept diasporic existence as God’s missional stance toward the world.<sup>367</sup> This particular vision for God’s people culminates with Jesus’s ministry and the Holy Spirit scattering the disciples.<sup>368</sup> The New Testament starts with a particular story rooted in God’s relationship to a particular people.

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<sup>365</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 75.

<sup>366</sup> Ironically, Peter Ochs lays the charge of supercessionism on Yoder as well. However, I do not know what he means by that charge with regard to Yoder. Simply because Yoder wanted to lift up one form of Judaism over others does not make him a supercessionist, but a good interfaith dialogue partner. It seems to me that Ochs mainly dislikes the diaspora model that Yoder put forward. But Yoder never says or implies that Christianity supersedes Judaism in such a way that Judaism should not exist any longer. See *ibid.*, 40 and 68.

<sup>367</sup> For a similar summary of Yoder’s narrative based from the Hebrew Bible see John Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder, the Old Testament, and the People of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade 2011), 87.

<sup>368</sup> On the Holy Spirit’s role in Christian mission for Yoder see John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, ed. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2013), 75–90. Of course, there are ways of living into the diaspora existence of Jewishness that do not include Jesus. Daniel Boyarin makes this point. So the difference Jesus makes to a diaspora vision that is eschatological becomes part of the discussion. Paul Martens charged that for Yoder, Jesus made no difference to the larger Jewish vision I am pointing toward. I think that charge is a bit stretched when applied to Yoder. He was not arguing that Jesus fit into a preconceived notion of diaspora, but that the trajectory of eschatology and diaspora Jesus inherited gets taken up and shifted anew with Jesus. For

This particular people has a particular task according to this vision: to be a “light to the nations” (Isa 49:6). At first this mission was passive: the prophets and even the early church in Acts expected the Gentile nations to come to Jerusalem to learn how to make peace and to follow the Torah. The nations would learn justice from Israel by coming to Israel. Johannes Blauw has deemed this view a “centripetal” view of missions because of the expectation that non-Jewish people would come to Israel.<sup>369</sup> By their peaceful way of life in which everybody prospered and treated each other as equals (nobody ruled over anybody else like the Gentile kings), Israel would attract attention. They would be a lighthouse in a dark and stormy night so that people could find their way safely. By simply following God’s law, Israel would be an attractive example that other nations could follow and in this way other nations could learn what it means to be God’s creatures.

From early on, therefore, Jewish Scripture narrates Jewish particularity and mission as related to the Gentiles. The Jewish mission was to tell the Gentiles who they are: God’s creatures, created in God’s image to love and serve others, not to dominate them. Jews would communicate this divine love by their very existence, first and foremost. Once their lifestyle and politics attracted attention, people would come to learn more. At that point, so it seems, Jews could speak about the God who led them out of slavery and set up this just and peaceable society.

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example, even in the Jewish scriptural vision of including Gentiles, the prophets still thought that the nations would have to come to Israel to learn peace. This was a “centripetal” vision in that everything falls to the center: Jerusalem. With Jesus and the church, however, the Jewish believers go out to the nations because the Holy Spirit pushes them, despite themselves, to do so. This is a “centrifugal” outlook. See *ibid.* Martens did not have Yoder’s *Theology of Mission* available when he wrote his book critiquing Yoder. See Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

<sup>369</sup> Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 38–41.

According to Yoder's reading, the first-century community had this centripetal view of missions as well. Acts consistently narrates the early Jewish messianic believers as refusing to go beyond their borders, expecting an in-gathering instead. They never planned to go out to the nations. They did not set up missionary organizations. They did not have missionary strategy meetings on how to reach the whole world. Instead, the Holy Spirit pushed the early messianic Jews out of their comfort zones, despite their own resistance. It is at this point that the Jewish messianic mission to be a "light to the nations" takes on its full implications where Jewish believers would live amongst Gentiles as communities of peace and justice that followed God's way in Jesus, attracting their neighbors by their lives. They were to live in the messianic age that Jesus had inaugurated, as colonies of peace in a world of violence. These early followers knew that their community was imperfect and that conflicts and other such things would arise. But they chose not to handle the conflicts with violence. Paul gave up violence as a way to resolve inner Jewish disputes and became one of the leading advocates for the new community. The community would be imperfect, but it would be a sign of the fuller manifestation that they expected when Jesus would return. The community, therefore, was marked by an eschatological character that moves from Jesus's particularity to God's presence to and with other humans. This is how Yoder describes Jesus's eschatological messianism and the political community that witnesses to it.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Yoder may verge on characterizing Jewish identity as inherently pacifist and exclude that which does not fit his viewpoint. I am not sure that is his intention, but it might be an inadvertent flaw in his reading. But again, to hold up one way of being Jewish, one way in tension and dialogue with other ways, is not necessarily wrong. I am using this way of reading to say that Jesus stands in this particular tradition and particular way of being Jewish and not in some other way such as the Maccabees or even Jesus's own disciples who sometimes seemed bent on violence. For a good reading on all of this see Alain Epp Weaver, *Mapping Exile and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 66–82.

By focusing exclusively on human-on-human violence, however, Yoder ignored the way in which the Jewish eschatological vision has far more significance than political peace amongst humans who are in conflict with each other. Limiting the Incarnation to one particular creature is just as provincial as limiting it to Jews. God is not only the God of “other peoples as well,” as Yoder states, but as Job and many Scriptural passages make clear, God is God of other animals and ultimately of all creation. Yoder uses Isaiah’s peaceable kingdom vision from Isaiah 2:2–4, which speaks of nations beating their “swords into plowshares” and refusing to study war any longer.

Nowhere in his published writings does Yoder use Isaiah’s more expansive, creation-wide vision in Isaiah 11, which says “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:6–9). Nor does Yoder use the shorter creation-wide statement in Isaiah 65:25: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.”<sup>371</sup> For Yoder, Jesus’s expansive peace-

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<sup>371</sup> In only one unpublished essay did Yoder address creation care with any significance. He originally delivered this essay as a talk at a conference on Human Values and the Environment at the University of Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters in 1992. His talk, “Cult and Culture in and After Eden: On Generating Alternative Paradigms,” is published as “Are there Alternative Paradigms for Creation Care?” in Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker, eds., *A Faith Encompassing All of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 130–43. He does not address Isaiah’s vision in that essay either.



vision only includes our relationship with other humans. He completely ignores biblical and extra-canonical precedents for peaceableness with other creatures.

But Isaiah's expansive vision for peace has been important for some Jewish people. In chapter 2 I noted several congregations that had decorated their synagogues with imagery from Isaiah's peaceable kingdom vision. Additionally, the Jewish Targum adds a new clause to the beginning of Isaiah 11:6, which reads, "In the days of the messiah of Israel peace shall be multiplied in the land," clearly connecting the creation-wide peaceable kingdom vision to messianic hopes.<sup>372</sup> The Septuagint translates the Hebrew in 11:6, which claims that the wolf will "live" with the lamb, as the wolf will "graze" with the lamb. The image of a wolf having a vegetarian diet clearly hearkens back to Genesis 1, in which God's intention for creation was peaceable existence among all animals. But the Greek is in the future tense; clearly looking forward to a time when the Messiah will bring increased peace across the entire creation.

Isaiah's vision inspired other such peace visions in which nonhuman animals lived in a state of peaceableness. For example, the Third Book of the Sibylline Oracles (163–45 BCE) states, "Wolves and lambs will eat grass together in the mountains. Leopards will feed together with kids. Roving bears will spend the night with calves. The flesh-eating lion will eat husks at the manger like an ox, and mere infant children will lead them with ropes. For he will make the beasts on earth harmless. Serpents and asps will sleep with babies and will not harm them, for the hand of God will be upon them."<sup>373</sup> Philo, writing in the first century CE, also depicted a peaceable kingdom vision in which

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<sup>372</sup> See *The Targum of Isaiah*, trans. J. F. Stenning (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 40.

<sup>373</sup> "The Sibylline Oracles," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 3.788–95, p. 379.

nonhuman animals would live at peace with one another, and humans would give up war and domination of other animals. Philo describes a future where

bears, and lions, and leopards, and those beasts which are found only in India, elephants and tigers, and all other animals whose courage and strength are invincible, will change from their solitary and unsociable habits, and adopt a more gregarious life, and, by a gradual imitation of those animals which live in troops, will become softened and accustomed to the sight of men, being no longer in a constant state of excitement and fury against him, but rather feeling awe of him as their ruler and natural master, and will behave with proper respect to him; and some of them, with an exceeding greatness of tameness and affection for their master, like Maltese dogs, will even fawn upon them and wag their tails with a cheerful motion. Then the species of scorpions, and serpents, and other reptiles will keep their venom inoperative; and the Egyptian river will produce those animals, which are at present carnivorous and which feed on man, called crocodiles and hippopotami, in a tame and gentle condition; and the sea too will produce innumerable kinds of animals, among all of which the virtuous man will be sacred and unhurt, since God honours virtue and has given it immunity from all designs against it as a proper reward.<sup>374</sup>

Likewise, 2 Baruch, written in the first century CE after Jerusalem was destroyed, imagined a time when there would be “eternal peace” that would entail not only the

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<sup>374</sup> Philo of Alexandria, “On Rewards and Punishments,” in *The Works of Philo*, ed. Charles Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 89–90. There is a hint in Philo’s vision, however, of human superiority and domination. He does not say that humans will not harm other creatures, but that those creatures will not harm humans. Philo had taken up Stoic ideas of human superiority based on reason and language.

demise of disease and death, but peaceableness amongst people and with people and nonhuman animals (2 Bar. 73).

Yoder clearly saw how the Jewish vision of the end should change human relationships with one another into peaceable living. But he completely ignored a long Jewish tradition in which the messianic age brought about a much wider peaceableness that includes other animals. But the trajectories and patterns Yoder sees for an ever-widening mission apply to a more expansive viewpoint that can include other animals.

The long tradition of interpreting Isaiah 11 in terms of eschatological peace carried forward from early times through the Middle Ages to the modern era. Some interpreters have seen the verses are purely figurative. Ibn Ezra (1089–1164 CE), for example, commenting on Isaiah 11:6 states that “This is a metaphor for peace that will reign in his time.”<sup>375</sup> Likewise, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204 CE) interpreted the passage as an allegory for the world peace that would reign in the messianic era. The lions and other dangerous animals represented wicked people who would no longer harm other people.<sup>376</sup> However, Maimonides allegorizes the animals by making them human. This allegorizing is part of a process of animal erasure that comes into Judaism and Christianity over time. The same applies to Ibna Ezra. By contrast, Saadia Gaon (882–942 CE) interpreted Isaiah 11 in such a way as to deny that the messianic age had come since not only do nations still war against each other but predators still kill other animals to survive: there has been no change in their nature as the messianic age promises.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, *Commentary of Ibn Ezra on Isaiah*, trans. M. Friedländer, vol. 1 (New York: Philipp Felheim, Inc., 1873), 60.

<sup>376</sup> See Yael Shemesh, “Vegetarian Ideology in Talmudic Literature and Traditional Biblical Exegesis,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 9 (2006): 164n61.

<sup>377</sup> Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 318–19 (treatise 8.8).

Rabbi Nahmanides (1194–1270 CE) and Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508 CE) also interpreted Isaiah 11 as indicating that predators would be transformed into peaceable animals. So the idea of a messianic creation-wide peaceable kingdom has a long and venerable history in Jewish thought, though it weakens somewhat with some major medieval figures. Nevertheless, God is the Creator and Redeemer of all creatures.

So one of the primary reasons that Jesus’s Jewishness matters is because the particular Jewish view that God is Creator and Lord of all that exists—and that all that exists is good—serves as the bedrock for considering ways to include nonhuman animals and the rest of creation in the reconciling work that Jesus did in his life, death, and resurrection. This view of God as Lord of “all flesh” fueled the Jewish sense of identity as a “light to the nations” and is the particular vision that Jesus upheld, expanded, and will ultimately bring to fulfillment. This particular vision always had a larger-than-human purview and in particular saw peace amongst nonhuman animals and between humans and nonhuman animals as a central aspect of the messianic age. The place of nonhuman animals is therefore an important part of theological reflection. If we move too quickly past Jesus’s particularity we miss how the eschatological character of Jesus’s particular Jewish vision opens the door to creation-wide renewal, particularly amongst animal creatures.

This eschatological peace is largely missing from deep Incarnation literature. And when it is there, it is not there as a particularly Jewish stance. It is important to note that this is Jesus’s specifically Jewish heritage because it is from this particular Jewish vantage that we move to the more “cosmic” notions. If we take the position of a deep Incarnation but start from Jesus of Nazareth’s particularity as a Jew, peace comes to the

foreground. If we start with Stoicism, by contrast, an anti-animal view comes forward very quickly. It is the Jewish community's witness to the eschatological peace of the Messiah that allows the rest of the world to see the universal in the particular.<sup>378</sup>

### **Jewish Visions of an Original Peace**

Eschatological peaceableness is not the only aspect of Jewishness that we miss by ignoring Jesus's Jewishness. Jewish vision also pointed backward to the opening chapters of Genesis. In the first chapter we find a depiction of a God who created all of creaturely existence in an ordered fashion and does so by merely speaking. Biblical scholars routinely point to the Babylonian context within which Genesis 1 arose. The text of Genesis stands in stark contrast to the violent creation narratives Jews would have encountered at that time. For instance, the Babylonian myth *Enuma Elish* depicts a struggle amongst the gods, who are the offspring of Apsu and Tiamat. The divine children are too noisy for Apsu so he tries to kill all of them. But Apsu's divine children kill him first. Tiamat, upon learning of Apsu's death, wages her own war against her children. Finally, Marduk kills his mother Tiamat and uses her body to create the sky and the earth. He caused the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to flow out of her body. He created the mountains and established the bounds of creation. He goes on to create the sun, the stars, and the moon from one half of her corpse and sets them in motion. Once Marduk is enthroned as king of the gods, he kills Tiamat's husband Kingu, and creates humans out of Kingu's blood: "Blood I will mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage,

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<sup>378</sup> In emphasizing the Jewish community I am not denying that individuals have their own particular witness. Indeed, sometimes it is the individual person that bears witness despite the whole community, as we can see in the prophetic books. However, these individual prophetic voices witness only in relationship to the community, however faithful or unfaithful the community may be. Even if the individual is only on the margins of the community, the margins matter.

‘man’ shall be his name. Truly, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with service of the gods that they may be at ease.”<sup>379</sup> Clearly there are direct parallels between Genesis 1 and the *Enuma Elish* that strongly suggest the author of Genesis 1 used the *Enuma Elish*.

The contrast, however, between Genesis 1 and the *Enuma Elish* creation myth could hardly be starker. The gods of the *Enuma Elish* wage war on each other in a competition of the strongest, whereas the God of Genesis has no rival with whom to wage war. In the Babylonian tale, the universe results from war and violence, whereas all of creaturely existence comes about by the mere word from God in Genesis. In the *Enuma Elish*, humans come about as a result of divine violence for the purpose of working as slaves for the gods. In Genesis, God creates humanity in God’s own image and lets them be free. In short, the violence and oppression of the *Enuma Elish* is entirely absent from Genesis. To the extent that the Hebrew Bible uses the struggle against chaos themes from Babylonian culture, Jewish Scripture does so by depicting God as overcoming human military might rather than struggling with creation per se.<sup>380</sup> So God’s peaceable relationship to the world is prior to and more fundamental than violence. In fact, the very creatures that are often associated in Ancient Near Eastern creation myths with chaos and violence such as dragons are, in the Genesis story, according to J. Richard Middleton, “part of God’s peaceable kingdom.”<sup>381</sup>

This Jewish vision of an original peace, according to Middleton, has significant implications for how we think about human actions within creation. There are

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<sup>379</sup> For the English translation see “Enuma Elish,” in *Stories of the Beginning: Genesis 1-11 and Other Creation Stories*, ed. E. J. van Wolde (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1997), 189–94.

<sup>380</sup> On this see J. Richard Middleton, “Created in the Image of a Violent God? The Ethical Problem of the Conquest of Chaos in Biblical Creation Texts,” *Interpretation* 58, no. 4 (2004): 344.

<sup>381</sup> See *ibid.*, 352-53.

implications for theological anthropology that I will develop in another chapter. But for now, the vision of original peace is what I want to emphasize. This original peace is perhaps most explicitly stated in Genesis 1:29–30: “God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all 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 creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so.” Carol J. Adams has noted that the parallel structure of creation in Genesis culminates with these verses. That the parallel ends with this peaceable intent reveals God’s intention for all animals to live at peace with one another rather than in competition and violence.<sup>382</sup>

Jewish commentary on Genesis largely supports this interpretation of original peace. The Babylonian Talmud reports that Rabbi Judah (d. 217 CE) said:

As to the first man, he was not permitted to eat meat. For it is written, “Therefore I have given you all the herbs, to you it shall be for food and to all the beasts of the earth” (Gen 1:29–30) — [herbs], and the beasts of the earth shall not be for you [to eat]. And when the children of Noah came, [God] permitted [meat] to them. For it is said, “[Every moving thing that lives shall be meat for you;] even as the green herbs [now] have I given you all things” (Gen 9:3).<sup>383</sup>

*Genesis Rabbah* 34:13 claims something similar:

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<sup>382</sup> Carol J. Adams, “What about Dominion in Genesis?,” in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 4.

<sup>383</sup> *Bavli Sanhedrin*, 59B. The edition I have worked from is *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation XXIIIB: Tractate Sanhedrin Chapters 4–8*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 171.

“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. . . . Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (Gen 9:3f). R. Yose b. R. Avin said in R. Yohanan’s name: Adam, to whom flesh to satisfy his appetite was not permitted, was not admonished against a limb torn from the living animal. But the children of Noah, to whom flesh to satisfy their appetite was permitted, were admonished against eating a limb torn from the living animal.<sup>384</sup>

While these passages support the idea of an original vision of peace that included nonhuman animals, there are Midrashim that suggest an original peace in a different way.

In the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 59B, one objection to the idea that Adam was a vegetarian was the claim that the angels tossed meat down for him to consume: “R. Judah b. Tema said: ‘The first man reclined in the Garden of Eden, and the ministering angels roasted meat for him and strained wine for him.’”<sup>385</sup> The text even suggests that carnivorous animals like snakes and lions learned to eat flesh from watching all of this because they were jealous. As long as Adam ate meat that came down from heaven and not flesh from an animal he had killed, the consumption was acceptable. He had not broken the peace.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis I*, trans. Rabbi H. Freedman (New York: The Soncino Press, 1983), 278. I modified the translation to update the English from such words as “liveth” to “lives” so it is easier to read.

<sup>385</sup> *Bavli Sanhedrin, 59B. The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation XXIIIB: Tractate Sanhedrin Chapters 4–8*, 172.

<sup>386</sup> Perhaps this story would lend support for the idea of in vitro meat. In vitro meat is grown in a laboratory from the cells of a slaughtered cow much like a yeast culture can be grown to make bread. Aside from the initial culture, the meat that is grown has never been part of a nonhuman animal. The idea of in vitro meat and the “magic meat” some Talmudic rabbis argued Adam ate are similar to the extent that both try to consume flesh without breaking peace and causing harm to other animals. On the idea of in vitro meat see Tasmin Dilworth and Andrew McGregor, “Moral Steaks? Ethical Discourses of In Vitro Meat in Academia and Australia,” *Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics* 28, no. 1 (2015): 85–107; T. O. M. Foster, “The Meat Lab,” *Popular Science* 283, no. 5 (2013): 56–78 and Carolyn Mattick and Brad Allenby, “The Future of Meat,” *Issues in Science & Technology* 30, no. 1 (2013): 64–70.



Later commentators suggested that Adam was allowed to eat the flesh of nonhuman animals as long as they died a natural death. Adam was not allowed to kill nonhuman animals. Some later commentators even denied that nonhuman animals died before humans sinned; therefore, Adam could not have eaten flesh. Even after the Fall Adam was not permitted to eat animal flesh because that would have “rewarded” Adam for his sin.

In most of these peace visions God did not create nonhuman animals for human consumption. Most Jewish commentators believed that God created nonhuman animals to serve humans. Genesis gives humans dominion over all nonhuman animals. “Were they not created for naught else but to serve me?” opines Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar.<sup>387</sup> Rabbi ben Eleazar’s comment comes within a larger discussion of what kind of work is appropriate for a human, suggesting that his view was in line with others who thought nonhuman animals were created to help humans with their work, but not necessarily for food. *Sanhedrin* 59B relates an objection to the idea that Adam was a vegetarian, citing Genesis 1:28 and the mandate to “rule over the fish of the sea.” The objector asks, “Is this not for the purposes of eating?” The Rabbis reply, to the contrary, that dominion has to do with labor and goes on to give some rather implausible example of how even fish work for humans.<sup>388</sup> But there were other views as well. For example, one sixteenth-century commentator, Rabbi Judah Löw, wrote that God created nonhuman animals for their own sake:

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<sup>387</sup> Kiddushin 4:14. *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 329.

<sup>388</sup> *Sanhedrin*, 59B. In *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation XXIIIB: Tractate Sanhedrin Chapters 4–8*, 171.

Everything, like grasses and fruits, were created for the sake of animals, which are flesh, for He gave them everything to eat, as the verse states, “I give you” etc. From this you see that everything else was created for the animals, while the animals were created in the world for their own sake. Even though animals serve as food for human beings, this was not the case when the world was created, for human beings were not permitted to kill an animal and eat it until the time of Noah.<sup>389</sup>

The Babylonian Talmud tells a remarkable story about Rabbi Judah the Prince (d. 217 CE), a highly revered rabbi who edited the Mishnah. A calf that was being led to slaughter ran to Rabbi Judah and hid under his robes, to which he responded, “Go your way, for this is why you were created.” Because of his compassionless response to the calf, heaven decreed that he should suffer bodily pain. He appealed to God’s mercy to release him from the afflictions, which he suffered for thirteen years. The Prince of Judah was only released from these sufferings when he prevented his housekeeper from harming and evicting a few weasel kits she found hidden away.<sup>390</sup> Because he showed compassion for these helpless nonhuman animals he was shown mercy from heaven. This story does not teach vegetarianism, but it does show a general teaching toward being compassionate and not doing harm to other animals. Nothing could release this revered rabbi from his afflictions—which resulted from action rooted in a theological view that

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<sup>389</sup> Quoted in Shemesh, “Vegetarian Ideology in Talmudic Literature and Traditional Biblical Exegesis,” 146.

<sup>390</sup> Bava Mesia 85A. The edition I worked from is *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation XXID: Tractate Bava Mesia Chapters 7-10*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 31. 1.21–22.

nonhuman animals are created for humans—except an act of compassion toward nonhuman animals.<sup>391</sup>

This vision of original and primal peace is integral to the Jewish notion of God. From the depictions of the origins and intentions of God for creation to the prophetic visions of creation's *telos*, therefore, peaceable relationships among all animals is the ideal and that peaceableness precludes devouring one another. This peaceableness was already established as humanity comes on the scene according to Jewish Midrash on Genesis 1. God in fact consulted with all the nonhuman animals to create humanity: “the Creator therefore turned to the animals and said, ‘cooperate with me in forming a higher being to whom each of you shall donate a desirable characteristic. . . . the tiger, courage; the lion, bravery; the eagle, diligence, and so forth. Thus will man not only be akin to you but will also represent the finest in you.’”<sup>392</sup> This deep kinship with other animals meant not only that other animals were invested in the flourishing of humanity, but also that humanity was responsible for treating its nonhuman animal kin with respect and dignity, which the Torah seeks to establish. If humanity were to become “too pompous and proud,” according to the Talmud, “he may be reminded that even the gnats preceded him in the order of creation.”<sup>393</sup>

Jesus stands in this peaceable vision of origins. Nonhuman animals even helped to create humanity as a reminder of their own best *telos*, according to some versions of the

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<sup>391</sup> For a commentary on this story see Kimberley Patton, “Animal Sacrifice: Metaphysics of the Sublimated Victim,” in *Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 398–99

<sup>392</sup> Quoted in Noah Cohen, *Tsa'ar Ba'ale Hayim—The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: Its Bases, Development and Legislation in Hebrew Literature* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1959), 33. This quote would allow Jewish believers to accept evolution in a way that later Christian fundamentalists in the United States could not. The animals “cooperate” and “help” to make humans in this ancient Jewish Midrash.

<sup>393</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 32.

vision. Humanity is not to dominate but to live in harmony with other creatures. Without a focus on his Jewishness and the particular way this ideal functions in Jewish life, which I will detail in the next section, we miss important aspects of the Incarnation as they relate to how we think about the Incarnation in relationship to creaturely life.

Deep Incarnation theologians focus on the ontology of the Incarnation: Jesus's body takes up all that "flesh" would signify and in the resurrection and ascension raises it all up to the inner life of the Trinity. This is good. But the ontological focus is not always well grounded in Scripture or a larger Jewish vision for peaceableness in creation. The Word takes up a story, and that story, from beginning to the end, is about God's peace. The Incarnation, therefore, is a story of peaceableness primarily. When this relates to nonhuman animals we see an eschatological renewal and an original intent of peaceable action. By focusing squarely on an ontology divorced from the story, deep Incarnation theologians can largely bypass the way this story points toward peaceable action and living. It allows, in other words, a separation of ethics and theology.<sup>394</sup> But the Jewish story does not make this separation the way modern deep Incarnational theology seems to do. The first chief rabbi of Palestine, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), says, "Peace in all realms of being is the concern of the heritage of the Jewish people."<sup>395</sup> The

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<sup>394</sup> I suggest that even David Clough falls prey to this tendency despite his Barthian proclivities. By writing a systematic theology first in order to provide a theoretical underpinning for ethics, he seems to accept that theology comes first and is a separate issue from ethics. Not only this, but I am suspicious of the idea that we must first get all of our theological and dogmatic ducks in a row before we can know how to act rightly. Life is more complicated than that. There is no way to provide a firm and indubitable foundation for "right" action by means of doing theology "first." The same might be said of biblical interpretation. The separation of disciplines here is problematic. It is not as if we must first get all of our theology and biblical readings exactly right, and only then can we really know how to behave properly toward other creatures. Why not reverse this at least sometimes: here is a creature looking at me, seeming to demand and call for my compassion, care, and respect. Now let's do some theology and Bible reading in light of this gaze and otherness. Ultimately, I suspect Clough would agree with this even though his written work does not say it.

<sup>395</sup> Abraham Isaac Kook, "Fragments of Light: A View as to the Reasons for the Commandments," in *Abraham Isaac Kook*, ed. Ben Zion Bokser (New York: Paulist Press), 310. In this

commandments, Kook argues, helped people to bridle their lust for blood and consumption and teach more positively respect for all life, with an ultimate vision of peace between all animal creatures, starting with humans refusing to consume their nonhuman animal kin.

### **Law and Sacrifice of Nonhuman Animals in Jewish Tradition**

One of the greatest tragedies of Christianity is the way in which Christians have dismissed Jewish laws as legalistic hindrances to the Gospel. In particular, Jewish laws concerning human relationships to nonhuman animals of all sorts had vast ramifications for how Jews lived in relationship to other creatures and these laws relate specifically to the Jewish vision of foundational peaceableness. In the Talmud, *Bava Mesia* 32A–32B, the principle of not causing animals to suffer is explicitly promoted (in Hebrew the phrase is *צַעַר בְּעַלֵּי חַיִּים*, translated literally as “pain of living beings”). The law preventing cruelty to nonhuman animals, moreover, is not simply an optional rabbinic law. Rather, this law against causing animal suffering is based on the “authority of the Torah.” Laws commanding Sabbath rest for nonhuman animals (Exod 20:10, 23:12; Deut 5–12) and Proverbs exhorting the virtues of compassion toward animals (Prov 12:10) form the basis for the rabbinic teaching. Moreover, Rebekah was chosen to be Isaac’s wife because she showed kindness to camels (Gen 24:14–27). Jewish tradition holds that Moses was

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regard Mark Sameth argues that the Jewish diet is not an ethnic description but an ethical one. In other words, what characterizes Jewish habits is not the particular foods they eat but the ethical considerations that matter. See Mark Sameth, “‘I’ll Have What She’s Having’: Jewish Ethical Vegetarianism,” in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, edited by Mary I. Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 229. This book, published by the Central Conference of Jewish Rabbis, is characteristic of Jewish literature. Nearly every book of ethics in Jewish literature has something about treatment of nonhuman animals, including this 520 page book by Jewish rabbis, which includes six dedicated chapters to animal welfare issues. Compare this to books by Christian authors who rarely have such chapters, including statement from conferences and bishops from Protestantism to Catholicism. At best one finds in this Christian literature random rare statements within larger tomes.

chosen to lead God's people from Egypt after helping women water their flocks in the desert and later being compassionate to sheep (Exod 2:16–17):

When Moses our teacher was tending the flocks of Jethro in the wilderness, a lamb scampered off, and Moses ran after it, until it approached a shelter under a rock. As the lamb reached the shelter, it came upon a pool of water and stopped to drink. When Moses caught up with it, he said, "I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. Now you must be tired." So, he hoisted the lamb on his shoulder and started walking back with it. The Holy One then said, "Because you showed compassion in tending the flock of mortals, as you live, you shall become shepherd of Israel, the flock that is Mine."<sup>396</sup>

The rabbis go on to conclude that the law of not causing suffering to nonhuman animals is so important that Jews are allowed to break other laws in order to avoid it, including the Sabbath laws and ones governing the festivals (*Yom Tov*).<sup>397</sup>

What avoiding causing pain to animals means is that faithful Jews are obligated to be concerned about the welfare of nonhuman animals; it is not an added "extra" to Jewish life. In fact, one must be just as concerned with the well-being of their own animals as those of Gentiles: "One must get involved with the condition of a beast belonging to a gentile as much as one belonging to a Jew," declares the Talmud.<sup>398</sup> The rabbis claim that even if the nonhuman animal belongs to an enemy and one sees it in distress, a faithful Jew must relieve the nonhuman animal of its burdens and help her (based on Exod

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<sup>396</sup> Sh'mot Rabbah, 2:2, quoted in Rayna Ellen Gevurta, "Kindness to Animals: *Tzaar Baalei Chayim*," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, edited by Mary I. Zamore (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2011), 220.

<sup>397</sup> See the Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat*, 128B. See other commentators on this cited in Gevurta, "Kindness to Animals," 223n2.

<sup>398</sup> *Bava Mesia*, 32B. *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation XXID: Tractate Bava Mesia Chapters 7-10*, 227.

23:33–34). The well-being of a nonhuman animal takes precedence over human animosities toward one another. This suggests nonhuman animals have intrinsic value apart from humanity. Indeed, based on Deuteronomy 1:15, the Babylonian Talmud claims that Jews are obligated to feed their animals before they feed themselves.<sup>399</sup>

Concern for the well-being of and avoiding cruelty and pain to nonhuman animals is such a well-known aspect of Jewish thought that Noah Cohen has said that for the classical rabbis mercy and compassion for nonhuman animals was “categorical and undeniable . . . not a proposition to be proved; it was a postulate, it was axiomatic and part of daily living.”<sup>400</sup> The Jewish tradition does not mandate vegetarianism, but it does mandate concern for their well-being in life and death. The break-away Christian tradition, by contrast, has far less concern and sometimes even sets up practices based on animal death that are specifically organized in opposition to Jewish practices, such as eating pigs on Easter Sunday.

It is also well known that priests sacrificed cows, lambs, birds, and a few other nonhuman animals in the temple, as commanded in the Torah. This is an important aspect to note for the Incarnation because the particularity of the Incarnation has traditionally included the notion that Jesus was killed in some sense as a sacrifice. If his death is a sacrifice—which is one way to view it, but not the only way—then it is in a long line of nonhuman animal sacrifice, a depiction that Christian tradition has readily used and depicted.

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<sup>399</sup> See Gitten, 62A. *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation XXIII.B: Gittin Chapters 4–5*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 122.

<sup>400</sup> Cohen, *Tsa'ar Ba'ale Hayim—The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: Its Bases, Development and Legislation in Hebrew Literature*, 70.

In general, scholars usually write about sacrifice as a universal religious phenomenon.<sup>401</sup> But for the purposes of this chapter and argument, I will focus on the ontological status that nonhuman animals generally have within Jewish scriptural rituals with an eye toward the Incarnation. If Jesus's death is a sacrifice, then Jesus's human death is within the tradition of nonhuman animal sacrifice.

Ancient Jewish writers bound up the notion of sacrifice with a sense that humans and nonhuman animals share a deep common life. Behind the Levitical laws about clean and unclean animals as well as which ones were suitable for sacrifice lies the notion of covenant. In Genesis 9, God made a covenant with Noah and his descendants "and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark" (Gen 9:10). God emphasizes that this covenant is also one with other animals, repeating what was said in verse 10 four more times: "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations" (Gen 9:12); "I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh" (Gen 9:15); "the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is

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<sup>401</sup> I have questions about this focus on "religious" sacrifice as opposed to what? Why is it "religious" sacrifice to kill an animal at an altar and then consume it but not religious killing in a modern industrial slaughterhouse? Catherine Bell maintains that rituals are not actions separate from ordinary routines. Rituals are just ordinary actions that take on a kind of "ritual" involving formalism, traditionalism, disciplined invariance, rule governance, sacral symbolism, and performance. Modern killing and consumption of nonhuman animals is not something we normally think of as ritualized religious activity. Yet a close look at the routinized killing in a slaughterhouse would reveal that the killing is formalized, part of a tradition of factory work, rule-governed and invariable (anybody can do these tasks if they follow the rules). It also has its own sense of the sacred. While modern Westerners denounce animal sacrifice to a god, it is not much of a stretch to see how nonhuman animals are "sacrificed" in an all-encompassing economic system that gives meaning to life every bit as much as the old gods. While a good sacrifice in Leviticus had very specific rules, a good sacrifice in the modern world is one that is the cheapest. Money governs killing. See Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a detailed look at how modern killing compares to ancient Jewish sacrifice see Wesley Bergen, "Animal Sacrifice Today," in *Reading Ritual: Leviticus in Postmodern Culture* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 13–26.



on the earth” (Gen 9:16); and “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth” (Gen 9:17). Five times the text emphasizes that the scope of the covenant extends to both human and nonhuman animals.

Earlier in the chapter God has given at least a provisional permission for Noah and his family to eat other animals. However, God forbade them from eating an animal’s blood, the sign of God’s animating providence in creation (Gen 9:1–6). Scholars generally consider this section of Genesis 9 to be from the P source.<sup>402</sup> These verses struggle to depict nonhuman animals and humans as having deep connection while at the same time setting humans apart. Both humans and nonhuman animals share the blood that signifies God’s life-giving presence and care, which puts “every living creature” or “all flesh” under God’s protection. The ontological distinction between humans and other animals is quite blurred in Genesis 9.

The P source continues to link humans and nonhuman animals throughout the Levitical laws regulating which nonhuman animals that humans are allowed to consume and sacrifice. Leviticus 3:17 and 7:26–27 reiterate the prohibition against consuming an animal’s blood. The Levitical laws regulating diet leave no room for unbridled human exploitation of nonhuman animals.

Leviticus even forbids touching dead nonhuman animals that have not been properly sacrificed in the temple. Such regulations have nothing to do with

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<sup>402</sup> See John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 33. Judith Barad interprets this permission as provisional sense, in a literal reading of the narrative there would have been very little vegetation to consume after the Flood. See Judith Barad, “What about the Covenant with Noah,” in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 13–22.

squeamishness about death or fear of contagions as some scholars surmise.<sup>403</sup> Rather, as Mary Douglas states:

In effect the rule against touching a dead animal protects it in its lifetime. Since its carcass cannot be skinned or dismembered, most of the ways in which it could be exploited are ruled out, so it is not worth breeding, hunting, or trapping. These unclean animals are safe from the secular as also from the sacred kitchen. The rule is a comprehensive command to respect the dead body of every land animal.<sup>404</sup>

These animals are not to be used for fur and leather. Their bones cannot be made into combs and jewelry. Their inner organs cannot be turned into strings for instruments or purses. These laws stringently protect the lives of nonhuman animals declared unclean. Moreover, these laws protect the overwhelming majority of land animals from human killing and consumption. Douglas puts it succinctly: “To be classified unclean ought to be an advantage for the survival of the species.”<sup>405</sup>

While the Israelites were wandering in the desert, to kill or consume an animal outside of the sacrificial system, according to Leviticus 17, was a capital crime: “If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to present it as an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, he shall be held guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood, and he shall be cut off from the people” (Lev

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<sup>403</sup> See, for example, E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 145.

<sup>404</sup> Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

17:3–4).<sup>406</sup> The majority of rabbis interpreted this as meaning that the Jews wandering the desert were not allowed to consume the flesh of any animal unless it had been sacrificed, which limited their consumption severely.<sup>407</sup> Jacob Milgrom argues that the passage certainly prohibited all nonsacrificial consumption of nonhuman animal flesh.<sup>408</sup>

Leviticus 17:7 states that the laws in Leviticus are a permanent statute to be with them “forever.” This material from the P source probably did not last long, however. Deuteronomy 12:13–16 and 20–28 allow Jews settled in Palestine to consume animal flesh that was not sacrificed: “Yet whenever you desire you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, according to the blessing that the Lord your God has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, as they would of gazelle or deer” (Deut 12:15). Deuteronomy 12:20–22 elaborates further: “When the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as he has promised you, and you say, ‘I am going to eat some meat,’ because you wish to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you have the desire. If the place where the Lord your God will choose to put his name is too far from you, and you slaughter as I have commanded you any of your herd or flock that the Lord has given you, then you may eat within your towns whenever you desire. Indeed, just as gazelle or deer is eaten, so you may eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat it.” According to Milgrom, evidence suggests that the Deuteronomist relaxed the priestly law of Leviticus

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<sup>406</sup> On the other hand, Philo may suggest that Alexandrian Jews sacrificed Passover lambs in their homes, and Josephus records a city council decree in Sardis that suggests Jews offered sacrifices in the city hall. Yet the evidence is much more abundant that Jews did not offer sacrifices anywhere but the temple, and with its destruction, the rabbis clearly reinterpreted sacrifice as referring to behavior and spirituality, not actual killing of animals. See James Rives, “Animal Sacrifice and Political Identity in Rome ad Judaea,” in *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries*, ed. Peter Tomson and Joshua Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 112.

<sup>407</sup> Martin Lockshin, ed. *Rashbam's Commentary on Leviticus and Numbers: An Annotated Translation* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, Brown University, 2001), 93n20.

<sup>408</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1452–453. “This law prohibits all common, nonsacrificial slaughter and, instead, demands that meat for the table initially be offered up as a sacrifice.” Ibid., 1453.

17:3–4. Yet this relaxation does not give Jews free reign. They must still maintain the distinction between permissible and forbidden animals, and later rabbis strictly regulated this nonsacrificial slaughter.<sup>409</sup>

Scholars regularly recognize the ontological connection that the Levitical laws make between humans and nonhuman animals by declaring that for an Israelite to kill a nonhuman animal outside the sacrificial system was simply murder: “In P’s view, until the time of the flood it was a capital crime to shed the blood of any animal; thereafter it was permissible as long as the blood was not ingested. Now that the Tabernacle has been erected, Israelites may slay sheep and cattle for food only as well-being offerings; if they fail to present the animal as an offering, it is as if they had slain an animal in the antediluvian period when such an act was considered murder.”<sup>410</sup> Jacob Milgrom also argues that this legal pronouncement points Jews back to the “primordial law” in which humans were not to kill nonhuman animals.<sup>411</sup> Likewise, Karl Barth extrapolates that killing any animal even in modern times is very close to murder. Barth says that a person is “already on his way to homicide if he sins in the killing of animals, if he murders an animal. He must not murder an animal.”<sup>412</sup> This idea that we can illegitimately kill nonhuman animals that are not killed within the strictly regulated system of sacrifice explains why the laws even against touching an unclean animal are within a moral code in Leviticus that demands atonement (see Lev 5:5–6). Killing a nonhuman animal outside of the sacrificial system, for the priestly source of Leviticus 17, is as serious a moral sin

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<sup>409</sup> See, for example, the extensive laws in the Babylonian Talmud, particularly those in the massive Tractate Hullin.

<sup>410</sup> Baruch Schwartz, “Leviticus,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 248.

<sup>411</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1456–457.

<sup>412</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), 355.

as any other. The Deuteronomist's prohibition on consuming blood and later regulation on nonsacrificial slaughter also point in the direction of taking seriously the killing of any nonhuman animal.<sup>413</sup>

These are not simply ethical issues but doctrinal ones on the ontological status of humans and nonhuman animals before God.<sup>414</sup> In fact, the doctrinal and the ethical are hard to distinguish here. Douglas chronicles the way in which modern English translations reflect biases against the purity and sacrificial laws of Leviticus as well as a view of nonhuman animals that is less than the good creatures they are. For example, many translations of Leviticus 11:41 use the English word "swarm" to describe a class of unclean creatures that "swarm upon the earth." The connotations here are of creatures that menace and threaten.

But Douglas brilliantly demonstrates that the underlying Hebrew word connects fertility and "bringing forth." In Genesis, God "brings forth" creatures that "swarm." God tells the creatures to be fruitful and multiply, using the same root term under "swarm" and "brings forth." Unfortunately, as Douglas points out, commentators typically opt for

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<sup>413</sup> I therefore disagree slightly with Jacques Derrida who claims that the Decalogue only prohibits *homicide*, and thereby sets up a Jewish structure in which the human has a self-designated transcendent quality. He is correct to state that the prohibition against killing has generally been most strident when it comes to killing another human. But Jewish law allowed for killing humans under certain circumstances, and the prohibition is general: Thou shall not kill. The direct object must be supplied if we want to narrow this commandment. So there is a way of reading the commandment that subverts the majority reading. The sacrificial system as a whole, I think, points in this direction. If we want to find a relaxing of the general prohibition it is in Deuteronomy 12. See Jacques Derrida, "Eating Well' or the Calculation of the Subject," in *Points . . . : Interviews 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 279.

<sup>414</sup> See Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 150. Douglas is unequivocal that the issue of nonhuman animals and their status in Leviticus is important: "This is a serious and central doctrinal problem," in *ibid.*, 135. Douglas charges that many theologians and biblical scholars have unjustly declared that Leviticus sees unclean animals as "abominations" that are somehow not the good creatures God creates in Genesis. These ideas pit the God of Genesis and the rest of the Tanak against the obsessive God of Leviticus. That Levitical God is supposedly obsessed with sex, purity, and food. Such views can lead directly to supercessionist Christian and Marcionite-like claims. For Douglas, however, Leviticus is not calling upon feelings of detestation or abhorrence. Rather the law is to avoid and shun, not to hate. These laws protect most creatures from human exploitation and recognize that theologically speaking, with Psalm 50:10–11, that every living creature is God's. See *ibid.*, 157.

a far more sinister interpretation that ignores its connection to fertility and abundance. Likewise, English translations that speak about some creatures that “creep” upon the earth have negative connotations in that the word connotes secretive actions like stalking and avoidance. But the Hebrew term has a much broader application. Even the ground can “creep.” In general the term simply means “moving” as a sign of life. Instead of “swarming” Douglas recommends “teeming” and instead of “creeping” she recommends simply “moving.”<sup>415</sup>

With these far more positive words in English, we can recover the more positive Levitical sense in the prohibitions to touching a dead animal carcass. These translations connect with the signs of life that are so important in Genesis. “Tracing the idea through the classifications of Leviticus, teeming is fulfilling God’s command to multiply, it is fertility exemplified; the rule that teeming things cannot be presented on the altar derives from this fact. . . . Remember that the holy of holies is traditionally a place of fertility. There can be protection for, but no covenant with, teeming things. If they cannot be offered to God, it is that they are his already: ‘All that moves is mine’ (Psalm 50:11), which is: ‘All that has life in it is mine.’”<sup>416</sup> The regulations in Leviticus are meant to foster respect for all life because God gives it.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid. Douglas also thinks that the translation “abominable” is unfortunate and does not capture the positive connotations in the Levitical laws. Such a word connotes that some of God’s creatures are somehow inherently bad. She wisely recommends “to be shunned” because “*contact* with these creatures is not against purity, *harming* them is against holiness.” See *ibid.*, 168, emphasis mine. Killing and eating these extremely fertile creatures offends God’s concern for fertility.

<sup>417</sup> Noah Cohen points, additionally, to some of the ways the Talmudic rabbis viewed the laws. For instance, Rabbi Yehuda apparently said about Exodus 22:30: “The Torah ordains that man not consume flesh torn by wild beasts, that the dog be given it in payment for its defense of the herd and flock against the wolf.” In other words, the rabbis taught that Jews should not only avoid causing harm to nonhuman animals, but learn to appreciate them as well. See Cohen, *Tsa'ar Ba'ale Hayim—The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: Its Bases, Development and Legislation in Hebrew Literature*, 51–52.

Douglas also argues that the translation “abominable” in the purity codes regarding nonhuman animals is unfortunate. The English term “abominable” does not capture the positive connotations in the Levitical laws. This word connotes that some of God’s creatures are somehow inherently bad. She wisely recommends “to be shunned” because “*contact* with these creatures is not against purity, *harming* them is against holiness.”<sup>418</sup> Killing and eating these extremely fertile creatures offends God’s concern for fertility. The emphasis in Leviticus is on God’s love and mercy toward creatures by telling humans to avoid teeming creatures. These are important insights into the status of forbidden animals as good and protected by God’s law. Unclean animals are not ontologically evil or abominable.

Permissible animals have an even more interesting ontological status, however. The distinction between permissible and forbidden animals is not between morally good and evil creatures or ontologically detestable creatures and animals deemed “good.” Permissible animals are the ones that humans must bring to the temple and offer as sacrifices. Permissible animals are very limited. Cattle, sheep, and goats as well as a few species of domesticated birds make up the potentially clean animals for sacrifice. All other domestic and wild animals are forbidden. Jonathan Klawans points out that “Israel’s sacrificial offerings involved animals that are by nature docile, defenseless, and communal (living and reproducing in flocks and herds).”<sup>419</sup> If Jesus’s death is in continuity with the ancient Jewish notion of sacrifice, then his death is as one of the

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<sup>418</sup> See Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 168. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>419</sup> Jonathan Klawans, “Sacrifice in Ancient Israel: Pure Bodies, Domesticated Animals, and the Divine Shepherd,” in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 70.

“docile, defenseless, and communal” nonhuman animals that the Tanak sees fit for sacrifice.

Klawans also argues that Tanak animal sacrifices functioned within a theological drama in which Israel was to the sacrificial animals as God was to Israel. That is, Israel imitated God in its sacrificial system. The shepherd creates a bond with his flock and knows them extremely well. Only a few animals out of flock would be without blemish, and the good shepherd would try to keep blemishes (wounds, becoming lame, etc.) from occurring. Moreover, since a mother and her child could not be sacrificed together, the shepherd would have to pay close attention to the familial relationships in his flock, knowing the sheep and lambs intimately.<sup>420</sup> Moreover, Klawans argues, the shepherd himself must be ritually pure. Though some scholars have argued that this is a function of “death avoidance,” Klawans argues that the ritual purity is better understood as a heightened sense of the divine: the offerer must be ritually pure because God is pure.<sup>421</sup>

Klawans points to ancient Jewish language of God as a shepherd and Israel as God’s flock.<sup>422</sup> Psalm 23, for example, provides a good example of a pervasive idea in the Tanak:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
 He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
 he leads me beside still waters;  
 he restores my soul.  
 He leads me in right paths  
 for his name’s sake.

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>422</sup> See *ibid.*, 70.



Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
 I fear no evil;  
 for you are with me; your rod and your staff—  
 they comfort me. (Ps 23:1-4)<sup>423</sup>

The intimate relationship between a shepherd and each individual sheep is here depicted as a relationship between God, the divine shepherd, and Jewish people, God's sheep. The Psalmist here imagines himself as a sheep in a flock. Is he a sheep without blemish who will end up on the altar? Some Psalms admit sin and therefore blemish. But more significantly, as a nation Israel was to be "docile, defenseless, and communal" trusting in God alone for their security.<sup>424</sup> To characterize the sacrificial animals as docile, defenseless, and communal is to describe their way of living, not their manner of death by itself.<sup>425</sup>

### **Jesus's Death as an Animal Sacrifice**

Understanding Jesus's death within the framework of a sacrificial lamb is a very fruitful task for those of us concerned about how Christian theology views nonhuman animals. The Gospel of John in particular depicts Jesus's death as an animal sacrifice. Jesus's bones remained intact as Exodus 12 required (Exod 12:46; John 19:33, 36). Jesus's body was taken away before the next day (Exod 12:10; John 19:31). Jesus was offered liquid on a branch of hyssop, the same plant used to smear the lamb's blood over the door at Passover (Exod 12:22; John 19:29). David Clough notes, "Jesus's body is pierced with a spear (John 19:34) just as the body of the Passover lamb would have been

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<sup>423</sup> See also Gen 49:24; Pss 44:12, 23, 40:11, 49:10–11, 53:7, 63:13–14; Jer 12:3, 13:17, 23:3–4, 31:10, 50:19, 40; Ezek 34:13–16; Hos 4:16; Mic 2:12, 7:14.

<sup>424</sup> This is my point, not Klawans's.

<sup>425</sup> Again, this is my point rather than Klawans's.

pierced to be roasted over the fire (Exod 12:9).”<sup>426</sup> Many biblical scholars argue that Jesus died at the exact time that lambs would have been killed in the Temple.<sup>427</sup>

Seeing the Incarnation in this way has a number of implications for theology. First of all, Mary Douglas has pointed us to the fact that the sacrificial system of ancient Israel actually protected the vast majority of species from human (and largely male) aggression and exploitation. Only a few species were fit for sacrifice and only a few individuals within those species could ever be offered.<sup>428</sup>

In light of these severe restrictions, several biblical scholars have claimed that one function of the sacrificial system may very well be that it pointed Israel back to the peaceable vision found in Genesis 2, where humans and animals live in relative harmony and to Genesis 1:28, where all humans and nonhuman animals are given plants for their diet. Walter Houston claims that “Between the utopian vegetarianism of the original creation intention . . . and the unrestrained violence of the Flood period, the restricted diet laid down for Israel in the Torah can be seen as a mediating line accepting the human craving for flesh but restraining it sufficiently to enable God to dwell in the midst of his people.”<sup>429</sup> Likewise, Jacob Milgrom argues that the dietary laws in Leviticus were specifically meant to remind Israel of the vegetarian ideal. Milgrom interprets the prohibition against consuming a nonhuman animal’s blood in Leviticus 17 in the context

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<sup>426</sup> Clough, *On Animals*, 128.

<sup>427</sup> See Dorothy Lee, “Paschal Imagery in the Gospel of John: A Narrative and Symbolic Reading,” *Pacifica* 24, no. 1 (2011): 25.

<sup>428</sup> The vast majority of Jews living away from Judea would have experienced animal sacrifice only upon a visit to Jerusalem, and for most people that, as one scholar notes, “would no doubt have been a once-in-a-lifetime event . . . something that even the wealthy would not have done frequently.” Rives, “Animal Sacrifice and Political Identity in Rome ad Judaea,” 113.

<sup>429</sup> Walter Houston, “What Was the Meaning of Classifying Animals as Clean or Unclean?,” in *Animals on the Agenda*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (London: SCM, 1998), 24. See also his statement in another essay: “the dietary laws mediate the contradiction between the ideal of a non-violent world and the fact of unrestrained violence against animals.” Walter Houston, *Purity and Monotheism: Clean and Unclean Animals in Biblical Law* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 77.

of the original vegetarian ideal and the subsequent “concession” after the flood to consuming animal flesh. The concession is in the form of a law that no human should consume an animal’s blood (Gen 9:3-4). In the case of Israel, there is further restriction than this, according to Milgrom. Animals must be brought to the sanctuary for sacrifice. If this is not done, “Leviticus contains the clear, unambiguous statement that whoever slaughters an ox, sheep, or goat anywhere except at the authorized sanctuary is guilty of murder (17:3–4.)”<sup>430</sup> Only by pouring out the blood and giving the life back to God can a human be acquitted of illicitly killing a nonhuman animal according to Leviticus 17 (and Deuteronomy 12 also prohibits consuming blood), which, according to Milgrom, reminds Israel that flesh-eating is not God’s intention for human or nonhuman animal creation.

If the sacrificial system protected most nonhuman animals from human (and again, largely male) violence, and if the sacrifices themselves were reminders of the peaceable kingdom ideal in Genesis 1, then understanding Jesus’s sacrifice within this framework becomes crucial. Christians have long interpreted Jesus’s death as an animal sacrifice. Paul calls Jesus’s death τὸ πάσχα (1 Cor 5:7). The Gospel of John, as noted, repeatedly compares Jesus’s passion with the slaughter of lambs at the Passover. In Christian art, Christians have routinely depicted aspects of the passion as directly comparable to the slaughter of nonhuman animals at the temple. For example, in the twelfth-century Mosan Floreffe Bible, an illuminated manuscript, Jesus’s crucifixion is depicted above the sacrifice of a calf directly below with the inscription: “For the blemish of sin a calf is given, worship’s sacrifice; this inscription teaches that Christ is the

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<sup>430</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 251.

calf.”<sup>431</sup> In these and other renditions Jesus is pulled and pushed over a “rough and stony way” as a sacrificial animal (Deut 21:3–4). Jesus is dragged, pushed, and kicked. He is led by ropes. Morrow notes that in one twelfth-century tract from the Netherlands Jesus is depicted as being pushed so hard that his feet did not even touch the ground on the way to the cross, a reference to Jeremiah 11:19 in the Vulgate: *Ego quasi agnus mansuetus qui portatur ad victimam* (I was like a gentle lamb that is carried to be a victim).<sup>432</sup>

So understanding Jesus’s death as an animal sacrifice of sorts is not unheard of in Christian tradition. But what I want to highlight is that if the sacrifices spared most species and pointed Jewish people back to God’s peaceable kingdom intentions, then Jesus’s crucifixion within that system of animal sacrifice does something similar. The Epistle to the Hebrews maintains that Jesus’s death ends all animal sacrifice and cleanses those who believe from sin (Heb. 10:1–18). Jesus’s death does not just end the need for sacrifices to cover human sin but spares the lives of other creatures, pointing humans, by means of this single sacrifice, back to the original vegetarian vision of Genesis and forward to the peaceable kingdom of Isaiah 11 and 65 in Jewish eschatology.

I will return to Jesus’s death and the notion of sacrifice in another chapter dealing with Jesus’s maleness and humanity, but in this chapter Jesus’s death functions in a particular Jewish trajectory and tradition in which sacrifice reminds Jewish people of the original peaceableness and severely limits any human violence toward them. Indeed, it is far easier to follow many of the dietary restrictions from the Torah and subsequent kosher

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<sup>431</sup> Quoted in James H. Morrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemert, 1979), 99. See a reproduction of the image in Figure 72 at the end of the book. There are many other such depictions that compare Jesus to a sacrificed calf. See *ibid.*, 293n424 and n425.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 98. The translation from the Latin is mine. Morrow does not translate Latin (or any other language) into English in his work.

regulations in Judaism when one is a vegetarian. Jewish dietary laws, which Jesus kept—Jesus was kosher—certainly point in this direction.<sup>433</sup> In modern Judaism, some Jewish thinkers have pointed out:

All of the holidays in the Jewish year are (or can be) vegetarian occasions. For instance, every one of the obligatory foods and beverages at the Pesah seder is vegetarian (in fact, vegan). Many Jewish communities around the world follow the custom of eating dairy foods for Shavuot. Dishes containing oil, as well as cheese or milk (such as latkes with sour cream), are traditional for Hanukkah. The “Good luck” foods eaten (with special ‘wishes’ for the year) by many on the first night of Rosh HaShanah, including apples dipped in honey, are vegetarian (except for those who eat the head of a fish or goat). Even the prescribed menu of the Seudah Mafseket meal immediately before the fast of Tisha B’av, a hard boiled egg (which some dip in ashes), is vegetarian fare, if hardly a feast. . . . there is no food made from meat which is currently required on any occasion, nor even one which is widely associated with a particular day. And in the absence of a Holy Temple in Jerusalem and of animal sacrifices (which, by the way, Rav Kook, the great chief rabbi of pre-state Israel and advocate of vegetarianism, wrote would *not* be reinstated in the rebuilt Third Temple . . . ) there is no obligation that anyone who finds it objectionable should eat meat of any kind on any holy occasion—Sabbath or festival.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Daniel Boyarin has a brilliant chapter on Jesus’s defense of the Torah on diet in Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*. See chapter 3, “Jesus Kept Kosher” which argues from Mark 7, which a great many Christian scholars have mistakenly read to mean Jesus rejected the Torah’s dietary laws. Boyarin ably refutes these interpretations.

<sup>434</sup> Jonathan Wolf and Richard H. Schwartz, “Judaism, Vegetarianism, and Tu B’shvat,” in *Trees, Earth, and Torah* edited by Ari Elon, Naomi Mara Hyman, and Arthur Waskow (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 403.

In any case, the Word-became-flesh stands through and through in a Jewish tradition that is deeply connected to nonhuman animals. Once again, setting aside Jesus's Jewishness lets one forget the deeply Jewish vision of respect for life that even their sacrificial system embodied. Jesus's death as a sacrificial lamb points back, like animal sacrifice in the Torah, to Genesis 1 and the peaceable vision narrated there. His death is not just any sacrifice. It is not a "religious" sacrifice broadly speaking but a very particular death connected to a very particular system meant to reduce human avarice and gluttony and thereby help to protect nonhuman animals. Jesus's death simply fulfills the intention of animal sacrifice in the Tanak by bringing an end to the killing entirely.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have looked at a number of ways that Jesus's Jewish identity plays an important role in thinking about the Incarnation in relationship to nonhuman animals. In the first place, there is a particular eschatological trajectory envisioned in the prophets that places Jesus in a messianic peaceable kingdom motif. This Jewish eschatology is essential for understanding the Incarnation. It is not simply an eschatology; it is a Jewish vision. Jesus embodied a particular way of being Jewish in this regard in that he seems to have rejected all violence in favor of a diasporic existence. But beyond the particular eschatological vision that Jesus seems to embody, he also stood in line with a particular Jewish vision of original peaceableness that stood in stark contrast to the foundational creation myths of the Ancient Near East, in which violence was more primary than peace. The priestly author of Genesis 1 directly counters these violent assumptions with a vision of a world in which creatures do not live off the backs of each other and competition for resources does not have the first or last word.

While those working on issues related to nonhuman animals and Christian theology routinely point to Isaiah's peaceable kingdom and Genesis's mandate for a vegetarian diet, they have not really connected these areas with Jesus's Jewish roots. Instead they have stood apart as big ideas that we can take up quite apart from the particular identity that Jesus had as a Jewish person. But the Incarnation was rooted in Jewish faith and could not happen apart from it. Peace begins the vision and ends the vision that Jesus embodied as a Jewish, male human. Without specifically pointing out Jesus's Jewishness in these regards we run the risk of abstracting the Incarnation away from Jesus of Nazareth, whom Athanasius and John of Damascus very much wish to uphold, and who at first glance seem to be helpful for my purposes. Yet in chapter two these authors turned out to be largely negative examples primarily because they abstracted Jesus from his Jewishness. By doing so they could bypass the issue of other animals, indeed, of human animality as well. In this chapter I have sought to show a few ways that the Incarnation connects to nonhuman animals.

The Incarnation also stands in a line of sacrifice whose intent was to curb human violence toward nonhuman animals. Jesus's death is explicitly compared to an animal's death in the New Testament, connecting his death to the Jewish story of human-nonhuman relationships. The Jewish vision of original peace stands firmly at the center of these sacrificial rituals and laws regulating human-nonhuman animal relationships according to some biblical scholars. If this is so, then Jesus's death is far more connected to nonhuman animals than modern theology has depicted.

Moreover, the Incarnation itself stands in a long line of divine self-revelation in the Jewish tradition in which God reveals Godself by means of other than human

creation. Jewish people were not afraid to speak about God in terms of nonhuman creation. Any theology that wants to include nonhuman animals in any deep sense would be wise not to do so at the expense of grappling with its Jewish roots. As Oliver O'Donovan asks: "How can the church be clothed with Israel's name and vocation if the possessor of that vocation is remote from it?"<sup>435</sup> Jesus was close to Jewish visions of peaceableness with other animals.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 286–87.

<sup>436</sup> In this regard it would be prudent to note Peter's vision in Acts 10. I mention it in a footnote because it probably has less bearing on the Incarnation than other literature that I will examine. In Act 10 Peter goes up on a rooftop to pray and is hungry. He then sees a vision of a "sheet" with "all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air." A voice then tell Peter, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." Peter replied, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice replied, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." The entire cycle, Acts claims, happened three times (Acts 10:9–16). Before this vision God sends a Gentile centurion named Cornelius to find Peter. After this vision Cornelius's servants find Peter and ask him to come to Cornelius's home to preach to him, so Peter did this.

The text, however, does not say that Peter ate unclean animals, only that he went into a Gentile's home. Peter himself interpreted the dream as meaning that "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34–35). Afterward, the Jerusalem council asked Peter "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" Peter tells them about the vision and the voice saying that the Spirit commanded him not to distinguish between Jew and Gentile. The council interpreted this as God giving "repentance that leads to life" to Gentiles who were God-fearing.

Most likely Cornelius was a Jewish proselyte who would not have eaten unclean animals. Peter is not said to have broken his dietary restrictions, only that the vision uses this imagery to make the point that Gentiles are not "unclean" and can be "saved." Indeed, when the Jerusalem council gave Paul instructions Peter again appealed to his experience in support of Paul (Acts 15:7–11). The council sent a letter to the Gentile believers telling them to "abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication" (Acts 15:29). These are dietary restrictions about eating nonhuman animals that seem to place their eating within Jewish restrictions for the most part. Paul later seems to mock these restrictions saying that are for "weak" brethren but should be followed for the sake of not causing anybody to be offended (1 Cor 8).

It seems to me that there is nothing in this passage that actually contradicts Jewish teaching. As noted in this chapter Genesis Rabbah 34:13 claims something similar to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 when it quotes Genesis: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. . . . Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." This general Noahic law, according to Jewish teaching, is for all humans. The more specific dietary restrictions are for the people of God in Israel to witness to the more profound peaceableness toward which all creation is moving. The Noahic law is not more basic; Jewish Torah is more basic.



#### CHAPTER 4 THE WORD BECAME A JEWISH MALE

In the previous chapter I argued that Jesus's Jewishness is essential for thinking about how the Incarnation incorporates and is related to human and nonhuman animal life. But Jesus was a Jewish male. At first glance it would seem that Jesus's maleness has little to do with developing a theology capable of underpinning human peaceableness with nonhuman animals. After all, theologians have used Jesus's maleness as a particularity to exclude women from ministerial roles and to underwrite a variety of patriarchal values. Focusing on Jesus's maleness in the name of "animal theology" would then seem to be a step backward in the quest for gender equality within Christian churches. Here ethics and theology come together in a way that suggests a conflict between feminist theology and a new focus on peaceableness with nonhuman animals.<sup>437</sup>

While I am sympathetic with theologians who continue to critique patriarchal theologies and practices, I argue that Jesus's maleness is important for a theology about the Incarnation and nonhuman animals. I am convinced, along with many other theologians, that Jesus's maleness can critique patriarchal theologies and worldviews

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<sup>437</sup> In his monumental *On Animals*, David Clough notes that some theologians still use Jesus's maleness as an argument to exclude women from ministry. He rapidly moves, however, to the idea that most theologians would not use Jesus's maleness to argue for any systematic prejudices against women. After this brief statement he then moves on to a more "cosmic" vision without passing through Jesus's particularity. Clough's book on the whole is a masterpiece in systematic theology that seeks to deepen traditional orthodox Christian theology on behalf of nonhuman animals. In passing over Jesus's gender, I think Clough missed an opportunity to go even further in that process of deepening the Christian tradition, which does not detract from the positive things he does do in that book or diminish its value overall. My work in this chapter and in this dissertation is a deepening of Clough and others. See Clough, *On Animals*, 83–84.

rather than underwrite them. Likewise, Jesus's particular gender might actually help rather than hinder expanding our theological vision toward nonhuman animals.<sup>438</sup>

In the first section of this chapter I will look at some prominent ways theologians in the last few decades have argued that Jesus's maleness is of no theological consequence. For some, Jesus's maleness is an irredeemable aspect of the Incarnation that must be quickly bypassed. For others, however, Jesus's maleness signals a potentially positive impact for all people. Indeed, his maleness may not be a fixed "essence" to reject in an either/or dichotomy at all.

In the second part of this chapter, building on trajectories from the first section, I will look at Jesus's maleness as a Jew in the context of the Roman Empire. Jews were subject to an imperial government that defined masculinity in particular ways that included domination over animals. Jewish people from the Tanak onward have resisted these ways of being male. But the Romans also connected circumcision with a certain "beastliness," which I will argue that Jesus appropriates in resistance to Roman imperial colonization. In all of these ways, Jesus's Jewish maleness has some bearing on how to think about the Incarnation and nonhuman animals.

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<sup>438</sup> Most theologians who are concerned about the issue of animals and theology do not deal with the particularity of the Incarnation as a Jewish male. To the extent that gender comes up it is as a concept in discussing less "down-to-earth" issues than Jesus's concrete cultural identity as a male born in Nazareth. Usually the discussion veers in the direction of divinity related to Wisdom literature and critiques of 'Logos Christology' as a male concept, examining whether there is another way beyond replacing a male principle with a female one and reinforcing stereotypes. See Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom*, 95-107. Deane-Drummond, I think, does an excellent job of explaining and discerning along these lines. However, she does not deal with Jesus's masculinity more specifically. Her discussion is about Christ's divinity and issues of gender in that discussion rather than discussing Jesus's actual biological and cultural identity as "male."

### Jesus's Destabilizing Maleness

For nearly thirty years, feminist theologians have critiqued the idea that Jesus's maleness has any ultimate significance. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for example, asks, "Can a male savior save women?"<sup>439</sup> Sort of, answers Ruether. Because Jesus, as a savior, recognized that his maleness came with power and privileges that he should renounce, he can participate in women's salvation. Jesus critiqued oppressive structures and embodied liberation, which demonstrates a redeemed male and female humanity. Jesus upturned patriarchal, racist, class-based societal norms. By doing so he brought a new way of living and a new regime of power into the world that liberates the oppressed and helps heal the environment.

However, human existence is always particular and limited, so this male savior Jesus is not enough. There has to be a female savior as well. Only God is transcendent and universal. Our particulars relate dialectically to the universal God. So we need many saviors, including a female Christ to reveal how women can find a "redemptive personhood" from their own experiences.<sup>440</sup> Jesus is a Christ-symbol and a paradigm. There are others. Women need other Christ-symbols. Jesus's maleness is important as a "kenosis of patriarchy," which frees men from their violence and women from the system of patriarchy. But this is a very limited model of salvation, according to Ruether. Jesus's maleness limits redemption to only one aspect of life. Particularity, according to Ruether, means we need many Christs. One has to ask why Jesus really needs to be like us in every detail to be relevant. This is exactly how humans treat other animals: if they are not

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<sup>439</sup> See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 116.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

“like us” by having “reason” and “language,” for example, many argue that they therefore do not deserve any consideration at all.

Other theologians have likewise tried to push aside Jesus’s maleness. Jacquelyn Grant, for example, sought to displace Jesus’s historical whiteness in Christian history by imaging Jesus as a black woman.<sup>441</sup> What is important for these theologians is Jesus’s message of redemption. His maleness is incidental to that message. Jesus’s message, including what he said and did, is something that women can follow, unlike his maleness. Jesus’s liberating practices speak into the circumstances of contemporary women. Susan Ross sums up the general consensus while commenting on Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s Christology: “The fact that this incarnation was in a particular person who was male is simply indicative of historical particularity, not of lasting significance.”<sup>442</sup> Given that women continue to experience less power in decision-making and leadership within Christian churches broadly speaking, and such things as unequal pay within society as a whole, these efforts at refocusing on other aspects of the Incarnation are understandable. Another strategy has been to focus on the various women in the Bible and recover a sense of positive models for women.

More recently, however, New Testament scholarship has shifted away from focusing on biological sex differences to examining the broader concept of gender. Yet “masculinity” has only recently become a focus for Christian biblical scholarship. Beverly Gaventa and Susan Eastman, for example, have written about masculinity and Paul, focusing on ways that Paul uses female imagery for himself, undermining

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<sup>441</sup> See Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

<sup>442</sup> Susan Ross, “Christ as Bride: Toward a Christology of Diversity,” in *God, Science, Sex, Gender: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Christian Ethics*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung, Aana Marie Vigen, and John Anderson (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, 2010), 216.

masculinity stereotypes in his day and ours.<sup>443</sup> Other scholars have recently begun a reexamination of Jesus's masculinity.<sup>444</sup> In general, the studies of Jesus's maleness tend to perpetuate earlier feminist readings of Jesus's maleness as a body of oppression against women: the Gospels depict Jesus, they argue, as an ideal male in order to persuade people to join the Jesus movement. In what follows I will offer a different account with a view toward seeing Jesus's maleness as helpful in thinking about theology and nonhuman animals.

### **Jesus's Theological Body: Neither Male nor Female in Jesus's Body**

In one of the most enlightening pieces on Jesus's body in terms of sexual differentiation and gender roles—"The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ"—Graham Ward notes that Jesus's body and maleness has many peculiar aspects that undermine attempts to use his gender for purposes that would make Jesus's "maleness" a determining factor for differentiating male and female roles in church and society. From the outset, Jesus's male body differs from other male bodies because his body does not issue forth from another human, male father. In modern parlance, Jesus must have had one X and one Y chromosome like any other male. More specifically, he must have had the SRY gene that the Y chromosome normally carries. But human males get their Y chromosomes and the resultant SRY male-making gene from their human fathers, which Jesus did not have

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<sup>443</sup> See Susan Eastman, *Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). See also Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel eds. Anderson, eds., *New Testament Masculinities* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Jennifer Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 85–97 and Jennifer Glancy, "Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23-25)," in *Corporeal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24–47.

<sup>444</sup> Brittany Wilson, *Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke-Acts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

according to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The female egg can only provide an X chromosome.<sup>445</sup>

Did God create the Y chromosome and the SRY gene for Jesus “out of nothing”? Or, even more drastically, did God create Jesus’s entire DNA structure out of nothing, making Mary a mere vessel? Such *de novo* creation would arguably make Jesus a mere copy of humanity, the first clone. Jesus would be a creature that resembles a human but who does not share in our evolved humanity. Docetism lurks in this idea of Jesus’s maleness, especially if we follow the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke. For Karl Barth, the virgin birth narratives draw a kind of boundary around Jesus that forbid us to explain him in generally accessible principles. These narratives, then, point to Jesus as a spiritual mystery not an intellectual puzzle we can solve through DNA analysis.<sup>446</sup> Somehow, in a way we do not know, God’s Word has a bearing upon our physical reality, and Jesus’s Y chromosome, his maleness, becomes charged with a spiritual meaning that makes his maleness an important particularity with which to wrestle.

Luke 2:21 marks Jesus as biologically male by narrating that he was circumcised as any male Jewish child would have been. Yet Jesus’s circumcision has a decidedly eschatological character, according to Ward, who points to a long historical trajectory of such interpretation. Theologians have long interpreted this event as the beginning of the passion, when Jesus first shed his blood.<sup>447</sup> But the circumcision also prefigures the

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<sup>445</sup> Males can contribute either an X or a Y chromosome. If an X then the child will be female. If a Y, then the child will be male. For a discussion see Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 64. In all mammals the father must provide a Y chromosome if the child is to be a male. But not all animals work this way. For example, the Y chromosome in birds means the chick will be a female, not a male. In some reptiles, the sex of the infant is not determined by DNA but by how warm or cold the egg is during incubation.

<sup>446</sup> See Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 275.

<sup>447</sup> However, anti-circumcision polemic against Jews may underlie the connection between circumcision and the passion: evil and carnal Jews harming a baby Jesus easily crucify the full-grown man,

resurrection by taking place on the eighth day. Jesus's maleness, even as a little boy, has weighty theological significance in that it carries the cross, the resurrection, and even new creation as his body becomes "transfigured" theologically.

Ward speaks about the mystery of the Incarnation in relation to Jesus's maleness by pointing out that Jesus's identity becomes increasingly unstable in the Gospels. From the birth narratives, in which Jesus's maleness becomes a mystery, through the Last Supper, when Jesus's body crosses a species divide, to the Resurrection where his body becomes unstable so that he can walk through walls and conceal his identity from close friends, shows us that it is in the mystery that we find revelation: "The appearance / disappearance structure of Christ's resurrected body serves to emphasize the mediation of that body – its inability to be fully present, to be an object to be grasped, catalogued, atomized, comprehended. The appearance / disappearance serves as a focus for what has been evident throughout – the body as a mystery, as a materiality which can never fully reveal, must always conceal, something of the profundity of its existence."<sup>448</sup> Jesus's maleness, therefore, cannot be all determining because that very maleness, lacking in Ward's account a Y chromosome at all, is unstable and hard to pin down. Said more positively, Jesus's maleness becomes theologically significant to the extent that his maleness explodes our preconceived notions of what it means to be a male.

Jesus's male body subverts our ways of thinking about maleness. In the crucifixion, a soldier pierces Jesus's body with a spear and blood and water gush forth. In John's Gospel, this description seems to carry a theological weight by deliberately

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the argument would seem to run. Nevertheless, if divorced from the anti-Semitic Christian sentiments, the theological idea that there is a connection between Jesus's visible sign of maleness as a Jew and his life leading to death has ramifications worth considering.

<sup>448</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 172–202.

comparing this event with a mother's birthing. A male soldier pierces Jesus's male body. Jesus's body then becomes feminine, giving birth through blood and water to the ecclesial community (John 19:31–37). John sees water as a sign of birth. In John 3:5, Jesus says that a person must be “born of water and the Spirit” to enter God's kingdom. Jesus's male body gives birth like that of a female. But, I would add, this female body is more like that of a nonhuman animal in producing multiple offspring. His body is like a cat, birthing many offspring: to a large litter called the church. Jesus's male body therefore transgresses the male/female divide that we normally think demarcates what it means to be gendered.

If this portrait of Jesus's maleness is compelling, then Jesus's maleness is every bit as problematic for modern males as it is for women. Those of us men who have grown up in cultures where our masculine identities are tied to various social constructions of what it means to be male—men do not show fear or sadness, for example, or that men are characterized by certain types of aggression and sexual proclivities—comes sharply into question. Jesus's theologically transgendered body falsifies the notion that men simply “are” a certain way. These questions, as I will argue, have direct bearing on how to think of the Incarnation in relationship to nonhuman animals in which not only is the male/female binary far more fluid in Jesus's body but also the human/nonhuman. Jesus's body challenges these divisions. Ward's analysis opens up the discussion away from an exclusive focus on Jesus's gender in relationship to women alone and begins to focus on Jesus's gender in relation to men as well.<sup>449</sup> Likewise, the same thing happens at the species divide, an issue rarely, if ever, touched upon in feminist and gay theologies.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Issues of men and masculinity need to come farther into the foreground in these discussions. It is simply not enough to talk about feminist theology without at the same time looking at male spirituality



## Maleness in a Hyper-Masculine Roman Empire

What I find missing in most of the discussion of Jesus's maleness, either from early feminist discussions about whether a male Jesus could really be the savior of women or from more up-to-date post-colonialist readings that challenge the male/female binary and essentialism of much previous scholarship, is that these discussions ignore that Jesus was a Jewish male.<sup>451</sup> Even Ward treats Jesus's body as if it were ahistorically transgendered. Jesus's body, in Graham Ward's reading, moves fluidly between the binary of male/female in ways that challenge our conceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman in society. Yet Ward does not connect this theologically-transgendered Jesus to his Jewishness. There is no "male," "female," or even "body" as such but only very particular instantiations of embodiment. Jesus was embodied as a Jewish male, whose maleness challenges patriarchal structures of his own time and ours. This becomes

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and such things. In other words, Christian theology needs to take into account the new discipline of critical men's studies. "Studies in this new field are, on the one hand, critical of normative models of masculinities and, on the other, also supportive of men struggling to find their place in religion and society" Björn Krondorfer and Philip Culbertson, "Men's Studies in Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan, 2005), 5862. The type of work I am advocating here is not the same thing as the more popular Christian men's movement seen in such groups as Promise Keepers or in the hyper-masculine ministries of people like Mark Driscoll. Much of what critical men's studies does is a subset of feminist theology rather than a new push for men to take their "rightful" places at the head of the table as Promise Keepers imagines.

<sup>450</sup> This is not the case in feminist work in general. See, for example, Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990). Nevertheless, the number of non-Christian feminists working on issues of speciesism is still relatively small. Yet this does not have to be the case. Feminist theologians, for example, regularly point out the intersection between patriarchy, racism, heterosexual normativity, and Western/non-Western prejudices. It is hard to argue, many such as Delores Williams's claim, against patriarchy without also challenging racism because of the way in which white males have defined what is culturally normative in the theology and society for so long. Yet, underneath some of these issues lies a fundamental notion that divides humans from nonhumans and so without also addressing the binary of humans and nonhumans, it seems to me that feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist work is missing a very important element. I will address this more fully later in the dissertation, but note the issue here.

<sup>451</sup> For a critique of Ruether, whose own work critiques anti-Semitism in Christology and yet decides for some ultimately more universal category of Incarnation that ultimately relativizes Jesus and Judaism (which is a very ironic way for somebody concerned about anti-Semitism), see D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 149–50.

important for those of us who want to think theologically about how nonhuman animals can enter into the theological scene by way of the Incarnation. Before reflecting on how Jesus's Jewish maleness helps in that endeavor, however, I need to look at Jesus's maleness in its particular historical context: Jesus was a Jewish male in the context of hyper-masculine ideologies.

Scholars have published many works on gender identity in the Greco-Roman context.<sup>452</sup> Generally, these scholars have maintained that masculine identity was a social construction in which one's biological sex played less of a role than how a biologically-sexed person fulfilled cultural and societal expectations of the ideal male. Even if a person had the right genitals, if that person failed to "act like a man" according to the social norms of the time, he would lose status and social benefits. Masculinity was not a fixed matter of birthright based on biology, but a matter of social discernment and observation. Jennifer Larson states, "Masculinity was viewed as an attribute only partially related to an individual's anatomical sex."<sup>453</sup>

Elite males knew that slaves, clients, and women were subject to their sexual demands. That elite males had the right to penetrate their inferiors was a mark of their political and social power over others. Elite men who allowed other males to penetrate them sexually were ridiculed as slave-like or lowborn, willingly giving up their social dominance and becoming effeminate.

Since a male's gendered identity was culturally unstable, men had to defend their masculinity and exhibit it publicly. A social hierarchy in which freeborn elite men ranked

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<sup>452</sup> Among the many relevant studies are: Lin Foxhall and John Salmon, *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power, and Identity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1998). In this paragraph I am drawing from the general portrait of masculinity these authors paint in far more detail from the historical records.

<sup>453</sup> Larson, "Paul's Masculinity," 86.

above everybody else related to their ability to dominate, sexually and otherwise, anybody below them. Larson again describes the situation:

Because masculinity was all but identified with social and political dominance, there was no assumption that all males must be masculine. The masculinity of slaves, for example, was by definition impaired. Personal dignity, bodily integrity, and specific details of one's appearance were all factors in individual self-assessment and in men's evaluation of one another's masculinity. Elite men of the day were constantly concerned with the maintenance of their masculinity, because it both displayed and justified their positions of power. Unlike noble birth, which was immutable, masculinity was a matter of perception. While elites always represented their masculinity to outsiders as innate, among insiders it was implicitly recognized that masculinity was a performance requiring constant practice and vigilance.<sup>454</sup>

Beyond this sexuality, men also showed their manliness by other displays of dominance, often connected to self-discipline. What constituted a true man (*vir*)—in distinction from mere *homines*, the generic term for males—had to do with a person's manner of displaying courage, influence, and self-control, which society uses to evaluate whether a man is a "true man" or an "ideal male" quite separate from having correct anatomical parts (and again, the biological issues are theologically complicated by Jesus's fluid body, as Ward notes). Manliness consisted in acting rationally and controlling one's emotional responses that were generally considered effeminate.

This self-mastery exhibited itself in mastery over nonhuman animals lives as well. Warfare and hunting were male activities par excellence in which a male could

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

demonstrate the virtues. Xenophon (ca. 430–354 BCE), for instance, repeatedly connected warfare to hunting, in his book *Cyropaedia*: hunting is a preparation for war (1.2.9–11), Cyrus told his general about a battle, “Think of it like hunting” (2.4.25–26), and Cyrus promoted men to higher military rank who were also good hunters (8.1.34–39). Xenophon said that Cyrus had been trained in the art of hunting from an early age, which helped him become such a great warrior and ruler (1.4.7–15).<sup>455</sup>

In the Roman world Livy (64 BCE–17 CE) believed that hunting trained young men in the virtues and skills they would need to engage in warfare. He claimed that Rome’s founding fathers, Romulus and Remus, began to “confront wild beasts” from an early age and from these hunts learned how to attack thieves and robbers as well. Through these early hunts they became mighty warriors.<sup>456</sup> Likewise, Horace (65–8 BCE) believed that hunting was training for the Roman military, a male occupation.<sup>457</sup> Cicero (106–43 BCE) claimed that wild animals provide not only food but also an occasion to “mimic warfare” as humans chase and kill them.<sup>458</sup>

The virtues, inextricably tied to manliness, were armed: armed against nonhuman animals and other humans.<sup>459</sup> First hunting and then war were the crucibles in which the manly virtues were honed. Courage—that quintessentially Greco-Roman military virtue—was first nurtured in killing relatively defenseless animals, overcoming the

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<sup>455</sup> See Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914–1925).

<sup>456</sup> See Livy, *The Rise of Rome: Books 1–5* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8–9 (bk 1, ch. 1).

<sup>457</sup> Horace, *Satires and Epistles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See Satire 2.2.

<sup>458</sup> Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 2.64.161.

<sup>459</sup> See Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Citizenship and Armed Civic Virtue: Some Questions on the Commitment to Public Life” in *Community America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart*, ed. Charles Reynolds and Ralph Norman (Berkeley: University of California Press), 50. Elshtain emphasizes the Greek warrior origins of virtue, but this can equally be said of the Latin takeover of the concept. For a discussion and rebuttal see Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Robert Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 149–65.

emotional recoil at bloodshed, and then later honed on the battlefield. The Greco-Roman hero-warrior was the ideal male. As Myles McDonnell argues, virtue derived from killing one's enemies and winning a war "was a powerful political slogan, not the *virtus* of Cicero the new man, nor that of popular philosophy, but *virtus imperatoris*, *virtus militia*, the martial *virtus* of Roman tradition."<sup>460</sup> To penetrate bodies sexually or with weapons was the right and sport of elite Romans (indeed, the difference between a "weapon" and the male penis disappears).

### Jesus's Unmanly Maleness

David Clines argues that the Gospels depict Jesus as "a man's man, by any standard, ancient or modern."<sup>461</sup> Commenting on the Gospel of Luke's portrayal of Jesus, Mary Rose D'Angelo claims, "Jesus is depicted as ἀνὴρ after God's own heart, a heroic prophet, cast in the mold of Elijah and Moses. A worthy heir to David's royalty, he is shown to have achieved, indeed excelled in, all the steps toward public manhood in his own nation, but in terms that are comprehensible to an imperial public. He shows himself to be a learned reader and interpreter, a skilled and powerful speaker."<sup>462</sup>

Yet Brittany Wilson has argued that Jesus performed his maleness in ways that simply did not live up to Greco-Roman standards of manliness.<sup>463</sup> "Jesus's masculinity,"

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<sup>460</sup> Myles Anthony McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 383.

<sup>461</sup> David Clines, "Ecce Vir, or, Gendering the Son of Man," in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and Stephen Moore (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 374.

<sup>462</sup> See Mary Rose D'Angelo, "The ANHP Question in Luke-Acts: Imperial Masculinity and the Deployment of Women in the Early Second Century," in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 68.

<sup>463</sup> See in particular her chapter on Jesus in Wilson, *Unmanly Men*, 190–242.

agrees Maud Gleason, “was a problem.”<sup>464</sup> Even though Jesus spoke well and could gather a crowd as “real men” were able to do, the kind of crowd he held were country people, whom the Roman elite despised. According to Gleason, the Roman elite “were actually suspicious of speakers who were excessively popular with audiences of low degree, stigmatizing them as illegitimate players at the game of words.”<sup>465</sup> So in the minds of the Greco-Roman elite males, that Jesus could captivate an uneducated crowd of rural people did not make him masculine. Jesus used his masculinity in ways that Roman elite males would have deemed effeminate.

The Gospels mark Jesus as a male. Jesus is an *ἄνθρωπος*, for example (Luke 24:19 and John 1:30). The New Testament uses male titles for Jesus like *υἱός* and *κύριος*, which were exclusively used for men. Nevertheless, there are some strikingly “effeminate” images of Jesus in the Gospels that not only undermine his authority as a “manly man” but also relate specifically to nonhuman animals.

### **Jesus in the Temple: The Doves**

Colleen Conway argues for a way of reading Jesus as a “manly man” by using his action in the temple. She claims that in general Jesus displayed the kind of self-mastery over his emotions that would be expected of a “manly man” in the ancient Greco-Roman world. The one place where he lets his passions guide him is in the temple, when Jesus makes a whip that he uses on “unsuspecting cows and sheep. He makes a big mess of coins and tables.”<sup>466</sup> Jesus lost his temper, Conway argues, which was perfectly in line

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<sup>464</sup> Maud Gleason, “By Whose Gender Standards (If Anybody's) Was Jesus a Real Man?,” in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen Moore and Janice Capel Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>466</sup> Colleen Conway, “Behold the Man! Masculine Christology and the Fourth Gospel,” in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen Moore and Janice Capel Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 173.

with some strands of Roman thought that saw anger as one of the only acceptable male emotions for men to display. A long history of Christian interpretation would seem to agree with Conway. From just war to Crusades to executing heretics, Jesus's action in the temple has provided fuel for righteous male violence and killing.<sup>467</sup>

In response, the first thing to point out about Jesus's temple action is that he did not angrily beat the animals in the temple with a "whip" as Conway and many other suggest.<sup>468</sup> Borrowed from the Latin term *flagellum*, the φραγέλλιον that Jesus used could indeed refer to an instrument "consisting of a thong or thongs, frequently with metal tips to increase the severity of the punishment."<sup>469</sup> As an instrument of torture, its primary use can be seen in its verb form φραγελλόω, which appears in the passion narratives (Mark 15:15; Matt 27:26), and was "a punishment inflicted on slaves and provincials after a sentence of death had been pronounced on them."<sup>470</sup> It is unlikely, however, that Jesus had this kind of weapon or inflicted that kind of punishment on those in the temple. First, weapons were forbidden in the temple area. The Mishnah, though it is a later document than the Second Temple, states that, "One should not enter the Temple mount with his walking stick, his overshoes, his money bag, or with dust on his feet."<sup>471</sup> Jesus did not bring the instrument into the temple; he fashioned an ad hoc instrument from whatever

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<sup>467</sup> The earliest interpretation of this passage, however, in Origen, interprets Jesus as being nonviolent. The view that Jesus was angry and used violence became prominent only after Augustine. For a history of interpretation of John 2:13–15 see Andy Alexis-Baker, "Violence, Nonviolence and the Temple Incident in John 2:13–15," *Biblical Interpretation* 20 (2012): 73–86.

<sup>468</sup> Much of this paragraph is a modification of my analysis of Jesus's "whip" in my article *ibid.*, 87–88.

<sup>469</sup> Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1064.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>471</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 14. Raymond Brown also noted this. See Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I–XII*, 115. Although it is a later document I think it still gets to the general sense that the temple was not an area that a person could commit violence within because it was a holy place. Paul was dragged out of the temple to be beaten and herpas killed rather than harmed in the temple itself (Acts 21:27–40).

materials were available, which was not likely to include metal shards or leather for thongs. Thus, the narrative depicts him fashioning the tool ἐκ σχοινίων (from reeds), a word Josephus used to describe some of the garb used when mourning with sackcloth and ashes.<sup>472</sup> The type of material available would have been animal bedding<sup>473</sup> or fodder and ropes with which animals were tied up. An ad hoc “whip” of this sort hardly rises to the level of a Roman instrument of torture.<sup>474</sup> It hardly constitutes doing violence to the sheep and cattle.

The image many Christians have painted of Jesus, however, is one where Jesus is so angry in the temple that he uses this makeshift instrument to drive human and other animals out of the temple. Jesus, as Conway claims, “loses his temper.”<sup>475</sup> The proper display for this masculine anger is controlled violence. David Brakke puts it, in the Greco-Roman context, “Because anger motivated a man to action in righting wrongs to himself and others, because its opposite appeared to be passivity in the face of challenges from other males, because—to put it simply—it raised the body’s temperature, anger appeared to be a characteristic of masculinity, a sign that a man was indeed a manly man.”<sup>476</sup> David Clines argues that Jesus is not only strong like a man was expected to be

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<sup>472</sup> See Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Books 7–8, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8.385. See also Acts 27:32 where it is used to describe the rope attached to a ship’s anchor.

<sup>473</sup> “Jesus may have fashioned his whip from the rushes used as bedding for the animals.” Brown, *The Gospel according to John, I–XII*, 115.

<sup>474</sup> Moreover, N. Clayton Croy has argued that the modern critical Greek edition which views ὥς as a secondary later reading may not be correct: “The reading with ὥς has better extrinsic and intrinsic support than is often acknowledged. In addition to the manuscript support and the possibility of parablepsis mentioned above, I would note that the evangelist himself had good reason to mollify the image with ὥς, given that he juxtaposed the words φραγέλλιον and ἐκ σχοινίων, a combination that nearly demands a qualification.” See N. Clayton Croy, “The Messianic Whippersnapper: Did Jesus Use a Whip on People in the Temple (John 2:15)?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 557n9.

<sup>475</sup> Conway, “Behold the Man! Masculine Christology and the Fourth Gospel,” 173.

<sup>476</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 166. There were other views of anger. In general many philosophers thought that a male should control all of their emotions, including anger. Nevertheless, anger could drive a person



but also violent. One piece of evidence he gives for this masculine violence is that Jesus “overturns the tables of the changers of money and the seats of the pigeon sellers (Mt. 21.12; Mk 11.15). In John, he makes a whip to drive the merchants and the animals out. It may be a good cause, but it certainly uses violence.”<sup>477</sup> Yet this use of the temple action does not square well with a close reading of the text. Jesus did not use a “weapon” on any human or nonhuman animal.

However, the strongest challenge to the idea that Jesus threw an unrestrained tantrum is how he treats the doves. The Gospel of John says that after fashioning his broom to get the animals moving out the door, Jesus began turning over tables and pouring out the vendor’s money purses. But suddenly Jesus stopped and told the dove-sellers to take their caged birds out of the temple. A person who was blind with rage and who did not much care for nonhuman creatures would have knocked the caged birds over like the tables and money jars. If these birds did not matter any more than metal coins or wooden tables, then Jesus would have overturned their cages, sending them fluttering in panic while banging against a falling cage. However Jesus took deliberate care not to overturn the birdcages. He did not put them through any further distress. Rather he protected them. He paused in the middle of his nonviolent demonstration to act graciously toward these little creatures.<sup>478</sup>

Careful examination, therefore, of how Jesus treated the doves in the temple as well as the supposed “whip” he used reveals that his supposed masculine anger, strength, and violence would be pretty pathetic by Roman standards. When the Romans “cleaned”

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to right wrongs, which is appropriate expression. The violence should be controlled, but it is an expression of male superiority.

<sup>477</sup> Clines, “*Ecce Vir*, or, Gendering the Son of Man,” 356.

<sup>478</sup> See my article Andy Alexis-Baker, “Jesus in the Temple: Remembering other Creatures,” *The Mennonite*, October 2013, 27.

the Jewish temple, Josephus tells us the Romans crucified so many people in the Jewish revolt of 70 CE they could hardly make room for them all outside the city walls.<sup>479</sup> That is Roman male strength. Jesus telling a merchant to take his little doves out of the temple after shooing the cattle and sheep out is more like an old lady with a broom by comparison. This is not, we will see in a later section, how the ideal Roman male behaved toward nonhuman animals.

### **Jesus the Mother Hen**

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke Jesus compares himself to a “mother hen” (Matt 23:37–39 and Luke 13:31–35). In Luke’s story some Pharisees tell Jesus he should flee because Herod wanted to kill him. He then speaks in the first person, but as a mother: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it (αὐτήν)! How often have I desired to gather your children (τὰ τέκνα σου) together as a hen (ὄρνις) gathers her brood (τὴν ἑαυτῆς νοσσιάν) under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34). Matthew’s version of this saying is almost identical. The reflexive pronoun ἑαυτῆς in Luke intensifies the personal intimacy of Jesus’s words. Jesus wants to gather “her own” chicks.<sup>480</sup>

The avian image that Jesus’s uses to describe himself has deep roots in Scripture. The Psalms repeatedly depict God with the wings of a bird. In Psalm 17:8–9, the Psalmist implores God to “hide me in the shadow of your wings, from the wicked who despoil me,

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<sup>479</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War, Books 5–7*, trans. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 5.446–451.

<sup>480</sup> For more interpretations and insights into Jesus as a mother hen see Wilson, *Unmanly Men*, 199–200.

my deadly enemies who surround me.”<sup>481</sup> In Psalm 57, the psalmist declares that he takes refuge with God, “in the shadow of your wings.” Psalms 36:8 and 61:5 also depict God as protecting others under the “shadow” or “shelter” “of your wings.” Psalm 61 refrains from any anthropomorphic imagery for God. The only reference to God’s form is to the wings. This Psalm highlights God’s protective role, not God’s power to fight enemies. In Psalm 63, the psalmist once again refers to God’s wings, under which he “shouts for joy” (Ps 63:7). The Psalmist “looks for” God (v. 1) and “sees” God in the sanctuary. According to some commentators, these verbs connote theophany.<sup>482</sup> Finally, Psalm 91:1–4 invokes God’s wings:

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
 who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
 will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress;  
 my God, in whom I trust.”

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
 and from the deadly pestilence;  
 he will cover you with his pinions,  
 and under his wings you will find refuge;  
 his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

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<sup>481</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus argues that the wing-imagery references the wings of the cherubim within the temple sanctuary (see 1 Kgs 6:23–28 and 2 Chron 3:13). Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). The prayer, according to Kraus, belongs within the temple confines as the petitioner seeks a verdict on his own righteousness. Erhard Gerstenberger, on the contrary, argues that such a setting is unknown. So Kraus’ suggestion lacks any real merit outside of a tautological argument that makes reference to Psalm 17 as proof of such a ritual. Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 95. The precise *Sitz im Leben* of this Psalm is therefore unclear. But Kraus’s suggestion raises the possibility that the reference to being hidden under “wings” does not refer to God per se, but to another aspect of Jewish worship. But clearly the psalmist seeks to depict his own character as righteous, his enemies as blameworthy, and God as able to defend him as well as able to judge and attack his guilty enemies.

<sup>482</sup> See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 19.

This is the most developed imagery about God and wings. The word behind “Almighty” is  $\text{אלהים}$  “God of the Mountain Wilderness.”<sup>483</sup> This name occurs 48 times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Exod 6:3; Num 24:4,16; Ruth 1:20,21; Isa 13:6; Ezek 1:24; 10:5; Ps 68:15; 91:1, and 31 times throughout Job). So while the imagery is of a God on high,  $\text{אלהים}$  also signals something about the nonhuman world. God is God of the nonhuman parts of the world. Parallels in the Ancient Near East include a “goddess of animals” who was also called the “goddess of the wilderness.”<sup>484</sup> Ostriches in particular became associated with this goddess. So behind the English word “Almighty” in Psalm 91 stands a rich tradition of associating God with nonhuman animals, appropriated to Yahweh.

Yet Jesus’s avian image for himself is feminine, unlike the avian images in Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>485</sup> While  $\text{ὄρνις}$  is a neuter case, the pronouns Jesus used for himself (and his “brood”) are all feminine. By using female imagery of a hen rather than a male image, Jesus shows little regard for the masculine gender norms for males.

### **Jesus the Hunted; Herod the Hunter**

Moreover, in addition to Jesus depicting himself and his followers as female chickens, Jesus depicts himself as hunted. When the Pharisees tell Jesus he should flee because Herod wants to kill him, Jesus answers: “Go tell that fox ( $\text{τῆ ἀλώπεκι}$ ) for me . . .

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<sup>483</sup> See Ernst Knauf, “Shadday,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toom, Bob Becking, and Pieter van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 749. The English translation, “almighty,” reflects the influence of the Septuagint and Vulgate, which translated the Hebrew as  $\text{παντοκράτωρ}$  and *omnipotens* respectively. The Greek and Latin do not reflect the “wildness” of the Hebrew.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 752.

<sup>485</sup> 2 Esdras 1:30—“I gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings”—is part of chapters 1 and 2 which are sometimes called 5 Ezra. Scholars believe that Christians wrote these chapters around the middle of the second century CE. See John J. Schmitt, “2 Esdras,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and Rogerson John William (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 876.

.” (Luke 13:31). John Darr argues that in Luke’s Gospel Herod is a dangerous predator. Herod arrested and killed John the Baptist (Luke 3:20; 9:9). Now Herod was threatening to kill Jesus. Jesus’s answer acknowledges the danger by pitting Herod “the fox” against Jesus “the mother hen” (Luke 13:34).<sup>486</sup> Jesus portrays himself as one of the weakest prey animals that a middle-chain predator could attack. Jesus is not even a rooster, who might fight back, but a mother hen. The feminine imagery combined with the idea that Jesus is the hunted one, not the hunter, serves to undermine the ideal male image for Jesus in Greco-Roman culture. Real men are not prey. Real men hunt.

Josephus tells us that Herod was an excellent hunter (κυνηγέτης).<sup>487</sup> Josephus describes how Herod supposedly was so skilled at bow hunting, javelin throwing, and horsemanship that he supposedly once killed “forty wild beasts” in a single day. Josephus connects these hunting skills to Herod’s skill in war: “seldom was he defeated in war.”<sup>488</sup> Josephus portrays Herod as a manly man, whose virtues in violence and physical prowess demonstrate his superiority. According to Josephus, Herod’s sons were taught to hunt and were skilled in the art as well (and one of them even plotted to have his father killed while hunting). Herod and his sons enacted an idealized masculinity within the Roman imperial context.

Herod’s treatment of nonhuman animals ran against the customs and sensibilities of his fellow Jews at the time. Again, Josephus relates a story: “There was also a supply of wild beasts, a great many lions and other animals having been brought together for

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<sup>486</sup> See John Darr, *Herod the Fox: Audience Criticism and Lukan Characterization* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Darr argues against previous scholarship that interprets the label “fox” as signifying Herod’s powerlessness. Since Herod had killed and was threatening to kill, Herod was by no means harmless.

<sup>487</sup> See Josephus, *The Jewish War, Books 1–3*, trans. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 1.429–430.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.430.

him, such as were of extraordinary strength or of very rare kinds. When the practice began of involving them in combat with one another or setting condemned men to fight against them, foreigners were astonished at the expense and at the same time entertained by the dangerous spectacle, but to the natives [Jews] it meant an open break with the customs held in honour by them.”<sup>489</sup> Around his theater Herod had inscribed the great war feats of Emperor Augustus, Josephus tells us.

The New Testament, of course, has a different but similar portrait of Herod, the mighty warrior and hunter, than does Josephus. Herod wanted to kill Jesus in his infancy and in his effort to do so killed “all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under” (Matt 2:16). Herod was a bloodthirsty and ruthless tyrant. If Herod is an example of Roman maleness it is one of unfettered rejection in the New Testament.

Luke’s depiction of Jesus taking up the position of a feminine prey bird in relationship to a masculine predatory puppet-king signals also that Jesus stands in a long line of Jewish rejection of hunting. Herod seemed to relish in killing nonhuman animals. We see nothing like that in the patriarchs and prophets of Jewish Scripture. Before examining this idea, however, I will look at evidence from Scripture that permits hunting for Jewish people.

### **Hunting in the Jewish Tradition**

Leviticus 17:13 permits some hunting amongst Jewish people: “anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.” Jews were not

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<sup>489</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Books 14–15*, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 15.273–75. Here Josephus indicates that even killing nonhuman animals for enjoyment was not acceptable to the local Jewish population. A modern equivalent of these games would be bullfighting, which attracts large crowds in Spain, cockfighting, or dogfighting.

allowed to hunt just any nonhuman animal, however. Deer, gazelle, roebuck, wild goats, antelopes, mountain sheep, and the ibex are permitted, according to Deuteronomy 14:4–5.

When we read the histories of the great kings and emperors of the ancient world there are often accounts of their hunting feats (as Josephus records for Herod). There is evidence that the royal courts engaged in hunting. Josephus recorded Herod's hunting obsessions. 1 Kings states that Solomon's daily provisions included deer, gazelles, and roebucks (1 Kgs 4:23). These are nonhuman animals that could have been hunted lawfully according to Leviticus 17:13. Yet this list comes in an account of Solomon's extravagant reign and how Solomon's opulence came about: Solomon militarized Hebrew society and enslaved Israelites to build the temple, fulfilling a prophecy from 1 Samuel 8 in which God warned the Israelites that having a king over them would mean rejecting God and becoming the king's slaves. Given that at the end of his reign Solomon was a hunted man himself, since God, according to the text, ripped the kingdom from him due to his greed, it is not clear that 1 Kings 4 praises Solomon for his ostentatious reign. As Barth says, "in Solomon's glory as such we are not really dealing with beauty but rather its preconditions: riches, brilliance, magnificence, inexhaustible possessions and the lavish development of material means for it. There is such a thing as cold magnificence, and, if we are not wholly deceived, Solomon's glory appears to have possessed more of the nature of this cold magnificence than true beauty."<sup>490</sup> For the most part, the accounts of the kings—even King David and his son Solomon—are tragic

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<sup>490</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 664.

stories of how the kings become ensnared in the trappings of power and prodigal living.<sup>491</sup>

These depictions stand in stark contrast to the triumphalist narratives of non-Jewish rulers. The royal Assyrian court went out on annual campaigns to conquer other lands. Likewise, they developed an annual royal hunt, which was so important to the Assyrian rulers that it was the basis of the royal seal for two centuries.<sup>492</sup> During the reign of Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE), the annual lion hunt was particularly important, as it was staged so that the population could watch the king kill lion after lion. The reliefs displayed at the British Museum show lions in various stages of dying, pierced with arrows. The lions did not die quickly. Ancient Greek hunting was also associated with the elite “and not necessity.”<sup>493</sup> Later Roman imagery featured the emperor hunting. A statue of Domitian on horseback lancing a lion may be the earliest imperial hunting imagery, reinforcing Domitian’s status as the ideal Roman male.<sup>494</sup>

All of the rulers surrounding Palestine from Assyrian days to the Roman era depicted their rulers as great warriors, and these kings and emperors relished the idea of their hunting prowess. By contrast, Jewish Scripture never depicts its kings as great hunters.<sup>495</sup> Some of them were great warriors like David, but they are not depicted as

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<sup>491</sup> The best account of this, in my view, is in Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>492</sup> See Michael Dick, “The Neo-Assyrian Royal Lion Hunt and Yahweh’s Answer to Job,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (2006): 246.

<sup>493</sup> Judith Barringer, *The Hunt in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: The John’s Hopkins University Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>494</sup> See Steven L. Tuck, “The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Redefinition of Virtus under the Principate,” *Greece & Rome (Second Series)* 52, no. 2 (2005): 221–45.

<sup>495</sup> 1 Samuel 14 narrates Samson killing a lion that threatened him. But the story, while displaying Samson’s masculine violence and strength, also critiques him. Samson breaks Jewish law: “he tore the lion apart barehanded as one might tear apart a kid” (1 Sam 14:6). Samson not only kills the lion in an unclean manner, but later returns to use the carcass, violating the Torah’s injunctions about touching dead creatures, which I examined in the previous chapter. This was not a hunting story, but it is a story of masculine



being trained in the art of hunting.<sup>496</sup> David, in fact, grew up as a shepherd. The only hint that the Jewish royalty engaged in hunting is from 1 Kings 4, which lists Solomon's daily provisions. But this does not seem like a story that simply brags about Solomon's wealth.

Moreover, Jacob Milgrom argues that hunting was not an important part of the Israelite economy and life in the monarchical period because most Jews had become farmers at this point. Because of this, "hunting changed from a necessity to a sport, one that could be indulged in only by a leisure class, namely the royal aristocracy.

Nevertheless, this law and the one specifying permitted game . . . demonstrate that since hunting continued to be practiced—even by the relatively few—it had to be controlled by legislation."<sup>497</sup> I would add that later rabbinical abhorrence of hunting for "sport"—which I will examine in a later section—reflects Milgrom's view as well. The fact that an elite group of men could hunt down and kill nonhuman animals for pleasure was and remains anathema in Jewish circles. Once Jewish people settled into a society in which they did not need to hunt, to continue to do so was a sign of bad character and bloodlust. Solomon is no exception to this rule.

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violence. And Samson's is not a story that ends well: he commits suicide as he kills more people in this final act than he did during his lifetime. His is a cautionary tale.

<sup>496</sup> David boasted to King Saul that he had killed a lion and a bear when these creatures attacked his flock. David claims that he would chase these predators away and rescue his lambs. But if the lion or bear attacked, he would "catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it" (1 Sam 17:35). David depicts his actions as swift and just, unlike Samson's extreme violence, or the violence from the Assyrian kings. But David is not describing a lion or bear hunt. He depicts his actions as that of a young shepherd defending his flock. Yet the larger story depicts David displaying an extreme male heroic violence by decapitating Goliath (1 Sam 17:51). And while this is a story of masculine heroism, later in the narrative God rejects David for his bloodshed.

<sup>497</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1480.

### **Anti-Hunting in the Tanak**

Jewish Scriptures mention hunting in a few other significant places outside of Leviticus 17. The two great hunters in Scripture are Nimrod and Esau.<sup>498</sup> Nimrod is said to have been a “mighty hunter” who started a kingdom beginning with the rebellious city Babel (Gen 10:8–12). Nimrod’s family lineage stretches back to Cain through a series of warriors and kingdom-makers to Babel. This heritage does not paint Nimrod in a good light. Being a “mighty hunter” in the genealogy from Cain, the first murderer, is not a badge of honor. The label is a mark of shame in this context.

The second great hunter in the Hebrew Bible, Esau, was Jacob’s twin and was a “skillful hunter.” Isaac, their father, favored Esau because of his hunting skills. Esau’s name itself denotes his masculinity: hairy-man. Jacob is said to have preferred to stay at home rather than enjoying the manly hunt. Jacob even coaxed Esau into selling his inheritance to Jacob for a bowl of stew that Jacob had prepared (Gen 25:29–34). Jacob clearly enjoyed the more “female” activities of homemaking rather than the “manly” activities of killing animals.<sup>499</sup> The boys’ mother, Rebekah, favored Isaac as a result. She tells Jacob to follow her instructions, dresses him in clothes so that Isaac will think Jacob is Esau, and Jacob receives Isaac’s blessing meant for Esau. While Esau was out hunting and killing nonhuman animals, being a “mighty hunter,” Jacob was home with his mother

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<sup>498</sup> There is a third character that might be a hunter in the Bible: Genesis describes Ishmael, Abraham’s son as “an expert with the bow” (Gen 21:20). After Abraham sent him and his mother Hagar away, they lived in the wilderness and the text states that in this context he was a skilled archer. This is likely a reference to hunting. But the covenant with Abraham was passed to Isaac who was a shepherd like his father, not Ishmael.

<sup>499</sup> In contrast to hunting, the occupation of a shepherd was available to women as well as men. Rachel, Jacob’s wife, was a shepherd (Gen 29:9), likewise for Moses’s wife Zipporah and her sisters (Exod 2:16). The attachment of masculinity to hunting is very strong, whereas shepherding is something open to females and males.

engaging in stereotypical women's activities of trickery and cunning rather than violence to get something done.<sup>500</sup> Esau, the mighty hunter, turns his stalking and killing skills toward his brother to kill Jacob when he learned of the deception. Jacob, however, escaped due to his mother's cunning, once again (Gen 27).<sup>501</sup> In the story of Jacob and Esau, the masculine hunter, is portrayed as dim-witted and troublesome, while the male who stayed home with his mother and learned to cook and get his way nonviolently (through words, costumes, etc.) finds himself blessed by God.<sup>502</sup> So while all hunting is not explicitly forbidden in the Hebrew Bible, it is not an activity associated with men of good character. The masculinity involved is not heralded as praiseworthy but depicted as bloodthirsty and stupid.

Moreover, the story of Jacob and Esau demonstrates that hunting was more about status and masculinity than subsistence. In the story, Isaac asks Esau to hunt and kill some game and make Isaac some "savory food, such as I like" (Gen 27:4). From the story it is clear that Isaac and his family already had enough of food. They did not need to hunt. So Isaac's request does not arise from necessity but a vice of his own. Moreover, Isaac is depicted as foolishly caught up in his meat-eating in this passage. He is so concerned

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<sup>500</sup> On trickery see Adrien Janis Bledstein, "Binder, Trickster, Heel and Hairy-Man: Rereading Genesis 27 as a Trickster Tale Told by a Woman," in *Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 282–95.

<sup>501</sup> I am reminded of the way in which female mothers like gazelles in the animal kingdom hide their young or lure predators away from nests and the young so that the younger ones can escape. Jacob was Esau's prey at this moment, yet his mother protected him from this predation.

<sup>502</sup> Compare Jacob and Esau's actions to Philo's later comments: "Market-places and council-halls and law courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life." See Philo of Alexandria, "De Specialibus Legibus, Books I–III," in *Philo, Vol. VII* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 3.31.169.

with the flavor of his stew that he cannot discern that he is about to bless Jacob rather than Esau.<sup>503</sup>

Furthermore, since Jacob slaughters two goats and cooks them for Isaac, and Isaac accepts the food without noticing the difference, we can discern yet again that the issue is status, not the actual food. The story of hunting is not about providing food for the family, which is more easily done through more domestic activities, but about the risk and danger associated with hunting, thereby giving the hunter a higher social status (courageous, etc.). But Jacob subverts this social status through domestication: hunting as a sign of one's masculinity and worth becomes subservient to the cunning arts of the domestic household where females are skilled (in that culture).<sup>504</sup>

In Exodus, as the Israelites wandered the desert for forty years, the story says that God provided them with a heavenly vegetarian meal each day of manna (Exod 16). The story mentions quail, but they are entirely eclipsed by the manna. Numbers 11 retells the story in parallel, perhaps trying to explain the presence of quail in the Exodus account. In this account the people had been eating manna for some time and started to complain: "The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at'" (Num 11:4–

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<sup>503</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the way Genesis depicts Isaac as shrewdly taking care of his sheep so that he eventually marry Rachel. In the passage where he blesses Jacob rather than Esau, that shrewdness is gone, blinded by a stupidity bent on getting a hunted meat for stew.

<sup>504</sup> This is a lesson and observation from the text that I have not found in a single commentary. The question becomes how Isaac can be so easily fooled. He clearly asked for hunted animal flesh cooked in a particular way, but was given domestic flesh instead and did not know the difference. So the story cannot be used to buttress mythologies that hunting is primarily about subsistence. It is not. It is about status and privilege. Hunting is a symbolic act more than it is an effective one for providing food.

6).<sup>505</sup> Moses told them that God would grant their disobedient request but it would not be fun: “You shall eat not only one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you—because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’” (Num 11:19–20). The text goes on to say that as soon as the people tasted the flesh of the quail, “while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was consumed,” God sent a plague upon them (Num 11:33). So in this tale, hunting quail in the desert rather than eating God’s provision of vegetarian food was seen as disobedient and liable to judgment. God even says there would not be enough sheep or cattle to satisfy the gluttony (Num 11:22), connecting meat-eating to vice.

Hunting and consumption of animal flesh in Numbers is connected subtly to masculinity as well. Moses complains to the Lord that he is being made to look womanly to the people: “Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,’ to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they come weeping to me and say, ‘Give us meat to eat!’” (Num 11:12–13). This is a subtle complaint, in which Moses complains of being seen as feminine because of the vegetarian food he provides. It is a deep story connecting consumption, hunting, and gender in ways that denounce typical masculinity connected to hunting and consuming other animals.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Though the “riffraff” (that is, non-Israelites) also “remembers” the diverse vegetables they had as slaves in Egypt, the emphasis of the story really on the animal flesh (meat, fish, quail).

<sup>506</sup> Strikingly, I have not found a single commentator who makes these types of connections. A few commentators note the feminine imagery but all of them note that it is unusual for Tanak to imagine God as a mother as Moses implies. They do not generally connect the issue of gender roles in hunting, killing, and consuming nonhuman animals. For a representative comment see Dennis Olson, *Numbers* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 66.

The biblical depictions of hunting, in which Nimrod, Esau and the “rabble” come across negatively, are part of a general pattern of rejecting wanton violence toward nonhuman animals in the Tanak. In the previous chapter I noted how some biblical scholars see the Levitical laws about touching or consuming nonhuman animals actually protects them from human avarice and points people back to a more peaceable vision in Genesis 1. The negative portrayals of Esau and Nimrod in Genesis stand in contrast to the attitude toward nonhuman animals in other cultures in which hunting and killing those creatures is a rite of passage to manhood or in which rulers demonstrate their power and might through wanton killing of nonhuman creatures. The symbolic nature of hunting as a form of status and privilege comes to the foreground in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jews rejected that mode of status: the ideal Jewish male would become one who studies Torah, not one who kills human and nonhuman animals.

### **Anti-Hunting in Rabbinic Tradition**

Jewish literature through the ages simply does not praise hunting. Outside of the Scriptures, as far back as the first century, Philo depicted hunting unfavorably. Commenting on Nimrod, Philo says that his skill as a hunter should be condemned because “hunting is as far removed as possible from the rational nature.”<sup>507</sup> According to Philo, hunting is “a sort of prelude to and representation of the wars and dangers that

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<sup>507</sup> Philo of Alexandria, “Questions and Answers on Genesis,” in *Philo, Supplement I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 2.82. Commenting on Esau, Philo says, “Why was Esau a hunter and man of the fields and Jacob a simple man, living at home? This passage admits of allegorizing, for the wicked man is (so) in a twofold way, being a hunter and man of the fields. Wherefore? Because just as a hunter spends his time with dogs and beasts, so does the cruel man with passions and evils, of which some, which are like beasts, make the mind wild and untamed and intractably and ferocious and bestial; and some (are like) dogs because they indulge in immoderate impulses and in all things act madly and furiously.” *Ibid.*, 4.165.

have to be encountered against the enemy.”<sup>508</sup> He claims that Gentiles who kill nonhuman animals even with a skill and precision that does not make them suffer should be ashamed of themselves because God even “forbade the enjoyment of bodies which died a natural death or were torn by wild beasts.”<sup>509</sup> Killing other creatures is not something to celebrate or that one does for enjoyment and leisure, according to Philo.

Philo also says that Jews should not even touch the carcasses of nonhuman animals killed in a hunt, “thus learning from his dealing with irrational animals what he should feel with regard to human enemies” who are only killed in self-defense and for no other reason.<sup>510</sup> Philo clearly had a very low view of (male) hunting. For him, the ideal male is a citizen of the city and can read and write (presumably to study Torah). Again, the only kind of hunting Philo would really know is that of hunting for pleasure. Esau and Isaac were engaged in the sport for pleasure, not because they had to do it. Alexandrian Jews would not have been skilled at hunting, either. So Philo’s comments really attack an entire culture of hunting dominated by men seeking to prove themselves.

Later rabbinic literature has a generally low view of hunting as well. On the one hand, Tractate Shabbat (106B–107A) in the Babylonian Talmud analyzes in detail what is acceptable in terms of “hunting” on the Sabbath and what is not. The means of capturing different animals matters. In general, the rabbis forbade any kind of “hunting” on the Sabbath, including hunting predators like lions and snakes (presumably because they are menacing one’s lands, because these are not kosher animals).<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Philo of Alexandria, “De Specialibus Legibus, Book IV,” in *Philo, Vol. VIII* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 4.23.121.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>511</sup> See *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation IID: Tractate Shabbat Chapters 11-17*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 106B–107A (pp. 58–67).

On the other hand, the Talmud Tractate Avodah Zarah comments on Psalm 1:1—“Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked . . . nor sat in the seat of scoffers”—by interpreting it as referring to Jews who refuse to attend the amphitheater games in which nonhuman animals and humans kill one another or participate in hunting. The rabbis condemned even the act of attending such spectacles. Indeed, they said that a Jew who attends the amphitheater or hunts is “guilty of bloodshed.”<sup>512</sup> The only way a Jew was permitted to attend these events is if they went with the explicit intention to save life: to shout for the life of the loser. Tractate Avodah Zarah pronounces a severe judgment on hunters: “He who is a clever hunter will not live or have the length of days.” The rabbis move quickly though to spiritualize “hunting” by transforming the male hunter into one who studies Torah. These rabbis have a generally low view of killing nonhuman animals in hunting, and replace such violence with a vision of masculinity that searches out the Torah. “Real men” they seem to say, hunt for wisdom in the Torah. This is a radical transformation of maleness.

An eighteenth-century rabbi may express the traditional view of hunting best. A man once asked Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793) if he could hunt on the rabbi’s large lands, which included forests and fields. In response Rabbi Landau said: “In the Torah the sport of hunting is imputed only to fierce characters like Nimrod and Esau, never to any of the patriarchs and their descendants . . . . I cannot comprehend how a Jew could even dream of killing animals merely for the pleasure of hunting. . . . When the act of

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<sup>512</sup> *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation XXIII.B: Abodah Zarah Chapters 1–2*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 18B, (p. 85). This is an interesting rabbinical opinion because it makes watching violence the equivalent of committing it.



killing is prompted by that of sport, it is downright cruelty.”<sup>513</sup> In his *Code of Jewish Ethics*, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin claims that although hunting is a popular sport in the United States and other Western countries, hunting “is rarely practiced among Jews. I have never seen a statement in Jewish religious literature that speaks of hunting for sport in a positive manner.”<sup>514</sup> The article on hunting in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* details a long history, from antiquity through the Middle Ages to modern times, of rabbinic opposition to hunting per se as cruel. One early eighteenth century figure, for instance, said that those who engage in hunting “have taken hold of the occupation of Esau the wicked, and are guilty of cruelty in putting to death God’s creatures for no reason. It is a doubled and redoubled duty upon man to engage in matters which make for civilization, and not in the destruction of creation for sport and entertainment.”<sup>515</sup> The authors conclude with a concise statement: “The rabbis looked askance at hunting as a sport and strongly disapproved of it.”<sup>516</sup> The idea, however, that most Jews could engage in hunting without it being a sport (that is, it being about necessity) was and is a myth. The hunting described in the Bible and Jewish literature is done with a net to capture the animal before killing it. A bow and arrow was considered cruel because it could wound the animal without killing it, which actually renders it unusable by giving the animal a defect or blemish.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Quoted in Richard Schwartz, “Tsa'ar Ba'alei Chayim—Judaism and Compassion for Animals,” in *Judaism and Animal Rights: Classical and Contemporary Responses*, ed. Roberta Kalechofsky (Marblehead, MA: Micah Publishers, 1992), 64.

<sup>514</sup> Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *A Code of Jewish Ethics: Volume 2: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself* (New York: Bell Tower, 2009), 339.

<sup>515</sup> Laurentino José Alfonso, S. David Sperling, and Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, “Hunting,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 622.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>517</sup> See Rabbi Natan Slifkin, *Man and Beast: Our Relationship with Animals in Jewish Law and Thought* (New York: Zoo Torah, 2006), 177.

Jesus's masculine identity is, therefore, wrapped up in a tradition that largely rejected notions of maleness conditioned on hunting down nonhuman animals. Jesus, rather, identified with a female chicken who would protect her brood from a cunning fox. Jesus identified with a prey animal, and in line with a long and venerable tradition rejected the position of the hunter.

### **Jesus with the Wild Animals**

There is another passage that suggests a positive relationship between Jesus and nonhuman animals. The Gospel of Mark records that Jesus began his ministry by retreating to the "wilderness," where Satan tempted him. While in the wilderness, Mark states, Jesus "was with the wild animals; and the angels waited on him" (Mark 1:13).<sup>518</sup> Scholars have interpreted the statement that Jesus was "with the wild animals" (καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων) in one of three ways. First, some have thought that the animals are simply part of the wilderness setting.<sup>519</sup> The wild animals stress Jesus's separation from human society. Second, some scholars see the wild animals as a threat and associate them with the satanic temptations Mark mentions.<sup>520</sup> The wild animals and Satan tempt and threaten on the one side, while the angels stand with Jesus on the other side. But the

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<sup>518</sup> Scholars are divided as to how much historical credence to give the story of Jesus in the wilderness. Some think that the story does not record any actual memory of Jesus's actions. Without trying to decide whether the story is historically accurate, it is enough to see the Gospel as preserving a memory of Jesus's significance for nonhuman animals.

<sup>519</sup> See Paul J. McCarren S. J., *A Simple Guide to Mark* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 4 and John Paul Heil, "Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006): 63–78; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 152–53

<sup>520</sup> See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preacher's* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 22 and David Rhoads, "Who Will Speak for the Sparrow? Eco-Justice Criticism of the New Testament," in *Literary Encounters with the Reign of God*, ed. Sharon H. Ringe and H. C. Paul Kim (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 74–75. Though Rhoads reads the animals as a threat, however, he acknowledges Richard Bauckham's interpretation that the wild animals who would normally be a threat are brought into harmony with Jesus. See *ibid.*, 74.

angels are not mentioned as protecting Jesus, but simply providing for him. Moreover, Mark does not portray the animals as hostile to Jesus. Indeed, the Gospel seems to put them in a light of companionship with the phrase “with the animals.” Mark uses the same phrase to denote association and agreement several places:

- And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him (ἵνα ὄσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ), and to be sent out to proclaim the message (3:14);
- As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him (ἵνα μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἦ — 5:18);
- When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth (καὶ σὺ μετὰ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ ἦσθα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ)” (14:67).

So in Mark’s use, the phrase “and he was with the wild animals” (καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων) seems to connote a positive association or relationship and not a hostile threat in this case. While the term θηρία certainly includes predatory animals that pose a threat to humans, such as lions, leopards, snakes and other carnivorous creatures, θηρία can also include nonhuman creatures that are not a threat such as mountain goats, gazelles, wild donkeys, rabbits, and other creatures. The θηρία are simply nonhuman creatures over which humans usually have no control.<sup>521</sup>

The third interpretation, which many scholars now follow, sees Jesus as inaugurating the peaceable kingdom that Isaiah 11:6–9 and 65:25 depict.<sup>522</sup> According to

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<sup>521</sup> Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 455.

<sup>522</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 111–32; Eugene Boring, *Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 48; R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 50–51; Robert Guelich, *Mark*

Richard Bauckham, Mark's prologue, within which the statement about being with the wild animals occurs, immediately sets Jesus as the messianic son who inaugurates God's kingdom. The wilderness is the nonhuman sphere where humans do not control the land or its creatures. It is a place that humans do not inhabit. So the Spirit send Jesus into the wilderness where he encounters the nonhuman world and recapitulates Israel's desert wanderings: "He must establish his messianic relationship to these before he can preach and practice the kingdom of God in the human world."<sup>523</sup> Mark's text does not say that Jesus dominated or in any way harmed them. He did not hunt them. He did not cry out for "meat" in the desert as the Hebrew people did in Numbers.

According to Bauckham, the phrasing that Jesus was "with" the wild animals suggests he went there to make peace and inaugurate the kingdom of God. He does this first among the nonhuman world, then he comes back to civilization and Satan, wild animals, and the angels, are no longer part of the story.<sup>524</sup> Nevertheless, as Robert Murray pointed out before Bauckham: "If the phrase is pregnant with implications, it must be

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1-8:26 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 39; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991), 50.

<sup>523</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 117. Bauckham likely gets this interpretation from Moltmann, whom Bauckham studied under. For Moltmann's view of Jesus "with" the wild animals see Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 308. Moltmann's interpretation is far less developed than Bauckham's.

<sup>524</sup> A. B. Caneday argues against the dominant way of reading Mark 1:13 by saying that Mark contrasts the wild animals to the angels, that Mark does not use a "new Adam" motif that most scholars who follow the third interpretation use, that θηρία is a negative term not a positive one, and that a Messiah/Israel motif is better suited to Mark than a new Adam motif. See A. B. Caneday, "Mark's Provocative Use of Scripture in Narration: 'He Was with the Wild Animals and Angels Ministered to Him,'" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 19–36.

That θηρία does not have to be a negative term can be seen by all the different creatures to which it can refer and so the meaning is in the use not a static dictionary definition. Whether Mark contrasts θηρία with the angels is exactly what is at dispute. Furthermore, translating the fourth και as "but" so as to make a contrast between the wild animals and angels while the others are translated "and" seems based on an imposed interpretive grid. Finally, the Messiah motif does not stand in contrast to the new Adam motif. For Isaiah, the Messiah will bring peace with wild animals, so there is no problem with that motif and the third interpretation that most scholars follow. Richard Bauckham, for example, does not stress a new Adam approach to Mark 1:13. So Caneday sets up a false choice in his interpretation.

admitted that Mark does not make them clear; a stronger clue would certainly be desirable.”<sup>525</sup>

Bauckham’s interpretation might seem novel but there is at least one precedent in Christian history. Saint Ephrem (c. 306–373 CE) preached that “He went about with the animals which knelt and worshiped him; and the angels praised him on earth as in heaven.”<sup>526</sup> Christian poets and artists have also seen a peaceable symbolism of Christ in the desert “with” the animals. Murray cites Stanley Spencer’s series of paintings in the Art Gallery of Western Australia in which Jesus reclines near a fox den as the kids play around him and another in which Jesus holds a scorpion in his hands as he sits alone in the desert. In his poem “In the Wilderness,” Robert Graves also depicts Jesus at peace with wild creatures.

He held communion  
 With the she-pelican  
 Of lonely piety.<sup>527</sup>

Graves continues depicting flocks of birds coming to Jesus to listen to his sermons. The sick, the blind, and the ugly animals came to Jesus to find comfort. But his greatest companion in the desert was the scapegoat:

And ever with Him went,  
 Of all His wanderings  
 Comrade, with ragged coat,  
 Gaunt ribs—poor innocent—

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<sup>525</sup> Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 127.

<sup>526</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>527</sup> For the full poem see Robert Graves, *Selected Poems*, ed. Paul O’Prey (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 28–29.

Bleeding foot, burning throat,  
 The guileless old scape-goat.

Graves's poem connects Jesus's desert wandering with the scapegoat of the Leviticus 16, who is sent out into the wilderness to bear the sins of Israel. The goat is innocent but chosen by lot to wander the desert. Jesus befriends one of these goats as it struggles for survival. This is not an image of masculine dominance but of human compassion and fellow creatureliness.

In line with Bauckham we can also read Jesus being "with the wild animals" as a recapitulation of the Edenic story. Jesus is the second Adam (1 Cor 15:45). In Genesis 2 Adam is set within a garden in which the trees were pleasant to view and were "good for food" (Gen 2:9). Adam was to act like a gardner by tilling and keeping the garden, being able to eat from any tree except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Because God wanted Adam to have companions, God formed all of the land animals and birds from the dust of the ground, just like God had done with Adam. Then God "brought them to the man to see what he would call them" (Gen 2:19).

Some interpreters see this passage as a violent act of dominion. For example, Jean-Luc Marion states:

Adam gives a name, and thus a definition to the animals, which thus become subject to him, because in general all knowledge by concept reduces what is known to the rank of object. Adam thus names in the manner by which the *I* knows—by concepts of objects. However, Adam has the power thus to name only that which can legitimately become for him an object: the animals (and the rest of the world), and perhaps the angels, but not God, and not himself. If, moreover, he

claimed to name them, either this name would have no validity, or, if it had validity, what he named would not be man as such (as the unrivaled thinker) but merely a thought-object like all others.<sup>528</sup>

For Marion, the practice of naming objectifies the other into an object under one's power to dominate: "Man has the power to name, to understand, and thus to dominate."<sup>529</sup>

According to his interpretation, that is why humans do not name themselves or God, but do have a divine permission to name (dominate) all other creatures. Language defines us as human beings, but it is dangerous when we turn it on ourselves.

If Marion is correct, Jesus does not rename the wild animals who he is "with" in the wilderness in the Gospel of Mark. One way to read that passage within Marion's interpretation is that Jesus does not exercise such dominion. Yet it is far from clear that Marion's analysis of naming is the violent domination he claims.

The naming-story in Genesis 2 does not suggest that Adam somehow "objectified" other creatures. In fact, God brought them to Adam because God considered them to be suitable companions. The story does not indicate that Adam's naming ceremony began a slippery slope toward killing and eating the animals, which would violate God's mandate of a vegetarian diet (Gen. 1:29–31; 2:9, 16).

Equally important, interpreting the act of naming as inherently violent and domineering seems misguided for several reasons. First, naming serves many different purposes in Scripture, including dominion, and we cannot reduce every instance of

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<sup>528</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, "Mihi magna quaestio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing," *Journal of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2005): 10. Marion cites Hegel, who wrote, "The first act, by which Adam established his lordship over the animals, is this, that he gave them a name, i.e., he nullified them as beings on their own account, and made them into ideal [entities]. . . . In the name the *self*-subsisting reality of the sign is nullified." *Ibid.*, 10n19.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

naming to any one purpose. While kings sometimes gave subjects new names, thereby signaling royal authority over the persons (for example, Gen. 41:45 and 2 Kgs. 23:34; 24:17), we cannot generalize from these instances to all instances of naming.

In Genesis 16, Hagar fled from Sarah. Finding her in the wilderness, God comforted her with a promise of descendants. So Sarah “named the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You are El-roi’” (Gen. 16:13). We can hardly imagine the author of Genesis envisioning that Hagar has exercised dominion—understood as domination—in naming God. Moreover, Hagar’s naming of God directly contradicts Marion’s claim that humans cannot name God just as much as Adam’s naming of Eve contradicts his claim that humans cannot name humans (and the absent sea creatures also challenge his thesis that nonhuman creation is under dominion through the act of naming). In his detailed study of naming in the Old Testament, George Ramsey concludes: “Taken all together, the evidence indicates that, instead of thinking of name-giving as a determiner of an entity’s essence, the Hebrews regarded naming as commonly determined by circumstances. The naming results from events which have occurred. This is a generalization which has more basis in the actual naming-passages of the OT.”<sup>530</sup>

Judith Barad suggests that rather than domination, naming creates relationships. Commenting on the naming ceremony in Genesis 2, Barad observes: “we do not name the animals we eat, for in doing so, they become more personal to us.”<sup>531</sup> Rather than naming, namelessness sometimes signals a broken relationship between creatures created to be companions. On the other hand, Tripp York maintains that “If Christians and non-

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<sup>530</sup> George W. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1988): 34.

<sup>531</sup> Judith Barad, "What about the Covenant with Noah," in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 15.



Christians are to see a world that is intelligible in light of our claims, then we must speak, and perform, a very particular kind of language. For instance, as a thought experiment, what if we ceased using descriptions that label animals as products, cosmetics, food, clothing, entertainment, and pets and decided to call them, first and foremost, ‘our covenant partners’? Wouldn’t that be profoundly more biblical than the previous alternatives?”<sup>532</sup> In other words, how we name or do not name other creatures either establishes relationships or dominance.

Rather than diminishing the creatures and relationships already established, God completes the circle began with Adam, continued with the land, sea, and air creatures, and completed with the woman. So the naming ceremony simply causes God to create yet another creature: woman. Therefore, the Genesis story is about a circle of relationships, not about which creatures are inferior and superior to others, and which has the right to dominate another.

John Eaton suggests that Adam and Eve form a “protective envelope around” the nonhuman creatures, who “have a companionship to offer, and in their own way are necessary to human happiness.”<sup>533</sup> Likewise, Bauckham states that the naming ceremony in Genesis 2 is about Adam acknowledging the other animals’ place in the world, in which naming is a “presupposition for relationship. Parents naming children are recognizing them as persons in their own right and giving them the wherewithal to be identified as persons by other persons and thus to enter interpersonal relationships.”<sup>534</sup> Naming does not result in alienation from other animals, as Marion suggests (following

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<sup>532</sup> Tripp York, “Can the Wolf Lie Down with the Lamb without Killing It? Confronting the Not-So-Practical Politics of the Peaceable Kingdom,” in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures*, 159.

<sup>533</sup> John Eaton, *The Circle of Creation: Animals in the Light of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1995), 8.

<sup>534</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 130.

Hegel). Rather, Bauckham claims, “alienation from wild animals is the consequence of the loss of Eden.”<sup>535</sup> Moreover, animal otherness is a good that humans should “take pleasure and delight in.”<sup>536</sup>

While the animals not suitable “helpers,” a word the text does not explain, God did not fill that role either. Yet we do not assert human superiority over God because Adam needed a female human to fill an undefined helper role. So why assert human superiority over nonhuman animals on that basis? The text does not make that leap.

If we can read Jesus as recapitulating the story of Adam in the garden of Eden, then how Jesus interacts with the other creatures is important. The Gospel of Mark does not say that Jesus named the other animals. But, with Bauckham, it does suggest a relationship of peaceableness rather than violence. But even if we imagine Jesus to give names to other creatures, in a way reminiscent of Adam, this type of activity does not seem to be to be one of domination but one of respect.

### **Circumcision as a Jewish Identity Marker**

Jesus’s maleness can be a lens through which to begin rethinking human/nonhuman relationships and their place in Christian theology. That Jesus, as a male, identifies with a female prey bird and stands with rather than against nonhuman animals, rejecting hunting with his tradition, tells us something about the Incarnation: God is not one who “lords it over” others. But there is more to Jesus’s maleness. In the Greco-Roman world, beauty was highly valued. Dale Martin claims, “In popular Greco-Roman culture, bodies were direct expressions of status, usually pictured as a

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

vertical spectrum stretching from inhuman or barbaric ugliness to divine beauty. The gods, of course, were beautiful; and people of aristocratic birth or upper-class origins were expected to manifest their proximity to the divine by possessing a natural beauty and nobility.”<sup>537</sup> The Greek ideal of male beauty can be seen in their statues. Polycleitos of Argos (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) set the standard for male beauty in his treatise “Canon” and a statue known as the “spear-bearer” or *doryphoros*, sculpted to illustrate the ideal principles. Polycleitos discussed the ideal proportions of the body, seeing it as a mathematical balance of relaxed and tense body parts in a symmetry. Balance, rhythm, proportion, harmony, and symmetry characterize the ideal body. His sculptures depicted “a heavily muscled sharply articulated scheme of the naked male body.”<sup>538</sup> Each element of Polycleitos’s statue was “constructed according to a precise set of measurements calculated to represent perfection.”<sup>539</sup> A later statue, “The Hunter” (300–100 BCE), depicts a naked youth in motion as he is about to spear an animal, again representing the ideal male body in action.<sup>540</sup> The naked male body in action is beautiful.

We do not know what Jesus looked like. The Gospels are silent as to his actual appearance. This stands in contrast to how ideal males of Greco-Roman culture are depicted in literature and art. They are always beautiful. The first-century rhetorician, Aelius Theon, for example, taught that a good rhetorician would detail the “health, strength, beauty, [and] quick sensibility” of noble men in their encomiums.<sup>541</sup> Depictions of Jesus do not follow this advice. Drawing on Isaiah 53:2—“he had no form or majesty

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<sup>537</sup> Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>538</sup> R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 51.

<sup>539</sup> Ian Jenkins and Victoria Turner, *The Greek Body* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2009), 14.

<sup>540</sup> See *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>541</sup> See James Butts, “The Progymnasmata of Theon: A New Text with Translation and Commentary” (PhD Dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1986), 469.

that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him”—

Christian theologians through the ages have not seen Jesus as a handsome male.

Tertullian went so far as to claim that Roman soldiers would not have spit on Jesus if he had not been so ugly.<sup>542</sup> Jesus’s masculinity, therefore, would not have come from his attractiveness. His body in action, with precise proportions, balance, and harmony did not define his beauty as a male. Indeed, the ugliness of his crucified body would have been off-putting to those seeking an ideal male. His already ugly body now disfigured from torture would in no way inspire masculine ideals. His maleness is the opposite of the hunter/warrior.

For the Romans and Jews themselves, one of the primary markers of Jewish identity was circumcision.<sup>543</sup> Horace and Persius sarcastically referred to the “clipped Jews.”<sup>544</sup> Martial jealously chided a Roman woman for preferring Jewish men to Roman ones.<sup>545</sup> Circumcision signifies Jews. Roman authorities could even require a man to display their genitals in order to determine whether the person was subject to the Jewish tax the Romans imposed on all Jewish people to pay for the Jewish War (64–73 CE).<sup>546</sup> “The rite of circumcision was central to the creation of visible Jewish difference in

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<sup>542</sup> See Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, 9. Tertullian’s argument is that Christ’s flesh could not have been “celestial” because he was ugly. See also Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, vol. 3 (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 3.19.2. Using Tertullian here is not to say that Tertullian would agree with my argument about Jesus’s masculinity. Tertullian demonstrated a decidedly sexist view of women. See Marie Turcan, “Being a Woman according to Tertullian,” *Vita Latina* 119 (1990): 15–21. Nevertheless, calling Christ ugly does not exactly place Jesus in the ideal male camp in antiquity. Indeed the grotesqueness of the cross is utterly off-putting to any idea that “real men” use violence or kill others.

<sup>543</sup> For a comprehensive survey and citation of the relevant Roman texts see Manahem Stern, “The Jews in Greek and Latin Literature,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. Shemuel Safrai, Manahem Stern, and David Flusser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1976), 1101–59.

<sup>544</sup> See Horace, *Satires*, 1.9.69–70. “You silently move your lips and turn pale at the circumcised sabbath,” in Persius, “The Satires of Persius,” in *Juvenal and Persius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 5.185.

<sup>545</sup> “Nor do you shun the loins of circumcised Jews.” Martial, *Epigrams, Vol. II*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 7.30.5 (p. 97).

<sup>546</sup> For one such story see Suetonius, “Domitian,” in *Lives of the Caesars, Vol II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 12.2.

antiquity, a form of ‘otherness’ physically inscribed in the flesh.”<sup>547</sup> Sometime between 120 and 132 CE, Hadrian forbade Jews from circumcising anybody, including their male infants. In the 150s Antonius Pius relaxed Hadrian’s prohibition stating that Jews could circumcise only their own babies, but not non-Jews.<sup>548</sup> Male Jewish circumcision, therefore, was part of a system of signs within the Roman economy of signs to signify their otherness.

Unlike the Greeks who forced those they conquered to Hellenize, the Romans prided themselves in their ability to absorb other peoples and their cultures.<sup>549</sup> Roman stereotypes, like all stereotypes, divide others into distinct groups—rather than one big group called “the other”—so that that dominant group doing the stereotyping can place different people into distinct groups. Stereotyping, in other words, involves a discourse of power and knowledge. Stereotyping is one of the most prominent forms of colonial discourse.<sup>550</sup> These stereotypes, according to Homi Bhabha, recognize difference at the same time that they reinscribe that difference within a discourse of power that subsumes the colonial subject (in this case Jews) into the dominant system: difference exists but only on Roman terms that establishes the Romans as superior.

So how did Jewish circumcision as a stereotype in Roman colonial discourse function to establish Roman superiority in the minds of the Romans? Romans had a

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<sup>547</sup> Ra'aan Abusch, “Circumcision and Castration under Roman Law in the Early Empire,” in *The Covenant of Circumcision: New Perspectives on an Ancient Jewish Rite*, ed. Elizabeth Wyner Mark (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 76.

<sup>548</sup> See Amnon Linder, ed. *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 99–100.

<sup>549</sup> On this idea see Andrew Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised: A Study in Early Christian History and Difference* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 17.

<sup>550</sup> On stereotyping see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 94–120. “The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (p. 101).

picture of the “ideal” male penis. Galen speaks about the beautiful ornamentation that nature provided men with their foreskin.<sup>551</sup> A boy’s nurse was to help mold his penis into a more ideal type by various techniques.<sup>552</sup> Foreskin was part of the ideal male in antiquity.

Jews were often ridiculed in Roman literature for circumcision. Romans ridiculed Jews because cutting off the foreskin of the male penis made Jewish men less masculine. It made them ugly as well, more akin to nonhuman animals. Even the Greeks believed this. In a fifth-century BCE painting, a Greek painter depicted Egyptian priests who had been circumcised. Frederick Hodges describes the scene: “The painter has taken great pains to depict the priests as having fat, ugly, wrinkled, circumcised penises with a bulbous externalized glans, which contrast sharply with the neat and attractive penis of Herakles, with its elegantly long and tapered prepuce. Likewise, the snubbed noses and monkey-like faces of the Egyptians could hardly be more dissimilar to the heroic Greek profile of Herakles.”<sup>553</sup> That is, if an uncircumcised penis goes with a certain type of face, long and tapered, and a circumcised penis goes with a hideous nonhuman animal-like face, then it is clear which type goes with the ideal male.

To be more like a nonhuman animal is to be more like a female in these stereotypes as well. Men have self-control, are rational, able to dominate their opponents, and show virtue on the battlefield and the hunt. For the Romans, as for the Greek before

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<sup>551</sup> See Frederick Mansfield Hodges, “The Ideal Prepuce in Ancient Greece and Rome: Male Genital Aesthetics and Their Relation to Lipodermos, Circumcision, Foreskin Restoration, and the Kynodesme,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75, no. 3 (2001): 376.

<sup>552</sup> See Soranus, *Gynecology*, 2.34: “If the infant is male and it looks as though it has no foreskin she should gently draw the tip of the foreskin forward or even hold it together with a strand of wool to fasten it. For if gradually stretched and continuously drawn forward it easily stretches and assumes its normal length, covers the glans and becomes accustomed to keep the natural good shape. In addition, she should shape the scrotum from where the thighs meet.”

<sup>553</sup> Hodges, “The Ideal Prepuce in Ancient Greece and Rome,” 386–87.

them, “barbarians” were routinely characterized as effeminate and unmasculine. Non-Romans lacked discipline and self-control especially in sexuality, a characteristic that the Romans thought they shared with all women.<sup>554</sup> Non-Romans were effeminate and let their women rule over them. Romans were masculine and ruled over women. Jews were often singled out in particular as sexually licentious, which placed them into the effeminate category, and this had to do with their circumcision.

In the New Testament, Luke describes the setting and situation in which Jesus was circumcised. He begins his account by noting that Emperor Augustus had declared an empire-wide census that had consequences for the manner of Jesus’s birth. As a result of the imperial decree, all the subjects had to travel to their hometowns, even pregnant women like Mary. As a result, Jesus was born in a manger because there was no room for them in the houses of Bethlehem (Luke 2:1–7). Luke marks Jesus as part of a people subjected to Roman government, one that cares little for the lives of individuals.

Luke continues, “After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21). This is the only Gospel that mentions Jesus’s circumcision. Luke connects it to his official naming. But Jesus, Luke makes clear, was circumcised.<sup>555</sup>

Jesus was born under a colonial government. That government could displace people. Jesus was born under a colonial culture. That culture viewed masculinity in very particular ways as dominant (potentially violently dominant), active, and self-controlled.

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<sup>554</sup> See Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 196.

<sup>555</sup> Luke 1:59 notes John the Baptist’s circumcision on his eighth day as well.

Jewish males like Jesus were effeminate, submissive, and deformed, not at all ideal males that Romans fetishized.<sup>556</sup>

The Gospel of Luke is often considered the most Gentile-oriented of the Gospels. The first two chapters of Luke, however, seem much more focused on Jewish issues and identities than the rest of the Gospel, leading some redaction-critical scholars to posit that the opening chapters are part of an originally Jewish setting that is ultimately subsumed and overcome in the rest of the Gospel. Luke, they claim, opens up the gospel from its parochial Palestinian setting to a more universal audience of the larger Empire.<sup>557</sup> Accordingly, many commentators argue that Luke stresses the naming, not the circumcision, of Jesus in Luke 2:21. Joseph A. Fitzmyer is typical: “Stress is put here more on the naming of Jesus than on his circumcision.”<sup>558</sup> Yet, beyond the crude supercessionism involved in these redactionist revisions of Luke, even if Luke had a Gentile audience in mind, then the mention of circumcision seems all the more significant.

Jesus’s circumcision is significant in a Gentile setting because Jews were stereotyped as effeminate, submissive, and passive in contrast to the ideal Roman male heroes who dominated their enemies and women, Jesus’s circumcision would immediately mark him off as less than male. In such a cultural milieu Jesus would come across as submissive and feminine, not a man to emulate at all. Jesus’s Jewish manhood, marked in his circumcised penis, therefore, functions as a counter-cultural resistance to

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<sup>556</sup> In the Hasmonean period, the Maccabees roamed the Palestinian countryside forcibly imposing circumcision as a way to bring conquered people into the Jewish fold. But by the time of Jesus, this way of seeing circumcision was gone. See Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 19.

<sup>557</sup> For an argument of this sort see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 8, 10

<sup>558</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 424. See also Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 237.



the dominant image of maleness in the Empire. Luke's use of circumcision, then, is similar to how later rabbis, monks, and nuns were viewed according to Daniel Boyarin. They were "a category—a third gender—formed by Jewish men whose characteristic or ideal mode of existence is scholarly-bookish, and therefore nonphallic and unmanly for Eurochristian performances of gender, and monks for whom the same is largely true."<sup>559</sup>

What should have functioned as a sign of Roman dominance of the deformed and passive Jews by the hyper-masculine Romans is turned upside down. The mark of shame from a Roman perspective becomes a mark of honor from a Jewish perspective. Luke specifically mentions a repulsive trait of Jewish males to upturn what his audience should expect from Jesus. Jesus is not the warrior-hunter ideal of Roman literature and imperial power. Jesus is the circumcised and crucified Messiah. The first indication of who Jesus will be is his circumcision: in that context, it is a re-appropriation of a colonial stereotype into a positive reconfiguration of maleness that rejects male violence associated with the phallus.

To the extent that circumcision undercuts the ideal of a warrior-hunter man, Jewish emphasis on the creatureliness of all that exists also places maleness within a relativized status. Men are creatures, too. Men are no better or worse before God than women or other animals.<sup>560</sup> God created all of them according the Jewish origins sagas. God creates male *and* female humans in the divine likeness and image, but this does not

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<sup>559</sup> Daniel Boyarin, "Homotopia: The Feminized Jewish Man and the Lives of Women in Late Antiquity," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (1995): 42.

<sup>560</sup> It is significant that the Talmud does not essentialize gender or make gender into an ontological status underlying reality. Men and women do not have their own "natures" in Talmudic literature. The Talmud definitely differentiates between males and females, but this kind of differentiation stands in stark contrast to the Greek notion of male as the norm and in which "man" is the general word for "human." On the lack of "natures" and ontological status for gender in Talmudic Judaism see Daniel Boyarin, "Gender," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 117–136.

place the male human in the place of dominator and killer of all that is not human. It places Adam, the first human male, in the place of intimate relationship with other creatures so that he can know them and name them.<sup>561</sup> His relationship to nonhuman animals was one of naming not consumption: fruit and seeds were his food, not flesh. The male, right from the start of the Jewish story, is utterly different than the Greco Roman male and the typical American male, who typically are taught to desire animal flesh and leave salads alone as “women’s food.”

The ideal is no longer the male military leader as John the Baptist expected, in line with so much prevailing culture.<sup>562</sup> Instead of a violent male military leader as the ideal for male humanness, the norm becomes the peaceable human whose identity is not in competition with other creatures through hunting and warfare. Jesus’s nail- and spear-pierced body, bleeding and dying on the cross, reveals a manhood that undercuts the hegemonic stereotype of typical masculinity.

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<sup>561</sup> I take naming to be a fundamentally relational activity, not an activity of domination.

Theologian Jean-Luc Marion argues, to the contrary, that Adam names nonhuman animals because naming objectifies that which is named and places the named under the power of the namer. All naming is therefore an inherently violent activity. The practice of naming objectifies the other into an object under one’s power to dominate: “Man has the power to name, to understand, and thus to dominate.” That is why humans do not name themselves or God, but do have a divine permission to name (dominate) all other creatures.” See Jean-Luc Marion, “Mihi magna quaestio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing,” *Journal of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2005): 15. The first thing to note here is that Marion’s anthropology, therefore, trades on a fundamental exclusion in which human dignity comes at the price of other creatures.

Moreover, Marion seems to misinterpret Adam’s naming in Genesis 2 (an interpretation he draws from Hegel). The naming-story does not suggest that Adam somehow “objectified” the other creatures. In fact, God brought them to Adam because God considered them to be suitable companions. Marion also misinterprets naming in Scripture, which serves many different purposes, including dominion, and we cannot reduce every instance of naming to any one purpose. In Genesis 16, Hagar “named the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You are El-roi’” (Gen 16:13). We can hardly imagine the author of Genesis envisioning that Hagar has exercised dominion—understood as domination—in naming God. Moreover, Hagar’s naming of God directly contradicts Marion’s claim that humans cannot name God just as much as Adam’s naming of Eve contradicts his claim that humans cannot name humans (and the absent sea creatures also challenge his thesis that nonhuman creation is under dominion through the act of naming).

<sup>562</sup> How ironic that the Baptist, so counter-cultural in many ways, stands in the line of patriarchal visions of the violent male ideal.

Jesus goes to the cross. He dies. He suffers. In the Roman economy of signs this is the utter defeat of a weak man. Some feminists also reject the cross, but not because it does not signify a violent male. Alison Jasper sees the cross as glorifying suffering per se as a type of obedience to God's will. Moreover, Jasper argues, this crucifixion seems to shed the body in ways typical of later Christianity that seems to have a low view of this material world and our bodies in general. The cross glorifies suffering and devalues the body in this interpretation. I think Jasper is right at one level: to the extent that Jesus's cross legitimizes oppression and tells women to just grin and bear it "like Jesus," the cross becomes a tool of oppression. To the extent that it tells oppressed men to grin and bear it is also problematic. But Jesus's crucifixion undercuts the prevalent portrait of manhood in his and our culture.<sup>563</sup>

The trial and crucifixion narratives give no indication that they condone what happens to Jesus or that the stories are meant to justify sadistic male behavior toward others, be they human females or nonhuman animals. Yet without the resurrection, these narratives would seem to trap women, nonhuman animals, and low status males in a cycle of victimization. It is from the vantage point of the resurrection that we can read back to the crucifixion and see the suffering endured there absolutely condemned.

Jesus, the subjugated male, with whom there is no reason in principle that women cannot identify, does not stay dead. Death is what Jesus was supposed to fear the most. Death is what Roman male dominance could give out as its mirrored other, in which that which they feared the most is inflicted on others. But the tomb, the place where Jesus is cast as another victim of male power, becomes a place for life to spring forth yet again.

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<sup>563</sup> This is not an idea unique to me. See Kent Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-in-Pain as Redemptive Figure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 132.

Jesus thus offers women hope: hope that despite being cast aside in the patriarchal system, there will be life. The feminized male flesh of Christ rises from the tomb. How can this not be a symbol of hope for women and a release for men from their hyper-masculine fears masked in domination?

To argue that Christ's maleness, per se, cannot be a source of hope and life for women is to have a very peculiar understanding of male and female. It seems to reflect a static view of biological sex and gender that does not do justice to the way the Gospels portray Jesus's body, as Graham Ward notes. Moreover, gender and queer studies in theology are now recognizing just how problematic the idea of male and female are biologically speaking anyhow.

This is not to say that the Gospels (much less the New Testament in general) portray Jesus in such a way that are not troubling in terms of his relationship with women. There are certainly plenty of instances of Jesus subverting the patriarchal values of his time in relationship to women and men.<sup>564</sup> But feminist readings are right to point out that these are not always decisive. The male Jesus still often reflects certain ideas latent in his and our modern culture that keep women in their place.

Nevertheless, essentialism about what it means to be male or female has to be rejected to the extent that it depicts an either/or situation: either Jesus is male and

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<sup>564</sup> For example, when scribes and Pharisees wanted to execute a woman for adultery, Jesus challenged their patriarchal authority. He refused to comply with the scribal and Pharisaical insistence that the woman be executed, and instead called upon the men to recognize their own sins. As a male, Jesus here broke with patriarchal power, leveling out the playing field between men and women. In this sense, Jesus offers an example of manhood that critiques and refuses patriarchal power and privilege. By refusing to condemn the woman, Jesus, in some sense, takes on her sin. By calling on the men to see their own duplicity, Jesus shows men the way forward. Jesus crosses a boundary. So Jesus's maleness can be a critique of male power and domination and models a boundary crossing identity that is not easily assimilated into the gender roles into which some people place him. Rather than an essentialist reading, in which Jesus's maleness either hinders or furthers some theological point, this way of seeing Jesus's gender, begins to break down the rigid divide.

therefore not able to save women, or his maleness is utterly unimportant and he *might* have some value for women. Jesus's maleness is a problem for modern males even more than his male identity is for women because it does not conform to some of the most enduring Roman hunter-warrior ideals.

Jesus let himself be crucified rather than wage war and violence. That rubs directly against dominant ideas of what it means to be a man down through the ages. As Boyarin notes about Jewish males (as well as Christian monks, nuns, and priests): “Within the context of a culture in which ‘strength, assertiveness, activity, stoicism, courage and so forth’ were the essential characteristics of manliness, Jewish men (and certain classes of Christian men as well) appeared to be not-male or feminized.”<sup>565</sup> This reconfiguration of the ideal male is far from theologically marginal.<sup>566</sup>

Jesus was not ashamed of his circumcision. We have no indication—as we do in other sources for some Jewish males—that he tried to hide his circumcision or reverse it through various techniques of stretching skin. Moreover, I will argue more fully in the next chapter that Jesus's circumcision, to the extent that it feminized him in the Roman economy of signs, an economy that Jewish people resisted and subverted by rejecting

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<sup>565</sup> Boyarin, “Homotopia,” 43.

<sup>566</sup> In terms of modern Christian ethics, Jesus's maleness is a challenge to Protestant and Catholic ministries to males such as the Christian Bowhunters of America, the Christian Sportsmen's Fellowship, Ironman Outdoors, Outdoor Connection, and South Carolina Baptist Convention's Bow Hunting with a Purpose.

A sample of these “manly” ministries comes from Brent Henderson's Hunting Truth Seminars & Wild Game Banquets, in which he recommends to churches appeals to males dressed in camouflage, surrounded by or holding weapons, with stuffed, dead animals on the walls. His videos show him killing animals and waxing about the importance of husbands and fathers in the household. In his Event Planning Guide for churches he recommends prizes like bows and arrows, knives, guns, and other hunting gear. In an attempt to draw men further into church life he also recommends that churches have plenty of meat for them to eat.

Henderson's masculine appeal is echoed in *Men's Ministry in the 21st Century: The Encyclopedia of Practical Ideas*, which advises churchgoers to make their events safe for men by having food for them: “men can sit together and talk as long as they have a purpose like devouring a roast pig!”

In these modern male ministries we are a far, far cry from the Jesus of the Gospels, in large part, I would argue because his maleness has been detached from his Jewishness.

their ideal male, also dehumanized him in that economy. Roman beauty was pitted against Jewish beastliness.

### **Conclusion**

My argument in this chapter proceeds from what I argued in the previous chapter about Jesus's Jewishness. One of the presuppositions of this chapter is that Jesus's maleness inextricably intertwines with his Jewishness. There is no such thing as a "Jew." There is no such thing as a "male." There are only particular embodiments and performances in which aspect of identity that we might logically separate for the sake of analysis are actually intertwined so deeply that any sharp division between Jew and male in the case of Jesus would not do the Incarnation justice. Not only this, but unlike previous studies, which have glossed over Jesus's Jewish maleness and argue for a broad creatureliness, I have tried to face it squarely with the awareness that Jesus's identity as a particular person in a particular place and time can speak to a universal audience. It is precisely through his particularity that we begin to see how Jesus's identity is salvific for nonhuman animals and humans.

Gender is a performance. Maleness is a performance. Jewishness is a performance. Jesus's biological sex is intertwined with a transgendered performance that is just as problematic for modern males as it is for modern females. The Gospels, as Graham Ward has argued, paint a radically transgendered portrait of Jesus's body in which his male body does a lot of theological work across the gender divide. Any "men's ministry" that wants to pick up some helpful hints from Jesus's maleness to reinforce their hunting, killing, and violent tendencies, as some male ministries certainly do, will

only be able to do so to the extent that they read Jesus in the most shallow manner possible.

But when it comes to nonhuman animals, Jesus's transgendered theological body needs its Jewishness. Scholars have paid far too little attention to this aspect of Jesus's maleness to date. But it is precisely as a Jewish male that the Incarnation begins to take on significance for other than human creatures. The dominant society made the ideal male into a hunter who kills helpless and relatively defenseless nonhuman animals, and then turns them into killers of their own kind of who must constantly negotiate their power in relationship to others. But Jewish tradition can be read as often doing the opposite. The record is not one of unbroken success. Yet there are trajectories that move us toward liberation. Jesus's own life is not one of an utter break with everything modern theologians and critical theorists might see as patriarchal or speciesist. Yet he sets a course that if taken to its conclusion will lead to more and more understanding and critique. It will lead to more attempts to overcome patriarchy and speciesism. His disciples, as he himself suggested, will do greater things than he.

If we ignore Jesus's maleness we may also tend to take the Incarnation out of its Jewish roots, where a creation-wide eschatological vision widens the scope of our theological vision. Severed from these roots, we may miss the way Jesus's maleness transgresses constructed boundaries about what we think it means to be male or female. We can only deconstruct stereotypical theological renderings of Jesus—which make his gender something useable for patriarchal purposes as the characters do to Jesus in the crucifixion—by focusing first on Jesus's particularity and working through it.

Theologically speaking, Jesus's maleness as narrated in the Gospels has a "transgendered" quality that subverts patriarchal domination and makes it problematic to use that maleness to speak about "active" and "passive" aspects of life that could underwrite social gender hierarchies. Jesus was a male Jew, and that Jewishness influenced how he negotiated life as a man. They are related. The way Jesus crosses the patriarchal boundary was completely within an interpretation and embodiment of Jewish history and eschatology.

Jesus stands, I have argued, in a Jewish tradition that rejected the dominant image of the ideal male as a violent hunter-warrior, a portrait of manhood that has been prevalent from ancient to modern times. The virulent and violent male warrior, actively conquering enemies and killing and consuming nonhuman animals, is not the ideal male in this Jewish vision. Jesus stands in a tradition that undercuts the active violent male and brings a new vision of peaceable masculinity into the foreground. That does not mean there is not room for critiques of ways that the Gospels portray Jesus as still within a system of the dominant. But it does mean we are not in an either/or situation, but a trajectory set in motion long before Jesus and carried to new heights in the Incarnation.



## CHAPTER 5 THE WORD BECAME A JEWISH, MALE HUMAN

In chapters 3 and 4, I argued that Jesus's particularity as a Jewish male helps animal theology. The Jewish origins and eschatological stories frame everything Jesus said and did. These theological bookends frame Jesus's maleness. His maleness overturned dominant portraits of the bloodthirsty male hunter and warrior. Jesus's theologically-transgendered body challenges our bipolar views of biological sex and culturally-generated gender. At the same time, his circumcision marked him as radically different from the ideal Roman male. How Jesus was male matters for how we think about the Incarnation and nonhuman animals.

Despite these trajectories, Jesus's humanness may provide an insurmountable barrier. While we might be able to revise the Nicene Creed from "Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven; and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man" to less a less masculine-biased translation—"Who for us human beings, and for our salvation, descended from heaven; and was made incarnate by the Holy Spirit from the virgin Mary, and became human"—even this gender-inclusive translation about the Incarnation could reinforce the assumption that Jesus's humanity is the all-decisive particularity for thinking about God and creation. In other words, Jesus's humanity could derail reflection on the Incarnation and nonhuman animals.

Responding to Christian anthropocentrism, many theologians dismiss Jesus's humanity as a Christological focal point. As noted in the introduction, Sallie McFague argues that we must relativize Jesus of Nazareth in Christology but "maximize it

[Christology] in relation to the cosmos” by seeing the cosmos as God’s body.<sup>567</sup> Others, such as Denis Edwards, Niels Gregersen, and Elizabeth Johnson, take a different approach. They view humanity as comprised of cosmic elements that began billions of years ago. So while acknowledging Jesus’s humanity, they connect Jesus’s humanity to a wider ecology.

I have argued that McFague does not take the Incarnation’s particularity seriously enough. The “deep Incarnation” approach produces more enlivening results for Christian theology. Ecological and cosmic forces have shaped humanity. Everything is interconnected. Nevertheless, this approach may take such a wide view of Jesus’s humanity loses particularity. Moreover, these theologians' broad viewpoint may clash with the personalism of the Triune Creator who notices every sparrow. In this chapter, my approach supplements deep Incarnation theology. I will read Jesus's humanity as necessary for animal theology.

### **Jesus’s Humanity as a Problem for Animal Theology**

Before constructively reading Jesus’s humanity in relation to nonhuman animals, a couple of scriptural challenges seem to halt the endeavor. Commentators across the ages have used the stories of Jesus sending a demon into pigs as exemplifying human superiority and dominion. Commentators have also used the Gospel of Luke’s fish-eating Jesus in a similar way. In this section, I will examine these stories and argue that they do not establish human superiority and violent dominion based in Jesus’s humanity.

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<sup>567</sup> McFague, *The Body of God*, 162.

### **Pigs and Demons: Mark 5:1–20**

In a pericope common to all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus seems to show little regard for pigs. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus lands in the vicinity of Gerasenes and encounters a man who lived in the tombs (Mark 5:1–20, see also Matt 8:28–34 and Luke 8:26–39). This man had broken shackles and howled at the moon. He also regularly committed violence against himself (Mark 5:5). Upon seeing Jesus, the man ran toward Jesus, whom he called "Jesus, Son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7), imploring Jesus not to "torment" him. Sensing a demonic presence, Jesus commands the spirit to leave the man, but then asks what the spirit's name is. The spirit says, "Legion, for we are many" (Mark 5:9). Then the spirit begged Jesus not to send them away to "torment" (to "the abyss" in Luke 8:31). They feared Jesus was going to kill them, so they asked to go into a "great herd of swine" of about two thousand: "Send us into the swine; let us enter them" (Mark 5:12). Legion apparently viewed going to the pigs as a refuge and escape. Jesus "gave them permission." The spirits entered the pigs, who then stampeded down a hill and drowned in the sea (Mark 5:13).

Commenting on this story, Bertrand Russell charged that Jesus "was not very kind to the pigs to put the devils into them and make them rush down the hill into the sea." Jesus, Russell argues, is supposedly God and as such would be omnipotent: "He could have made the devils simply go away; but He chose to send them into the pigs."<sup>568</sup> Jesus let the evil spirits kill pigs for no reason: he could have denied the demonic request and sent the spirits completely away. Indeed, Jesus "made" the pigs drown in Russell's view,

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<sup>568</sup> Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not A Christian," in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (London: Routledge, 2009), 575.

disproving his goodness and divinity. Animal rights philosopher Peter Singer also sees this passage as pointing to Christological flaws. “Jesus himself is described as showing apparent indifference to the fate of non-humans.”<sup>569</sup> Biblical scholar, David Rhoads, lists this incident as one of the more “egregious examples of disparaging attitudes toward nature in the New Testament.”<sup>570</sup> Stephen D. Moore adds that the pigs are “natural/supernatural hybrids” and as such represent “the literal demonization of the animal in Mark.”<sup>571</sup> The destruction of the pigs, therefore, according to Moore, violently establishes human superiority.

By contrast, some interpreters read the story as a political allegory. Ever since Ched Myer’s groundbreaking work *Binding the Strong Man*, many scholars have seen this story as veiling a conflict between Jews and Romans. English translations mask numerous Greek and Latin terms that signal the Roman military as the story’s target.<sup>572</sup> A Roman legion—with a boar as their ensign—was garrisoned in the vicinity. That Legion drowns in the sea recalls the parted Red Sea crashing down around Pharaoh’s army. Drawing on such scholarship, Charlie Camosy writes, “The demon’s name, Legion, seems to be a dead giveaway here.”<sup>573</sup> Annika Spalde and Pelle Strindlund argue that

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<sup>569</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Random House, 1975), 191.

<sup>570</sup> Rhoads, “Who Will Speak for the Sparrow?,” 67.

<sup>571</sup> Stephen D. Moore, “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 90.

<sup>572</sup> For a summary see Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story*, Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 190–91.

<sup>573</sup> Charles Camosy, *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics: Beyond Polarization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 107. Camosy does reveal his sources on this but the political reading that Ched Myers offers is fairly pervasive in regards to Mark’s story.

such “coded political messages” commonly appears in the Bible and in culture. The Book of Revelation uses this kind of imagery, for instance.<sup>574</sup>

Many commentators, by contrast, maintain that Jesus chose a lesser evil. The demons feared that if they would die without a body to live on parasitically, and since demons were territorial, they saw the pigs as a suitable substitute for the man. The demons, these scholars claim, had meant to kill the man, but Jesus sent them into the pigs as a “lesser evil.”<sup>575</sup> According to Bauckham, this story does not teach that nonhuman animals are valueless. Nevertheless, “the principle that human beings are of more value than other animals here operates to the detriment of the latter, in a case, unique within the Gospels, where a choice has to be made.”<sup>576</sup> Jesus’s action, therefore, becomes less of a problem by imposing hierarchies of being and moral quandaries on the story.

Michael Gilmour sees several problems with Bauckham’s way of reading this story.<sup>577</sup> First, if the demons wanted to kill the man, why had they left him alive? Second, if their plea was for survival, as many scholars argue, why would they drive the pigs into the ocean to drown, since they needed a body to survive as well, according to the then

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<sup>574</sup> Annika Spalde and Pelle Strindlund, “Doesn’t Jesus Treat Animals as Property?,” in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures*, ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 101–13. Moreover, they point out that there are unrealistic depictions of pigs in this story. They do not stampede because they are not really herd animals. And two thousand pigs would be far beyond most farming capabilities at that time. See *ibid.*, 106–107.

Nevertheless, a pig is not a pig in this reading. The pigs remain coded signs for something else, in this case, a military insignia. The pigs are signs to be interpreted. They represent something else. So the ethical problems involved are dissolved through a process of erasure. The pigs are not really there. They are just codes. The unwieldy potential of this kind of reading is only reined in by a historical-critical method, which looks at what “really” underlies the text. While the reading is intriguing and insightful, I suspect one could read almost any Gospel story in such a manner. It also plays into a long line of “animal erasure” in biblical interpretation, only this time in order to acquit Jesus of potential wrongdoing.

<sup>575</sup> This is how Richard Bauckham reads the story. See Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 97–98. I am using Bauckham primarily because he is sympathetic to the kind of work I am doing in this dissertation and has written extensively on the Bible and a theology that cares for creation and nonhuman animals specifically.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>577</sup> See Gilmour, *Eden’s Other Residents*, 84.

prevailing views of demons? Third, Jesus cast out other demons without such collateral damage and could have done so here. Fourth, to attribute the wanton destruction of life to Jesus raises problems of consistency since Jesus indicates that God cares about even a single sparrow's death (Matt 10:29–31). Finally, argues Gilmour, the standard interpretations raise issues about Jesus's authority. Cannot Jesus save the pigs as well as the human? If Jesus is lord of all creation, then this limitation seriously challenges the standard interpretations about the pigs.

Gilmour offers his own reading: the pigs are neither passive victims of demonic murder nor docile nothings whom Jesus disregarded. Rather than being acted upon passively, the pigs actively resist the demons. The Bible does not depict nonhuman animals as Cartesian machines. Rather, nonhuman animals cry out to God for food (Job 38:41; Ps 147:9; Ps 104:21; Joel 1:21); actively recognize angels (Num 22:22–35); work as God's agents (Jonah); and groan for redemption (Rom 8:18–23). Nonhuman animals praise God and in the Book of Revelation surround God's throne (Rev 4:8). Meanwhile, the demons have an interest in their hosts staying alive. So Jesus's permission to the demons to enter the pigs does not mean he permitted the demons to kill the pigs. Rather, the pigs act against the demonic forces. "The demons do not anticipate creation's abhorrence of their evil presence, which through an exercise of self-sacrifice destroys them. The demons do not plunge the swine into the waters. It is the other way around. The swine hurl the demons into the 'sea' using their own bodies, destroying the devils in the process."<sup>578</sup> The sea, in biblical literature, is a place of chaos and abyss, exactly where Luke says the demons wanted to avoid.

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 86.

If Gilmour’s interpretation is plausible, then the pigs in this story cooperate with Jesus in freeing the man from his demonic possession and in liberating the Earth from a demonic presence. Rather than pitting Jesus against nonhuman creatures in a “lesser evil” scenario, Gilmour’s interpretation places the pigs and Jesus in a cooperative role more fitting to Jesus’s role as savior and liberator.<sup>579</sup> Rather than violently establishing the superiority of humanity, as Moore asserts, this story shows pigs working against evil. Supporting Gilmour’s interpretation is the fact that an active verb describes what the pigs did: ὄρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη (the herd rushed—Mark 5:13—third person, singular, active, aorist, indicative). The herd itself ran. They acted. If the demon had run then we might expect the subject to be Legion: “Legion rushed.” If Legion caused the pigs to run, we might expect a passive construction—“the pigs were rushed”—or some kind of causal statement like “Legion caused the pigs to run into the sea.” Yet the Greek text states that the pigs stampeded into the water, drowning themselves and depriving the demons of their bodily hosts.

As a way of comparison, it might even be useful to compare the pigs’ action to a first-century Jewish protest. Pilate had raised Roman imperial standards in Jerusalem, offending many Jewish people. When they objected en masse, Pilate had the protesting Jews surrounded with soldiers. In response, the Jewish demonstrators “flung themselves

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<sup>579</sup> Evidence suggests that nonhuman animals act independently rather than being automatons. Jason Hribal, for example, has mounted significant evidence that nonhuman animals confined within circuses, zoos, slaughterhouses, and other places mount resistance. They are not machines who automatically do what they are bid by human overlords. These acts of resistance, which range from attacking keepers to plotting revenge and escapes, rarely gain the attention they deserve because zoo keepers and circus owners, for example, downplay the animal agency by telling the public these are “isolated” incidents that rarely occur. In fact these acts of resistance happen regularly. Many of the creatures kept confined in these places mount organized resistance. Hribal claims that if the public were made aware of these acts, they would help dispel the notion that humans are the only creatures capable of agency. See Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (Petrolia, CA: CounterPunch, 2014). The Gerasene pigs could be read as waging a collective act of resistance against an evil force similar to the mass suicide Jews committed at Masada when the Romans besieged the city.

in a body on the ground, extended their necks, and exclaimed that they were ready rather to die than to transgress the law.”<sup>580</sup> The readiness to resist evil to the point of death can also be read in the pigs rushing into the lake.

In response to reading the pigs as having active agency, some would deny that these creatures have any capacity for agency. Sara Grey and Joe Cleffies, for example, writing in the left-wing magazine *Jacobin*, recently argued that nonhuman animals are “objects of history” because unlike oppressed humans nonhuman animals have never mounted resistance: “Human beings, whatever their racial identity, possess agency. Enslaved human beings, even in the most brutal days of the chattel system, were self-directed beings who not only felt pain and experienced self-perception but who loved, reasoned, wrote, and above all *fought for their own freedom*. Other species will never display that kind of agency.”<sup>581</sup> But some evidence suggests otherwise. Nonhuman animals have resisted captivity and oppression. Take, for example, a story in *The Guardian* about a chimpanzee named Santino held in a Swedish zoo. Santino hates it when humans come to observe him. So he began stockpiling bits of concrete that he had actively chipped away from a wall. He would wait till visitors showed up and then go to his ammunition pile and throw them at the visitors.<sup>582</sup> That is plotting and resistance. Moreover, the idea that only humans can act purposefully to resist their oppression has been used in the past to justify oppression of other humans. For instance, in the nineteenth century, white Americans sometimes justified slavery by noting that black

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<sup>580</sup> For the full story see Josephus, *The Jewish War, Books 1–3*, 2.169–174.

<sup>581</sup> Sara Grey and Joe Cleffies, “Peter Singer’s Race Problem,” *Jacobin*, August 6, 2015. Online at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/animal-rights-cecil-the-lion-peter-singer-speciesism/> (accessed August 30, 2015).

<sup>582</sup> Ian Sample, “Chimp Who Threw Stones at Zoo Visitors Showed Human Trait, Says Scientist,” *The Guardian*, March 10, 2009. Santino planned for the future in this incident, actively trying to resist human encroachment into his space.



slaves were objects “incapable of deep plots.”<sup>583</sup> Yet we know that slaves occasionally revolted. Likewise, Jewish people mounted some revolts from their ghettos against Nazi oppression. Does the fact that there were not more revolts mean that Jews and African Americans are “objects of history”? There is a circularity to the reasoning that denies agency to other animals. Moreover, as we shall see, such reasoning is what Giorgio Agamben calls “the anthropological machine.”

In any case, whether one will allow the pigs in the Gospel account to have their own agency will often depend on the apriori assumptions one brings to this text: are other animals capable of acting on their own or not? If so, then the pigs may have acted to resist a demonic presence. If, however, a person will not allow for this possibility as a matter of principle then there is some bias against other animals being brought to the text, a bias, we shall see, that trades on a violent establishment of human superiority. That establishment of human superiority, however, is what one brings to the text, not what a person simply reads off of it. I will return to this, but first, there is another story to examine.

### **Jesus and Fish**

Jesus’s relationship to fish creatures seems to model something less than a peaceable co-existence.<sup>584</sup> Most of Jesus’s use of fish in the canonical Gospels revolve around food. He cooks fish for his disciples (John 21:9–13), multiplies fish and bread to feed a large crowd (Matt 14:13–21; 15:32–39), helps his disciples catch fish in a net

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<sup>583</sup> See Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1983), 12.

<sup>584</sup> I will examine this issue in terms of theology rather than ethics per se. I have written about the ethical implications elsewhere. See Andy Alexis-Baker, “Didn’t Jesus Eat Fish?” in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals*, ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 64–74.

(Luke 5:4–6; John 21:6–8), and tells Peter to retrieve a coin from a fish’s mouth (Matt 17:24–27). In a single Lukan passage, Jesus even eats a piece of fish after the resurrection to prove his bodily reality (Luke 24:42–43).

The debate over Luke 24:42–43 has often turned on the passage’s historical reliability.<sup>585</sup> Arguing for the nonhistoricity of all passages about fish and Jesus, Keith Akers argues that later Christians added Luke 24:42–43 in order to accommodate a growing influx of flesh-eating pagans, and so these interpolating Christians corrupted an original Christian vegetarianism.<sup>586</sup> Yet no solid evidence supports Akers’s thesis. The church never condemned vegetarianism per se, only various underlying anti-materialisms. There are also no extant biblical manuscripts that would demonstrate tampering with the fish passages. Consequently, Akers’s lost vegetarian Jesus seems implausible. His underlying logic—for modern Christians to be vegetarian Jesus should have been one too—displaces eschatology for ethics since the end must be fully realized in the historical Jesus. We must be able to look back for a fully realized eschatology to imitate.

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<sup>585</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer argues that this passage is a “Lukan embellishment” that is not historically reliable. See Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1574. By contrast, I. Howard Marshall, claims that Luke 24:43 is part of a “well-attested tradition.” See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 903.

<sup>586</sup> See Keith Akers, *The Lost Religion of Jesus: Simple Living and Nonviolence in Early Christianity* (New York: Lantern Books, 2000), 127–28. See also Charles Vaclavik, *The Vegetarianism of Jesus Christ: The Pacifism, Communalism and Vegetarianism of Primitive Christianity* (Platteville, WI: Kaweah Publishing, 1989), 144. Upton Ewing, likewise, makes Jesus into an Essene and argues that primitive Christianity’s original vegetarianism was later abandoned to accommodate flesh-eating pagans. But Jesus did not eat fish. See Upton Clary Ewing, *The Essene Christ: A Recovery of the Historical Jesus and the Doctrines of Primitive Christianity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961). My critique of Akers applies to Ewing and Vaclavik as well. For a devastating critique of this type of literature see Richard Young, *Is God a Vegetarian?* (New York: Open Court Publishing, 1999), 6–9. These scholars, Young argues, dismiss counter evidence to their thesis that Jesus was an Essene and Essenes were vegetarian as later corruptions. They read the evidence uncritically. Moreover, they use outdated scholarship. Scholars no longer see the Essenes as vegetarian since excavations revealed that the ritual meals likely contained some animal flesh. Moreover, the idea that the New Testament was altered to accommodate meat-eating pagans has no textual or historical basis. Moreover, the Christian church never condemned vegetarianism, which undermines their thesis.

At the other extreme, some scholars completely reject concerns around Jesus and nonhuman animals. I. Howard Marshall, for example, asserts dismissively with regard to Jesus's interaction with the demon Legion: "The moral problem can be safely dismissed: one man is of greater value than many swine."<sup>587</sup> This response does not allow Jesus's Jewish context to challenge modern Christians. As Richard Bauckham argues, "Jesus in his recorded teaching, does not teach compassion for animals, but he places himself clearly within the Jewish ethical and legal tradition which held that God requires the people to treat their fellow-creatures, the animals, with compassion and consideration."<sup>588</sup> The creation-wide redemption that the New Testament and the prophets picture of the messiah calls for a more careful assessment of Jesus's actions toward some sea creatures. Moreover, if Jesus's mission is to address the problem of life's horrors and not just human sin, then Jesus's fish-eating needs careful assessment rather than dismissal as a nonissue.

A third way that scholars have viewed this passage is to claim that Jesus commits a "lesser evil" act. In *Animal Theology*, Andrew Linzey claims, "It can sometimes be justifiable to kill fish for food in situations of necessity," such as survival.<sup>589</sup> Jesus and the disciples must have faced such situations. But because there is a presumption in Christianity for life and against taking it, those who can live without recourse to violence should do so, even if there are borderline cases where violence and killing are necessary in a fallen world. Yet the text from Luke in which Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish does not indicate that Jesus and his disciples faced a situation of necessity. They were never in

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<sup>587</sup> See Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 336.

<sup>588</sup> Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 86.

<sup>589</sup> Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 134–35.

danger of starving. Even when Jesus was hungry and tempted in the wilderness, he did not hunt the wild animals that were with him.

None of these solutions satisfies me. Instead, I think that a more solid footing comes by grounding Jesus's actions in Jewish Torah, which strictly limits the types of nonhuman animals Jews may consume. The entire system of Jewish rituals, Milgrom argues, is premised on the idea that "human beings can curb their violent nature through rituals means, specifically, a dietary discipline that will necessarily drive home the point that all life, shared by animals, is inviolable, except—in the case of meat—when conceded by God."<sup>590</sup> Milgrom expounds on the fact that the Hebrew Bible does not name a single real fish (it only names the mythical Leviathan and a great sea monster, see Gen 1:21). The Priestly source (H) lists all the forbidden foods—wild animals, birds, and swarmers—but omits fish (Lev 20:25). The relatively scarce legislation regarding fish species, therefore, is a consequence of a single fact: "Israelites were not fishermen—at least until the end of the Second Temple times."<sup>591</sup> Israel did not control very many fresh water streams, and the Sea of Galilee was part of a contested border that had been annexed by Assyria when that empire destroyed northern Israel. The Mediterranean was not accessible to Israelites for much of its history. So Israel "would, at best, have known only a few species of fresh water fish."<sup>592</sup> Milgrom cites studies demonstrating that until the modern Suez Canal was built in 1869, the eastern side of the Mediterranean had very few species of fish living there because all of the nutrients fish species needed to survive were too deep. So the reason that ancient Hebrews did not list species of fish in the detailed way they did other animals is "not because they had no contact with the sea, but,

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<sup>590</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

to the contrary, the sea with which they had contact was virtually devoid of fish.”<sup>593</sup> The fish brought to Jerusalem were from foreign fishermen who could fish the Greek seas. The “piscatorial dearth” around Israel, however, has a further consequence. The “fins-scales” criterion for forbidden and allowed species restricted Israel’s consumption of “seafood” nearly to the point that they could not consume sea creatures at all. Only a few species, Milgrom argues, passed the test: “It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the very purpose of the criteria for fish, just like the criteria for quadrupeds . . . was to limit Israel’s access to the animal world.”<sup>594</sup>

The terms “fish” or “seafood,” therefore, are already far too broad when speaking about Jesus. Since, in Jesus’s time, water creatures without fins and scales were expressly forbidden to all Jewish sects, we can safely assume that Jesus did not eat catfish, shrimp, crab, shellfish, dolphin, whale, octopus, and much more just as he did not eat pigs, ducks, rabbits, and other land animals that Mosaic dietary laws explicitly or implicitly forbade (Lev 11 and Deut 14). We do not know the exact species, but Jesus’s Jewishness already limits the broad category of “fish” to far fewer species than such a catchall term suggests to English-speaking ears. So the first word in thinking theologically about this passage I would offer is limit-with-purpose. The purpose of the dietary limitations was peaceableness: God is peaceable; humans made in God’s image ought to be peaceable too. Linzey offers the same point, but by way of an unwarranted textual interpretation.

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 113.

Jesus's Jewishness would have provided Linzey with a better route.<sup>595</sup> Once again, Jesus's Jewish particularity becomes important.

I submit that Jesus's Jewishness is the decisive factor in the act of fish-eating in Luke. Not only was his own access to fish severely limited by virtue of the fins-scales criterion, but the few fish he and his disciples would have had access to even while engaging in fishing were severely curtailed.<sup>596</sup> The entire point of this Jewish limitation was to point Israelites back to the peaceable kingdom vision of Genesis 1 and forward to the prophetic vision of a renewed creation. Perhaps we could say that it would have been better for the Son of God to have abstained from fish altogether under that pedagogical tool. But that Jesus ate fish at least once still fits within the Jewish tradition's limitation of human violence toward other animals. To condemn Jesus for eating a piece of fish misses the radical Jewish disruption of humanity's desire for consumption. Even if Jesus ate a piece of fish, that consumption is already encircled by a system designed to limit-with-purpose, pointing backwards to God's intentions for all creatures and pointing forwards to new and transformed relationships between all creatures. Indeed, one could argue, as I will in this chapter, that eventually the church came to see that relationship embodied in the person of Jesus's ascended body, where the predatorial lion and the gentle lamb finally come to rest.

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<sup>595</sup> Stephen H. Webb also deals with Jesus eating fish but simply acknowledges the fact against those who distort the texts to make him into a vegetarian. See Stephen H. Webb, *Good Eating* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 131.

<sup>596</sup> They were curtailed by the Torah but also by circumstances as Milgrom points out. This also makes sense of the miracles the Gospels portray in which the disciples are able to catch a lot of fish. If large catches had been normal, those miracles would not have been noteworthy at all.

### Clearing Away Another Challenge: Descartes's Humans and Animals

I began this chapter with the challenge of Jesus's confrontation with Legion and the pigs' subsequent action as well as Jesus's fish-eating not only because they challenge my working idea that Jesus's particularity as a human helps rather than hinders theologians to develop an "animal theology." But I have also used these stories because they illustrate that we never read these texts as if they are simple bare facts. We come to them with prior assumptions and interpretive grids that can stifle the liberating trajectory of the Incarnation.

If we assume that only humans are capable of rational foresight and active agency, then of course we will either have to accuse Jesus of lesser evil thinking, being callous, or being a speciesist (for better or worse). If we assume that Jesus's fish-eating in Luke gives carte-blanche permission to Christians to kill and destroy whatever nonhuman animal we like, then obviously Jesus's humanity stands as an insurmountable obstacle to animal liberation within a Christian framework.

Yet different assumptions can open up these texts in liberating ways for not only nonhuman animals but also for humans. Reading the texts with different assumptions can free us from the responsibility of being lords and masters over others (cf. Luke 22:25 and Matt 20:25). Violent dominion harms everyone involved, or as Pope Francis repeatedly argues in *Laudato Si'*: "everything is connected."<sup>597</sup> This statement stands in stark contrast to the binary cuts made in theological anthropology at least since the time of Descartes.

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<sup>597</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), §117.

Descartes declared that animals are nothing more than divinely created “machines.”<sup>598</sup> We can know the difference between “man and beast,” according to Descartes, because “it is quite remarkable that there are no men so dull-witted or stupid . . . that they are incapable of arranging various words together and forming an utterance from them in order to make their thoughts understood; whereas there is no animal . . . that can do the like.”<sup>599</sup> This is not because animals do not have the necessary body parts but because “they have no reason at all.” All they can do is mimic speech like any robot humans might devise. “They have no intelligence at all.” Animals are simply a conglomerate of “bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins and all the other body parts that are in the body of any animal.”<sup>600</sup> Animals are totally devoid of λόγος. Only the rational soul that humans have can possess this λόγος. Otherwise, we are looking at mere animals who are like machines, like clocks whose motion and parts are entirely devoid of reason and thought.

Descartes seems to have believed that animals cannot feel pain because they have no perception or interior senses at all, which are the conditions for suffering. Between humans and animals there is only an abyss. The “marvelous connection of all things” about which Thomas Aquinas spoke becomes flattened into a binary with Descartes: the human and the animal, that which has reason or λόγος and that which does not.

Speaking about Jesus’s “humanity” risks appropriating him into our modern human/animal binary. Jesus was not a modern “human” whose humanity was essentially

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<sup>598</sup> See Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, discourse 5. Descartes’ view had immediate influence. For example, in his *De motu animalium* (1680) Giovanni Borelli maintained that all animal movements are quantifiable and mechanistic. Describing animal motion in terms of levers and weights, he meticulously studied the muscles, nerves and tissue of animals. See Giovanni Borelli, *De motu animalium* (Rome: 1680).

<sup>599</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 5, p. 45.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.



and fundamentally at odds with the “animal.” When thinking about Jesus’s humanity in our time it is important to note that Jesus’s humanity has nothing to do with Descartes’s binary in which what is human is defined against animals. In the first chapter of this dissertation I examined the roots of נִפְשָׁר and σάρξ, showing that these terms connect humanity with all other animals without making a binary hierarchy. All flesh, the Psalmist writes, is “like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more” (Ps 113:15–16).

In contrast to a Jewish understanding of difference and commonality amongst animal creatures, Descartes not only strips animals of any possible connection to reason, he also cuts away everything except the formless and shapeless “mind” in humanity: I think therefore I am. Nowhere in Scripture do any authors define humanity and other animals in this way. Rather, humans and nonhuman animals are living beings who all have God’s breath. It is God’s Spirit that defines the living being, not a special “substance.” Unlike every other creation that God declares good, God never says that humans are good. Instead, Genesis says that God saw everything, “and indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Humans, in this view, are only good in relationship to everything else and not set apart from it in a binary opposition. Therefore, if we are to define humans and other animals within the Cartesian binary, then Scripture does not contain any animals or humans. This all too common modern lens for reading theological anthropology and views about animals in Scripture simply flattens the swarming and teeming world of the Bible. Such a lens will not do for understanding Jesus’s humanity.

## **Animal Rights and Homogeneity**

Descartes's view stands in a long line of defining what it means to be human by looking for characteristics that are unique to humanity such as "reason" or "language" or "self-consciousness." Yet something has happened in our time that radically challenges this classical anthropology. We now realize not only that humans are an evolved creature with deep connections to other creatures, but that the qualities theologians and philosophers once posited as uniquely human are also found in a variety of other species to one degree or another. The issue then becomes matters of degree not qualitative differences. This is an important and fundamental modern development.

Consequently, some modern theologians and theorists have tried to reimagine human/nonhuman animals relationships based on the idea that those nonhuman animals that exhibit the human-like traits of reason and rudimentary language skills should be given rights and generally treated as we would other humans.<sup>601</sup> This view is generally based on a static notion of humanity. Beyond the static notion of humanity, animal rights viewpoints have some other tensions to resolve.

First, rights language posits anthropocentric characteristics as the determining factor for ethical consideration. Why not use echolocation found in bats and dolphins, for example? Second, those creatures who do not exhibit the necessary capacities for equal treatment do not have rights. This reinforces human domination rather than helps to undercut it. Third, this viewpoint lacks a robust anthropology since not even all humans exhibit the qualities necessary to be human. Mentally incapacitated humans, for example,

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<sup>601</sup> See Tom Regan, *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs: An introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

may not have the necessary qualities that define humanity. So the classical definition of humanity does not even really include all humans. There are structural flaws in the anthropology from the start. Fourth, animal rights advocates often value “reason” over other traits, like emotions. If we must base treatment of nonhuman animals on reason alone, then this is a peculiarly narrow way to see humanity, and historically a male-dominated viewpoint. Why should emotions that elicit compassion, pity, and love be excluded?<sup>602</sup> This harkens back to the third point: what is most human is male-dominated reason, with the more “emotional” aspects equated with females who are human but not ideally so. But once again, this is not how we should best define Jesus’s humanity.

### **Framing a Hermeneutic: Derrida, Deleuze and Guatarri, and Agamben**

Having started the chapter with Scriptural challenges that at first seem to establish Jesus’s humanity as violently dominant but on another reading do something very different, in the following section I will detail some current philosophical currents that I think provide a good lens for interpreting Jesus’s humanity. I do not wish to impose these on the text anachronistically. However, these ideas provide some lenses through which to view the Incarnation and open the texts to new insights. That is, I will use the ideas from the next section to help re-read Jesus’s humanity all while trying to allow the alienness of texts from two thousand years ago to speak into the modern world.

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<sup>602</sup> For a different view in terms of feminist ethics see Lori Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals* (New York: Lantern Books, 2015).

## Jacques Derrida: The Animal Difference

In response to ideas examined earlier that would homogenize creatures by forcing them into a standard of humanness, Jacques Derrida argues that we should heighten and expand differences rather than try to flatten them into sameness. If Derrida's body of work is taken as a whole, he wrote more about nonhuman animals than any other subject.<sup>603</sup> He claimed, "Since I began writing" that he had addressed issues about the human/animal binary "a thousand times."<sup>604</sup> Derrida argues that Western philosophy has erroneously posited an isolated human individual without attending to the complex systems and network of differences that make such individuals possible in the first place.<sup>605</sup> So the primary task of philosophy is to recover differences, which includes examining the human/animal binary that defines modern anthropology.

Rather than finding human traits like language or reason in nonhuman creatures like great apes or dolphins, Derrida multiplies differences. For example, he calls into the question the term "animal." This "catch-all concept" covers every creature we do not consider human fellows "in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the

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<sup>603</sup> One of Derrida's close associates, Élisabeth de Fontenay, says: "Of all the oppositions placed back to back that Derrida sets into place, the one between man and animal is the most decisive: one could say that it is the opposition that commands the others." Élisabeth de Fontenay, *Without Offending Humans: A Critique of Animal Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>604</sup> He goes on to detail some of these instances in an impressive array of evidence. When these are taken with *The Beast and the Sovereign* Volumes 1 and 2 and *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, his work has been focused on issues about human and animal identity more than any other issue. See Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 34–41.

<sup>605</sup> Derrida uses Karl Marx and others to critique the notion of the individual isolated from society. Marx wrote that "The individual hunter and fisherman . . . belongs among the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades, which in no way express merely a reaction against over-sophistication and a return to a misunderstood natural life." Marx goes on to speak about the way in which social contract theories isolate individuals from society in a "natural" pre-political form, untouched by the matrix of relationships that actually shape people.

See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 25–27.

dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger, the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm, the hedgehog from the echidna.”<sup>606</sup> This homogenizing designation erases difference and involves a power relationship. It is not a neutral classification. Human and animal are asymmetrical classifications:

We have to notice that these two plurals (beasts, men) are asymmetrical and problematical. . . . in that the two plurals do not correspond to two classes or two species, two comparable sets. All men are supposed to belong to the same species or the same genus, the human species, the human race, whereas the beasts . . . designates a set with no other unity, any more than that of said animal which has no other supposed unity than a negative . . . namely that of not a human being. But there is no other positively predictable unity between the ant, the snake, the cat, the dog, the horse, the chimpanzee . . . or the sperm whale.<sup>607</sup>

Derrida charges that the general concept “the animal” only reduces all the diversity of life “by violence and willful ignorance . . . The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority, it is always a crime. Not a crime against animality, precisely, but a crime of the first order against the animals, against animals.”<sup>608</sup> It is also, he elaborates, an affront to humanity: “The simplisticness, misunderstanding, and violent disavowal that we are analyzing at present also seem to me to be betrayals of repressed human possibilities, or other powers of reason, or a more

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<sup>606</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 34. Using “animals” in the plural is one way to resist the homogenizing effect of the term “animal.” I do not think it is enough, but it already signals differences. To add “human” and “nonhuman” to “animal” is another way to resist the homogenizing term.

<sup>607</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, 8.

<sup>608</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 48.

comprehensive logic of argument, or a more demanding responsibility concerning the power of questioning and response, concerning science as well, and, for example . . . as regards the most open and critical forms of zoological or ethological knowledge.”<sup>609</sup> But the violence directed against animals, Derrida charges, is largely a result of male violence in particular (an argument in line with the previous chapter’s analysis of masculinity and animals). He also connects a long-standing hatred of Jewish people with misogyny and violence toward animals.<sup>610</sup>

According to Derrida, introducing more homogeneity by identifying certain “animals” with “humans” does not solve the problem.<sup>611</sup> Such an enterprise is impossible anyhow because not all “humans” exhibit the necessary traits for the label. Of course, various creatures do have things in common. Humans and animals are living beings who die, Derrida maintains (in harmony with his Jewish tradition). He writes about a hedgehog rolling itself up into a ball to protect herself from an oncoming car. She might not see death coming, but this hedgehog dies all the same. Derrida speaks of the “hedgehog” rather than “the animal.” He often tries to speak of this or that creature rather than generally about “the animal.” He claims, contra Heidegger, that it is not certain that humans can experience death *as such* any more than we can deny that any other creature like a hedgehog can experience death. He finds Heidegger’s assertion that animals are

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>610</sup> “The animal’s problem . . . is the male. Evil comes to the animal through the male. . . . It would be relatively simple to show that this violence done to the animals is, if not in essence, then at least predominately male, and, like the very dominance of that predominance, warlike, strategic, stalking, *viriloid*. There may be huntswomen like Diana and Amazon horsewomen, but no one will contest that in its more overwhelming phenomenal form, from hunt to bullfight, from mythologies to abattoirs, except for rare exceptions it is the male that goes after the animal, just as it was Adam whom God charged with establishing his dominance over the beasts.” Ibid., 104.

<sup>611</sup> Derrida claims that he has “strong sympathy” for the notion of animal rights. Yet, he wonders whether “‘right’ is the pertinent concept here. Must we pose the question of our relations with the *animot* in terms of ‘rights?’” Rights, he points out, have not exactly protected other humans from human aggression. See *ibid.*, 88.

“poor in the world” and cannot experience death to be an absurd dogmatic statement that shows his inability to transcend the human/animal binary.<sup>612</sup>

Rather than starting with his own rationality, Derrida reflects on his cat. He must talk about his cat in particular ways—as a cat, as a “little” cat, etc. Yet the individual cat precedes all categorization. This cat “refuses to be conceptualized” because she has her own outlook, which he recognizes but cannot comprehend.<sup>613</sup> Before Derrida-the-thinking-human ever arrives on the scene, there is a cat who has her own point of view. The cat watches him before he watches the little cat.<sup>614</sup> The cat’s gaze precedes Derrida’s autonomy. So before asking the question about capacities—Do they have language? Can they reason? Do they feel pain and suffer?—an encounter elicits the questions.<sup>615</sup>

For Derrida, to posit an “identity” between humans and other animals based on traits like reason, language, tool-making, etc., flattens the animal kingdom’s diversity into a human/animal binary. Instead, Derrida would have us multiply difference. Indeed, Derrida is not against finding a human difference. He thinks that our attempts to separate ourselves absolutely from other creatures have failed. Humans may have differences with every other creature. But these differences do not reduce into an abyssal human/animal binary with humans as dominant. The “animal” cannot contain creation’s rich diversity. So we must differentiate between creatures and individuals. But we can differentiate in different ways and for different purposes. The Valentinians (chapter 2) differentiated

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<sup>612</sup> On the hedgehog and death see Derrida, “Che Cos’è la Poesia,” 301–325. Derrida levels an extended critique of Heidegger on defining humans as world-making and animals as poor-in-the-world in Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 141–60.

<sup>613</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 9.

<sup>614</sup> Derrida does not name his cat in the text. For Derrida, the act of naming is a violent act of domination. Yet, it seems to me that calling the cat “my little cat” is still naming. This naming, however, is impersonal. Giving the cat its own individual name establishes relationship.

<sup>615</sup> I am helped here by Matthew Calarco’s work. See Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 117–21.

between different types to find an “elect” class. Orthodox Christians rejected this divisive hierarchy of being. They stressed creation’s oneness before God and defined creation’s multiplicity within the infinite “distance” between the persons of the Trinity.<sup>616</sup>

But are the only options either to identify animals with humans (animal rights) or multiply differences so that species no longer make sense (Derrida)? Matthew Calarco suggests a third option, one that uses Derrida’s ideas. Calarco argues that setting aside the human/nonhuman animal distinction altogether is a wiser path than these other two options. The purpose of leaving alone the human distinction is so that new ways of thinking can develop.<sup>617</sup> Calarco calls this third option “indistinction.”<sup>618</sup> Indistinction does not homogenize differences. When it comes to humans and other animals, “we are dealing with a field so utterly complex and so deeply relational that any and all concepts we use to refer to it will be inadequate.”<sup>619</sup> Creation’s diversity reveals human language’s limits by showing us “that which exceeds our conceptual mastery.”<sup>620</sup> Moving too

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<sup>616</sup> This is Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Trinitarian vision, derived from patristic and modern Russian theologians. For Balthasar, the only way to understand the Trinity is through the Son’s kenosis in the economy of salvation, finding its extremity in Holy Saturday. In this outworking of kenosis, God subjects death and suffering and all that is not God to the divine life. But this Christological act reveals the mystery of the Trinity: God is self-giving love. Kenosis is the reciprocal relationship between the persons of the Trinity. The first kenosis, logically, is seen in the Father’s begetting of the Son. Here, the Father “strips himself . . . of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son.” See *Theo-Drama, IV*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 323. The Son’s response is kenotic thanksgiving, which creates a “eucharistic movement back and forth from the Father.” See *Theo-Drama, I*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 243. Thus self-giving and self-reception are unified within God’s own being. The Father holds nothing back in generating the Son, and the Father and the Son hold nothing back in breathing forth the Holy Spirit, who maintains and bridges the infinite distance between the Father and Son. The infinite distance between Father and Son becomes most fully manifest in Jesus’s cry on the cross and the silence of Holy Saturday. This distance thus contains all other distances in the world of finitude, “including the distance of sin,” but also every “otherness” within creation itself because otherness and difference in creation mirror the otherness within God’s triune life.

<sup>617</sup> See *ibid.*, 148–49.

<sup>618</sup> Matthew Calarco, *Thinking through Animals* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 48–69. He labels the other two views “identity” and “difference.”

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–56.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*



quickly toward new conceptual maps to replace the traditional binaries might cause us to miss what we can learn in the collapse of the human/animal distinction.

### **Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri: Becoming-Animal**

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri develop a highly relevant idea to Jesus's humanity. They write about "becoming-animal." They open up space in the zone of indistinction for imagining the Incarnation in fresh ways that deepen deep Incarnational thinking. Deleuze and Guatarri focus much of their work on issues around identity, which they argue is always in motion even when it seems fixed. In explaining what this becoming means for Deleuze, Damian Sutton and David Martin-Jones use a coffee mug as an example:

If we pick up a coffee mug and look at it, we can have no doubt that it is a fixed object in time and space. It is, in fact, fixed to the extent of being brittle. It will smash if we drop it, and its "essential" identity would be at an end. What we are really looking at, however, is a moment (no matter how long) of apparent rest in the life of its molecules and atoms. It was once wet clay, formed and shaped, glazed and fired under pressure. It continues to change, cracks and fissures forming on its surface, until we break it, when it will be tossed aside as rubbish, returning to the earth. This "fixed" object in space is also a fixed object in time . . . only inasmuch as we isolate it in our minds from the continual change of the universe.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> Damian Sutton and David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze Reframed* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 45–46.

The mug's identity changes in relationship to the table upon which it sits, to the coffee it contains, to the human who uses it, to the floor upon which it smashes. So the mug is what it does: "we will avoid defining it by Species or Genus characteristics, instead we will seek to count its affects. . . . A race horse is more different from a workhorse than a workhorse from an ox."<sup>622</sup> Human identity changes as well. God said to Adam: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Deleuze and Guatarri call this *haecceity*: Adam-in-the-garden-at-five-o'clock-hearing-God's-judgment; Adam-staring-at-the-angels'-flaming-swords; Adam-exiled; Adam-father-of-Seth; and so on. Becoming involves continuity and change. Humans "are" dust, God said. Adam is a pile of molecules and particles slamming into one another, a motion that continues after death. He will leak into the ground and become part of it once again. His body is an assemblage of differences, but he is not above other creatures. Becoming is a fact of life. Deleuze and Guatarri argue that appreciating becoming means seeing identity as formed through differences.

Deleuze and Guatarri see "man" as the principal identity around which human identity is pressured. The male-female binary places the male as the dominant pole by which to judge identity. But "man" also marks a human-animal binary. In this binary, the

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<sup>622</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri call this *haecceity*. These individualities are a sum of particle and molecule movement and rest as well as their capacity to affect or be affected (to make the hand feel heavy or to be broken on the ground). The climate, wind, season, and time, are all part of the *haecceity*. "The street enters into composition with the horse, just as the dying rat enters into composition with the air, and the beast and the full moon enter into composition with each other. . . . Climate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them. This should be read without pause: the animal-stalks-at-five-o'clock. . . . Five o'clock is this animal! This animal is this place! . . . We are all five o'clock in the evening, or another hour, or two hours simultaneously, the optimal and pessimal, noon-midnight, but distributed in a variable fashion." See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 260–65. The quotation is from *ibid.*, 262–63.

(male) human serves as the canvas upon which all other identities must be cast. To dismantle patriarchy and anthropocentrism, we have to see from a minority view. One has to pass through the minority view, becoming-woman and becoming animal. This involves seeing from the minority point of view, which is not an essence but a “molecular” identity.

Becoming does not imitate: “becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone.”<sup>623</sup> So becoming-animal does not involve trying to biologically change into a difference species. Imitation, for Deleuze and Guatarri, replaces and erases the other. Moreover, imitation has a mechanical quality. A person becomes animal in a static sense by learning how to sing like a bird, making wings, and so on. Instead, becoming-animal moves from stable identity to a “nomadic existence” defying definition. Deleuze and Guatarri point to werewolves and vampires. Yet they insist, “becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real.”

Nevertheless they acknowledge, “The human being does not ‘really’ become an animal any more than the animal ‘really’ becomes something else.”<sup>624</sup> The human does not cross a species barrier. Rather this person occupies an in-between state where the distinctions between human and animal begin to fall apart. It is to pass through the animal to see through the animal’s eyes. “To become,” claims Deleuze, “is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find *the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation* where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 238.

molecule—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form.”<sup>625</sup>

Captain Ahab in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* serves as Deleuze’s illustration. Ahab does not imitate the whale. Rather, he enters a “zone of proximity” in which “he strikes himself in striking the whale.”<sup>626</sup> In *What Is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guatarri argue that philosophers “are not responsible for the victim but responsible before them. And there is no way to escape the ignoble but to play the part of the animal (to growl, burrow, snigger, distort ourselves): thought itself is sometimes closer to an animal that dies than to a living, even democratic, human being.”<sup>627</sup>

They chide Heidegger for his views of animals as poor-in-the-world and connect these views to his Nazism. Deleuze and Guatarri, by contrast, claim to write “for” animals and to “become animal so that the animal also becomes something else. The agony of the rat or the slaughter of a calf remains present in thought not through pity but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other.”<sup>628</sup> This “double becoming” happens as one begins to realize and see through the eyes of the slaughtered calf, which changes the calf too. Things are never the same for those who see “the war on animals” (as Derrida names it) for what it is.

Deleuze and Guatarri argue that we have a mysterious and enchanted world, filled with wonder. Becomings are imperceptible events, not voluntary choices. Becoming is a

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<sup>625</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *c*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1, emphasis added.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. See also Deleuze and Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 304–305.

<sup>627</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 108.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

metaphysical event (which is why some have accused Deleuze of being a mystic).<sup>629</sup>

They refer to children, who often seek a zone of indistinction between themselves and other animals. But their becomings are not the result of rules but of play. The becomings are like events.

For this reason, Deleuze and Guatarri argue, becoming-animal is not imitation. Imitation reinforces essentialist, static identities within the human/animal binary, and a world without enchantment. Yet children learn how to do things by imitating adults, so imitation has its place. But becoming happens at a different level than mimicry.<sup>630</sup>

Deleuze and Guatarri seek to decenter humanity from the dominant position in order to work toward a more just and peaceable order. They also present a view of world that is far more mysterious and fascinating than naturalistic, scientific reduction. They argue for seeing the world through the eyes of children.<sup>631</sup> Children serve also as an example of how society “steals” bodies and becomings. Little girls are told not to act like “tomboys” and little boys are told not to act like “girls” but only to see girls as objects of desire, imposing “a dominant history.”<sup>632</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri aim for liberation from these stolen becomings. What might “becoming-animal” look like then?

Deleuze finds inspiration in the twentieth-century painter Francis Bacon. Bacon’s paintings depict human faces as pieces of meat.<sup>633</sup> Bacon painted scenes of the Crucifixion in which a carved up carcass formed the center of the triptychs. In “Painting” (1946), a carcass hangs, arms outstretched, behind a monstrous looking “human” whose

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<sup>629</sup> Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>630</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 275.

<sup>631</sup> See *ibid.*, 257.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 266–67.

<sup>633</sup> Images of many of Bacon’s paintings are accessible through an internet search. See the chapter “Body, Meat and Spirit” in Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum, 2003), 20–26.

flesh hangs from his jaw, exposing bare teeth and ligaments. Deleuze quotes Bacon: “I’ve always been very moved by pictures about slaughterhouses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion . . . . Of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher shop I always think it’s surprising that I wasn’t there instead of the animal.”<sup>634</sup> Bacon confronts viewers with their vulnerability by painting “a zone of indiscernibility of undecidability between man and animal.”<sup>635</sup> We are “meat.” Deleuze finds in these monstrous paintings a space in which humans become-animal by the mere fact of glimpsing “that every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and beast.”<sup>636</sup> Rather than defining humanity as rational, Deleuze pushes his readers to accept their “flesh.” In accepting our flesh, we become-animal. We are not above the predator-prey relationships in this world. We too are edible. Yet the struggle for survival is a struggle to be more than meat, more than mere consumer and consumed.

This is a position different from describing animals as “like us.” In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guatarri deny that the human “face” elicits responsibility and care for another. For Emmanuel Levinas, the face troubles us because it calls us to respond. But Deleuze and Guatarri counter: “the face is a horror story.”<sup>637</sup> The face has functioned as a gate through which a person can enter human society. But it is the white male face that has formed the standard from which all other faces descend by “filiation.” Women, people of color, children, gorillas, cats, and others must pass through the white male face. So Deleuze and Guatarri attack the face. Rather than establish new dominant identities

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<sup>634</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>637</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 168.

(this face is like that white male face; this face is like the human face so it elicits ethical consideration), Deleuze and Guatarri ask us to imagine what it would be like to have a face one turns away from in disgust. We learn to measure faces. We can dismantle these biases through “becoming-animal” and rejecting norms of beauty.<sup>638</sup> So to inhabit the “zone of indistinction” in becoming-animal does not involve looking for human traits in other animals. The identity approach dissolves differences and absorbs the other into the dominant. Becoming-animal involves passing through their position as a minority and oppressed group who resist domination as a “pack.” Becoming-animal, therefore, involves becoming like animals: becoming “meat.” Becoming nameless.

By taking on this vulnerable, fleshly, meat-like existence we can more fully appreciate what it is like for animals to exist in our social and political economies.<sup>639</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri claim that “we become animal so that the animal also becomes something else.”<sup>640</sup> While capitalist society in particular seeks to reduce animals to mere “meat,” they are never this.

Deleuze and Guatarri’s notion of becoming-animal will play an important role in how I interpret Jesus’s humanity. The notion that we should give up seeking a human uniqueness that sets us apart from all other creatures fits well with a certain reading of Jesus’s humanity. When coupled with the idea that identity is never really static but always negotiated and changing as well as passing through a deep shift when one comes to see and become-animal, Jesus’s humanity will take on a radical role in the Incarnation. But before shifting into this theological reflection, there is another lens to add.

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<sup>638</sup> See *ibid.*, 170–71.

<sup>639</sup> On this point see Calarco, *Thinking through Animals*, 59.

<sup>640</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri, *What Is Philosophy?*, 109.

## Giorgio Agamben: The Anthropological Machine

In Descartes we can see what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls “the anthropological machine.” For Agamben, the separation of bare animal life (ζωή) from political human life (βίος) undergirds Western politics.<sup>641</sup> This *anthropogenesis*—a metaphysical process—creates the human by separating what is human (language, thinking, self-consciousness, etc.) from the animal (emotion, irrationality, the body, etc.). This process opens a gap between the human and the animal.<sup>642</sup> This “anthropological machine” demarcates within every human what is and is not human, those parts that belong to politics and those that do not. This anthropological machine does not describe the “real” world. The anthropological machine is not a natural process. It is religious, social, and political. The anthropological machine enacts this separation and creates the world we take for granted. Things could be otherwise.

The anthropological machine undergirds a great many atrocities, according to Agamben. If any creature does not measure up to the human standard, those creatures will become vulnerable because they have slipped from the political to the nonpolitical and might be killed. Those who are dehumanized and therefore animalized are subjected to slavery and even to gas chambers in the twentieth century.<sup>643</sup> The separation of human

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<sup>641</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1–12.

<sup>642</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 79–80.

<sup>643</sup> Agamben’s comparison of Jews dying in the Nazi death camps with the mass slaughter of nonhuman animals in our day finds echo in Derrida as well, who decries modern practices in particular as an “act of war, a phrase that undergirds his uncharacteristic disgust at industrialization of animal life. But it should be noted that it is Jews who underwent and survived the death camps who first made the connection. De Fontenay writes: “After 1945, European Jewish writers and philosophers lent their voices to animals, evoking intermittently or systematically the solitude, silence, and suffering of those victims of man: Vassili Grossman, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Elias Canetti, Primo Levi, Romain Gary, and the philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. They were the first to dare to allow for the understanding that the fate of



from animal entails opening up a “zone of indistinction” between the human and the animal, a place that corresponds elsewhere to Agamben’s “state of exception” in which the rule of law no longer applies: the place of both animals and sovereigns.<sup>644</sup> This is the space in which one can kill or be killed.<sup>645</sup>

Indeed, Roman law made provisions for the *homo sacer*. This is a person who can be legally killed because he or she is outside the law. Agamben cites Pompeius Festus, a Roman lawyer, who wrote that once the plebes had seceded, they were granted the rights to hunt down and kill—as individuals or as a mob—anybody they had collectively condemned to die. This hunted and condemned individual was called *homo sacer*. Killing this person was neither homicide, nor a punishment, nor a sacrifice, because unlike a killing under capital punishment, the killing had no purification rites. Indeed, such rites were explicitly forbidden. The condemned person was *sacer*: cast out, abandoned. This meaning of the word *sacer* is more ancient than the idea of the “sacred,” which connects

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animals sometimes looked like the fate of Jews, unless it was actually the other way around. This analogy is no doubt up for discussion, yet it cannot be repudiated as blasphemy for it comes from men who suffered in their flesh and their history and who knew what they were saying when they evoked human malice.” de Fontenay, *Without Offending Humans*, 61. Derrida cites an earlier but similar statement by de Fontenay saying that he “subscribes to it.” Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 104–105. Derrida even claims that Emmanuel Levinas’s denial of a “face” to animals and therefore any duties toward them from humans as “surprising” more than from Kant and Heidegger because Levinas is Jewish and “the principle of life . . . a great intangible Judaic principle.” In other words, Derrida recognizes the Jewish protections and principles in Judaism about nonhuman animals I laid out in previous chapters as something that should lead modern Jewish authors to see in animals a call to something better than philosophy has provided. See *ibid.*, 112. It should be noted, moreover, that Derrida himself is Jewish by birth. He repeatedly uses Scripture in his analysis of the human/animal binary, which most philosophers who are following Derrida on the issue of animals do not do and mostly ignore.

<sup>644</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>645</sup> “The camp is the space that opens up when the state of exception starts to become the rule. In it, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporal suspension of the state of law, acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that, as such, remains constantly outside the normal state of law.” Giorgio Agamben, *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 38. In this book is an essay titled, “The Face” which demonstrates that Agamben had not yet thought deeply about the human/animal distinction that becomes more important in his later work. In “The Face,” Agamben basically takes a position similar to Emmanuel Levinas in which the human face of the other calls us to act responsibly toward him or her. Animals, however, do not have faces. For the historical development of the idea of an anthropological machine in Agamben see Calarco, *Zoographies*, 79–102.

to the notion of sacrifice and holiness.<sup>646</sup> The *homo sacer* is therefore animalized and reduced to bare life.

Now more than ever, Agamben argues, we are aware of the anthropological machine's contingent and dangerous elements. Therefore, he claims, "It is more urgent to work on these divisions, to ask in what way—within man—has man been separated from non-man, and the animal from the human, than it is to take positions on the great issues, on so-called human rights and values. And perhaps even the most luminous sphere of our relations with the divine depends, in some way, on that darker one which separates us from the animal."<sup>647</sup>

But Agamben's critique reaches back further than Cartesian anthropology starting with Aristotle. The medieval chain of being, Agamben would tell us, also trades on the anthropological machine even if it is more nuanced than Descartes about the nonhuman world. Scripture has other ways way of speaking about Jesus's humanity. The question becomes whether Jesus breaks the anthropological machine in the process of becoming-animal.

### **Jesus Becoming-Animal**

What does all this have to do with Jesus's humanity as a particularity with which theology must wrestle in relationship to thinking about animals? In Christian doctrine Jesus is human and divine. Any theological anthropology must start with the person of Jesus Christ. As Karl Barth declared, "The nature of the man Jesus alone is the key to the problem of human nature." Jesus is human, according to the tradition. Yet the Gospels

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<sup>646</sup> See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 71–74. John Milbank draws upon Agamben's idea of the *homo sacer*, arguing that Jesus was the *homo sacer*: his death utterly meaningless. See John Milbank, "Christ the Exception," *New Blackfriars* 82, no. 969 (2001): 547.

<sup>647</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 16.

say nothing about the “nature” of Jesus’s humanity. The “rational animal” of Christian theology does not appear in the Gospels. If human means a creature with a rational soul distinct from all the irrational animals, then the Gospels do not have any human characters. Cutting humanity off from other creaturely life is alien to the Bible.

Deleuze and Guatarri would be skeptical of my claim that Jesus Christ tells us something interesting about resistance to majoritarian rule. They state clearly: “Theology is very strict on the following point: there are no werewolves, human beings cannot become animal.”<sup>648</sup> Yet the Gospels depict Jesus as doing just that.

Jesus speaks about himself in ways that challenge Deleuze and Guatarri. As I noted in chapter 4, Jesus said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matt 8:20). Jesus designates himself as “the Son of Man,” which might mean human. He then claims that his homelessness places him culturally beneath foxes and birds. Jesus also compares himself to a threatened “mother hen” who wishes to protect her young (Matt 23:37–39 and Luke 13:31–35). Jesus repeatedly speaks about birds and sparrows. Society, Jesus says, tends to view these little creatures as less valuable than humans. Jesus has less value than a sparrow. In the hierarchy of being, Jesus does not fit a little above the “animals” but a little lower than the angels. Rather, Jesus sleeps beneath the sparrow’s nest. This “becoming-animal” allows Jesus to see life from a different vantage point than anthropocentrism.

### **Jesus: *Homo Sacer*, Becoming Animal**

The passion narratives, however, provide a powerful context within which to view Jesus’s becoming-animal. John Milbank argues that the Gospels present Jesus as a *homo*

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<sup>648</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 252.

*sacer* in three ways. “Once, because he is abandoned by Jewish sovereignty to the Roman executive. Twice because he is abandoned by Roman sovereignty to the sovereign-executive mob; three times, because he is in some obscure fashion handed over by the mob to the Roman soldiers and executed after all in a Roman fashion.”<sup>649</sup> Understanding Jesus as a *homo sacer* means that Jesus’s death was not a murder, an execution, or a sacrifice. Such interpretations miss his death’s full significance because they make Jesus’s humanity decisive. Rather, Milbank argues, a lynch mob reduced Jesus to something “beneath humanity” to a “half-animality.” Jesus is the wolf-man whom the community casts out and whom the community can kill with impunity.

The implication is that Jesus’s death is not that of a martyr who witnesses to a cause. Jesus’s death occurs because of a resentment at his divinity and also a death of humanity itself. Jesus suffered “a kenotic death of utterly emptied out humanity.”<sup>650</sup> Said in other terms, Milbank’s analysis points toward Jesus’s death as a kenosis of anthropocentrism and speciesism. Jesus did not have the dignified death of a political threat. His death was meaningless. Everyone abandoned him. His death proved sovereignty’s arbitrariness. “Christ then was reduced to ‘bare life.’”<sup>651</sup> But the anthropological machine produces bare life too.<sup>652</sup> Christ is “bare life,” the animal. Pilate, the mob, and much of the Jewish leadership represent the human. Jesus was cast out from all protections that the Torah or Roman law might afford him. From a different vantage point than I took in chapter 3, Jesus’s death was not an animal sacrifice in any strict sense. Those sacrifices actually protected and limited human violence and sovereignty.

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<sup>649</sup> Milbank, “Christ the Exception,” 549.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.*, 550.

<sup>651</sup> See *ibid.*, 551.

<sup>652</sup> Milbank does not note this.

Rather, his death exposed animal sacrifices as arbitrary sovereignty. The anthropological machine produces this sovereign arbitrariness. Jesus was emptied of his humanity and becomes-animal. He becomes the wild animals that Deuteronomy allows Jews to kill. These wild animals were not sacrifices or executions. They were of those undomesticated creatures anybody could kill.

Yet the description from chapter 3 of Jesus's death as an animal deserves repetition. He died as a *homo sacer*, as a becoming-animal. The Gospel of John in particular depicts Jesus's death as one that is nonhuman. Jesus's bones remain unbroken like the paschal lamb (Exod 12.46; John 19.33, 36). Like the dead lamb who had to be consumed before daybreak, Jesus's body was taken away before the next day (Exod 12.10; John 19.31). Jews used hyssop to smear the lamb's blood on the doorpost; likewise Jesus was offered liquid on a branch of hyssop (Exod 12.22; John 19.29). Jesus's body was run through with a sharp weapon, as would a lamb's body.<sup>653</sup> Many biblical scholars argue that Jesus died at the exact time that lambs would have been killed in the Temple.<sup>654</sup> Moreover, Christian artists through the ages have depicted Jesus as a nonhuman animal. To pull just one example from chapter 3, in a twelfth-century illuminated manuscript, Jesus's crucifixion is depicted above the sacrifice of a calf. Below the calf is written, "For the blemish of sin a calf is given, worship's sacrifice; this inscription teaches that Christ is the calf."<sup>655</sup>

But the sacrificial similarities also harbor dissimilarity. It was forbidden to sacrifice a human in Jewish Torah. The Torah limited Jewish sovereignty over animals.

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<sup>653</sup> See Clough, *On Animals*, 128.

<sup>654</sup> See Lee, "Paschal Imagery in the Gospel of John," 25.

<sup>655</sup> Quoted in Morrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, 99. See a reproduction of the image in Figure 72 at the end of the book. There are many other such depictions that compare Jesus to a sacrificed calf. See *ibid.*, 293n424 and n425.

They could not sacrifice an animal at any time or place, for any reason. Nevertheless, the sacrificial system still allowed a division between the animal and the human. Jesus's death was not a sacrifice. The Law expressly forbids human sacrifice. His death exposes the anthropological machine. His death sunk beneath that of the domesticated creatures of Jewish Torah who had the most protection. His was more akin to the wild creatures who were far less regulated. He resembled the hunted ones whom Solomon killed. His was more like a sport hunt than a sacrifice.

By contrast, some interpret Jesus as a nonviolent radical executed for being a threat to Roman imperial power. But these readings of Jesus often miss the anthropological machine in their own theologies. For example, nowhere in John Howard Yoder's writings does the idea appear that Jesus died the death of an animal. Yoder reduces Jesus to a political figure. The Romans executed Jesus because he threatened Roman economics and political power. Jesus's alternative vision for social life challenged the violent regimes of this world. His nonviolent action in the temple triggered his arrest. But his entire ministry hinged on creating a new body politic.

But Yoder's body politic is purely human. It never includes nonhuman animals. Despite his interest in Jewish-Christian relations, he casts aside Jewish law on nonhuman animals. Consequently, the basic protections Jewish law provides other animals from human aggression disappear entirely as Jesus's followers diverge from their Jewish heritage. Yoder does not include in his pacifism Isaiah's visions of peace between animals. So reading Jesus solely as a political figure does not get to the heart of what establishes Western politics. The anthropological machine produces a fissure that establishes the human as the sovereign over that which is nonhuman, and the political as

a space where every human becomes a potential *homo sacer*. The anthropological machine runs quite smoothly throughout Yoder's writings. So he limited the peace he found in the gospel to the humans. But this peace is on shaky ground because Yoder's peace vision entails an egalitarianism of love in which human enemies must be on equal footing to human friends, lest one animalize (dehumanize) those enemy others and re-establish violence. I take this to be at the heart of the problem of Yoder's work and some of his theological disciples. Jesus is not becoming-animal but exhibits the full human "rationality" God intended by being nonviolent. The struggle for an egalitarian love between humans masks the anthropological machine underneath the nonviolence. So a violence more basic than peace runs through Yoder's work.<sup>656</sup> Reading Jesus more as the *homo sacer* of Roman law gets to the more basic divisions that lead to violence than only reading him as a political pacifist.

Milbank's suggestion that Jesus's death signals "a kenotic death of utterly emptied out humanity" needs further development.<sup>657</sup> What is it exactly that Jesus empties? Milbank equates Jesus with bare life but does not go so far as to identify bare life with animal life, perhaps because Agamben did not make the connection in his book

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<sup>656</sup> My aim here is not to do "Yoder exegesis" but to point to the outlines of a problem with seeing Jesus solely in the terms with which Yoder interprets Jesus as a political revolutionary of the nonviolent variety. Trying to follow this thread through Yoder's corpus would take me too far afield from the argument of this chapter. Moreover, a history of Anabaptism writ large could be written along similar lines. The act that really started the radical reformation was based upon the anthropological machine when the Zurich radicals refused to observe the traditional Friday fast from animal flesh (except fish) and deliberately and publicly consumed pork sausage. While the Radical Reformation may have spawned an anti-war pacifist movement within Christianity, or at least a quietist movement that refused to participate in the world's wars, this founding act of violence toward animals has never been questioned by any of the Anabaptist theologians over the past few hundred years. Yet, in this act the Zurich Radicals reaffirmed the basic stance of the world's politics to define the human and the animal. The "ban" that the Anabaptists used also corresponds to this machine. Agamben details the history of banning a person from the city, which the Anabaptists took up with the shift that the Christian community was not allowed to kill such a person: they left that to the "world." On this reading, I am no longer convinced that the ban, what Yoder called "binding and loosing," is the peaceable practice that Anabaptist apologists have made it to be. Underneath this practice is a profound violence wrapped up in the anthropological machine.

<sup>657</sup> Milbank, "Christ the Exception," 550.

*Homo Sacer* that Milbank used but in the follow-up volume, *The Open*. The traditional way to speak about theological anthropology is to see human λόγος in continuity with the divine Λόγος. Indeed, this is the presupposition of Gregersen's idea that Stoic philosophy undergirds a radical view of the Incarnation. Continuity between the divine and the human makes the Incarnation in human form appropriate. This is one way to view the Incarnation and theological anthropology. Human λόγος, whether defined as reason, language, thought, discourse, or rationality, has long been the defining factor of humanity that separates us from other animals. If Jesus's kenotic death "empties out humanity," as Milbank argues, then human λόγος—as the self-definition of humanity—must be part of this kenosis.

### **Jesus's Kenosis of Humanity**

Donna Haraway has expressed a popular viewpoint among critical animal theorists: "The boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks—language, tool use, social behavior, mental events. Nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal."<sup>658</sup> All the traditional ways humans have defined ourselves against other animals no longer hold. They are not utterly unique to humanity. Drawing on Freud, Derrida writes of "three great historical wounds to the primary narcissism of the self-centered human subject": 1) the Copernican revolution that decentered the Earth; 2) the Darwinian revolution that decentered humanity, placing us back amongst the creatures; and 3) the Freudian revolution that decentered human

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<sup>658</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 151–52.



consciousness by revealing the unconscious (this decentering involves pushing aside human λόγος in favor of unconscious processes and formations that affect a person).<sup>659</sup> These “wounds,” as Haraway rephrases them, signal that the quest for human uniqueness has been so thoroughly undermined that attempts to reassert any anthropocentric worldview is implausible. Rather than looking for divisions, Haraway argues, let the divisions go in favor of intersectional mapping to discover how to live together. What this suggests, according to Matthew Calarco, is leaving aside a search for human uniqueness so that we can create space “to think about the field of human beings and animals in new ways. . . . creating the conditions for other modes of thought—different ontologies and different practices—to emerge.”<sup>660</sup>

Jesus’s kenosis of humanity fits this letting go of human uniqueness. Jesus’s kenosis creates space for new thinking and practices in our relationship to animals by abandoning the search for and assertion of human specialness. Jesus’s humanity opens space for new thinking and ways of being as creatures, precisely by giving up humanity.

Milbank reads Jesus’s death as the kenosis of humanity. Deepening Milbank’s analysis should involve thinking about how we often define what is human as λόγος. To take Milbank’s analysis further, Jesus empties humanity of content not only in death but also in the becoming flesh. I will now revisit the Gospel of John and pay attention to the interplay of flesh, life, and humanity.

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<sup>659</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 136. Haraway cites Derrida on this as well. She adds a fourth “wound,” however: the cyborg, which mixes the human with the natural world. It seems to me, however, that this particular brand of transhumanism undercuts jamming the anthropological machine that divides human from animal to the extent that it pushes humanity beyond animality into a technology of purely human creation. It is a form of transcendence away from the creaturely rather than into it. Indeed, Haraway’s own thought does not overcome the violence humans perpetrate against other creatures. In the name of species survival, she has advocated killing and consuming some creatures. For this reason, her work has had a mixed reception amongst those working in critical animal studies.

<sup>660</sup> Calarco, *Thinking through Animals*, 56.

The Gospel of John declares that ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. This λόγος is the one who created all things in the beginning and came into the world, and yet the world did not recognize the λόγος. The prologue also states that in the λόγος is ζωή: ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν (John 1:4a). Without arguing what the text “originally” meant, in light of the death and resurrection we might read the ζωὴ in the λόγος as that which all creatures have in common. The ζωὴ is bare life.<sup>661</sup> The prologue continues by stating καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων (John 1:4b). It is ζωὴ that is the “light” of “humanity.”

It is as if John’s prologue announces the kenosis of humanity from the start and not only with Jesus’s death. Since Aristotle, humans have defined themselves against other animals by pointing to the human λόγος (speech, reason, rationality, discourse, meaning making, or even self-consciousness). Yet John’s Gospel declares Jesus to be the λόγος, and it is bare life (ζωή) that is the light shining into the darkness of humanity. Reason and rationality should enlighten humanity. But the Gospel declares that the human world is full of “darkness.” Humanity—self-defined as unique through λόγος—could not recognize the divine λόγος because the divine λόγος was full of bare life (ζωή). In other words, Jesus was full of the cast out animal life people could kill with impunity. The *homo sacer*, the *werewolf* (man-wolf) who is driven out of the human city and into the wilderness, the ζωὴ (bare life) that sustains all creatures was utterly incomprehensible to humanity defined as λόγος.

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<sup>661</sup> Agamben’s distinction between ζωὴ and βίος elaborates on the common distinction between these two words. In *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other New Testament Literature*, the editors say that “βίος may be said to denote the manner in which one’s ζωὴ finds expression . . . and the latter term may be used to connote the quality of existence as such. Hence, as the semantic history shows, the loss of βίος may not terminate ζωὴ.” Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 166–67.

The Gospel of John empties humanity of its most precious self-definition, positing only the divine λόγος. The Gospel denies that humans have this λόγος because they do not “believe in him” (John 5:38). Even the disciples could not recognize the true radicality of the Incarnation, the kenosis of humanity. They could not see how Jesus’s crucifixion could redeem Israel from its oppressive situation and establish Jerusalem as the center of the world. Jesus’s male disciples fled. Humans, particularly male humans, self-defined against and above animals, could not recognize that Jesus’s “bare life” saves us. The Gospel of John tells us that four women were present as Jesus died on the cross (John 19:25). It is as if the author is telling us, prefiguring Deleuze and Guatarri by two thousand years, that male readers must become women to see the real significance of the Incarnation. It is through becoming-woman that the rest of the becoming happens to the readers. Jesus’s theological body—to recall arguments from chapter 3—is a becoming-woman. But it is also, and perhaps through becoming-woman, a becoming-animal.

In the Incarnation, the Son becomes “flesh” so that “flesh” can become something else (to appropriate Deleuze and Guatarri). If human identity entails the “sacrifice” of bare animal life, then the Incarnation explodes this self-definition. The Incarnation empties humanity of meaning and points back to animals. Jesus the human must become nonhuman so that the nonhuman animal can become something other than what humans, in violent acts of “dominion,” have named them to be (meat, fur, leather, and pets). Jesus becomes “meat” so that what we call “meat”—other animals—can become something else.

### **Becoming Animal: *Ecce Agnus Dei***

Beyond Jesus's thinking about foxes, "worthless" sparrows, hens, and his own slaughter outside of Jerusalem, the New Testament's most pervasive image for the Son's Incarnation is a lamb. Through the ages Christian artists have often depicted Jesus as a Lamb. By the mid-fourth century CE, the Lamb replaced depictions of a human Jesus. In a mid-fourth-century painting found in the Roman Catacomb of Commodilla, a lamb multiplies loaves into seven baskets (see Matt 14:13–21, Mark 6:31–44, Luke 9:10–17, and John 6:5–15).<sup>662</sup> Likewise, in the famous Junius Bassus sarcophagus built in 359 CE, a lamb holding a wand multiplies loaves into three baskets and another panel contains a relief of a lamb raising a mummified Lazarus from the dead.<sup>663</sup> The Church of Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian contains a fifth-century mosaic in which the twelve apostles are depicted as lambs with the Lamb of God standing on a hill from which the four rivers of Paradise flow.<sup>664</sup> Even the sarcophagus of Emperor Valentinian III, who ruled the Western Roman Empire from 425–455 CE, has a relief of a lamb standing before a cross encased between two pillars and roof.<sup>665</sup>

This lamb imagery pushes the boundary between human and nonhuman animals in ways that has offended Christian leaders' anthropocentric views. For some, the lamb was too much and threatened the divine-human connection. So in 692 CE, the Council of Trullo forbade depicting Christ as a lamb:

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<sup>662</sup> See Robin Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 81.

<sup>663</sup> On the Junius Bassus sarcophagus see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>664</sup> See Robert Milburn, *Early Christian Art and Architecture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 222–24.

<sup>665</sup> The image can be found in the Art Museum Image Gallery database, accession number PCD.AA385850. The original sarcophagus is in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy.

In order therefore that “that which is perfect” may be delineated to the eyes of all, at least in coloured expression, we decree that the figure in human form of the Lamb who taketh away the sin of the world, Christ our God, be henceforth exhibited in images, instead of the ancient lamb, so that all may understand by means of it the depths of humiliation of the Word of God, and that we may recall to our memory his conversation in the flesh, his suffering and salutary death, and his redemption which was wrought for the whole world.<sup>666</sup>

The Council seems to have been worried that depictions of the Son of God as a lamb undermined the hard-won gains of seeing Christ as having a truly human nature. The Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 CE reaffirmed the decision of the Council of Trullo. From that time forward, Christ was to be depicted as a human. The lamb was forbidden and cast out of Eastern art. The Council did not attempt to destroy old images. New icons, however, should depict the humanity of God exclusively. As a result, images of a baby Jesus lying in a bread pan on the worship altar began to appear. Previously, a lamb would have occupied this position in iconography. But in response to the prohibitions against depicting the Incarnation in terms of a lamb, these new images arose and replaced images of the lamb across the Byzantine Empire.<sup>667</sup> Deleuze and Guatarri would seem to be correct: Christian theologians in the East are uneasy with the idea of Jesus becoming-animal.

Yet Christians in the West did not follow the decisions in the Byzantine East, which were in large part a response to the iconoclastic controversy. Catholics continued to depict the Son as a lamb. The lamb even grew in popularity in the West as an image

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<sup>666</sup> Quoted in Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 143.

<sup>667</sup> On the shift from a lamb to the infant Jesus see Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 179–80.

for Jesus. Even illuminated manuscripts depicted Jesus as a lamb. For example, the Codex Aureus of Saint Emmeran (c. 870 CE) depicts Jesus as a lamb at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke.<sup>668</sup> Even when Jesus himself was depicted as human, a lamb was often present as well. For instance between 1512–1516 CE, Matthias Grünewald painted the Isenheim Altarpiece for the Monastery of St. Anthony. In the center, Grünewald painted Jesus's beaten and diseased human body on the cross, his hands displaying the agony of crucifixion. At the foot of the cross stands a lamb, holding a cross and pouring out blood into a chalice. A search through the online images at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek at The Hague, the National Library of the Netherlands, reveals dozens of examples of the Agnus Dei in illuminated Bibles from the medieval collection.<sup>669</sup>

The lamb, therefore, has been and remains a powerful image for Christology. But the question remains as to what kind of image the lamb is for Christian theology. The Council of Trullo signals a lingering notion amongst Christians that the Lamb of God is a mere metaphor that we can cast aside in both word and image for literal language. Christ is human. Jesus's particularity as a (male) human is the literal stuff from which theology must draw rather than from unnecessary metaphorical devices. As one Orthodox scholar has put it:

Christ is only metaphorically called “the Lamb of God.” He is not the offspring of a ram and an ewe. It suffices to think in this connection of the Orthodox refusal to depict Christ in the icons as a lamb, as he is frequently depicted in the religious art of the Latin West. Such a depiction—a confusion of metaphor with reality—not only inadvertently blasphemes our Lord; it levels the distinction between man

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<sup>668</sup> See Tom Devonshire Jones, Linda Murray, and Peter Murray, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art and Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 301.

<sup>669</sup> See <http://manuscripts.kb.nl/>. Accessed 12/17/2014.

and the other creatures, downplaying the central claim of Christianity that God, in the Person of the Son, ennobles human nature, itself already an image of the divine nature, by assuming human nature in his Incarnation, by redeeming human nature in his passion and resurrection, and, in his ascension . . . . It is human nature, human flesh—not the nature of a sheep, or a tree, or a river, or a mountain, or a star—that, in the person of the Son, has been incorporated into the life of the Trinity.<sup>670</sup>

Here the particularity of the Incarnation in humanity is set up as a test of faithfulness of Eastern Christianity over Western Christianity in artistic depictions. Mere metaphor must give way to “reality.” Based on Jesus’s particularity as human, all other creatures are excluded from the Incarnation’s significance. Using an image of the lamb, regardless of its biblical pedigree, threatens to undermine the anthropocentric nature of Christianity. This kind of statement finds continuity in John of Damascus’s distaste for animal imagery in Christian art, as I examined and critiqued in chapter 3.

Jesus of Nazareth was a male, Jewish, human who lived in first-century Palestine. I do not dispute this historical claim. But Carey and John of Damascus, as demonstrated in chapter 2, argue a theological point about Christ’s human nature and therefore human nature in general. They assert that humans contain some quality that makes humanity worthy of the Incarnation. Other creatures completely lack this quality, making them unworthy of the Incarnation. This is the anthropological machine at work. The lamb imagery threatens the theologian’s anthropology that segregates humans from other creatures. The consequence of their claim is that Jesus should not be depicted as a lamb.

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<sup>670</sup>James Carey, “Sedimentation of Meaning in the Concepts of Nature and the Environment,” in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. John Chryssavgis and Bruce Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 183–84.

By contrast, I am arguing that a sharp division between humanity and other creatures does not withstand scrutiny. Even if it is historically true that Jesus was a male, Jewish human, Carey's belief that other creatures are not linked to Christ's Incarnation does not follow.

Moreover, down through the ages Eastern and Western depictions of the human Jesus have not generally depicted him as a first-century Palestinian Jew, but as a contemporary Greek or Roman male with white skin. Even depictions of Jesus as a human, therefore, have tended toward the "metaphorical" rather than the "literal." The main difference between the metaphorical lamb images and the Greco-Roman Jesus images is that the latter have no biblical basis. Rather, these Christians have made Jesus's humanity into the image of contemporary human culture rather than allowing it to be what it is and was: Jewish. In this sense, by ignoring Jesus's Jewishness, the depictions of Jesus in Greek icons do far more injustice to the Incarnation's particularity than do images of the lamb.<sup>671</sup> Yet both his Jewishness and the animal imagery for Jesus have been discarded. When theologians and Christian artists systematically exclude every aspect of Jesus that is "minoritarian," we are left with a Christ of power and might made in the image of the dominant in society. But this was not the Jesus who died a lamb's death.

It would be helpful at this point to look at the way the Fourth Gospel uses the lamb imagery for Jesus. John the Baptist declared Jesus to be the "Lamb of God" (ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ θεοῦ) in John 1:29 and 1:35. In verse 29, the Baptist says that Jesus is "the

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<sup>671</sup> I am not arguing that all artistic renditions of Jesus in terms of another culture are invalid. For example, James Cone compares the crucifixion of Jesus to the lynching of Black people in the American South. Artist Fritz Eichenberg, likewise, once depicted Jesus as a black male on the cross in his woodcarving, "The Black Crucifixion." These depictions at least have the merit of imaging Jesus in another role as an oppressed person.



Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” In the following section I will look at this statement a bit more closely. But I will do so by comparing John the Baptist’s statement, “Behold, the Lamb of God” with the statement of Pontius Pilate, who after having Jesus beaten severely, marches Jesus out in front of a crowd and exclaims, “Behold, the man!” (John 19:5).

### **The Gospel of John Again**

John the Baptist’s statement that Jesus is the “Lamb of God,” is unique to the Gospel of John, though a little lamb appears in Revelation using a different Greek term.<sup>672</sup> Scholars have extensively examined the Baptist’s statement, particularly the title, “the Lamb of God” and have posited various backgrounds for the phrase. To date, there is no scholarly consensus on whether a precise reference forms the main backdrop for the statement.<sup>673</sup>

Some scholars argue that the most appropriate background is the near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, traditionally called the Akedah.<sup>674</sup> Other scholars claim that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 provides a background for John 1:29.<sup>675</sup> Isaiah 53:7 says about the servant that he will be “like a sheep that is led to the slaughter, and like a lamb that before its shearers is silent.” Acts 8:32 quotes this passage, indicating that it was in

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<sup>672</sup> In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul says, in the NRSV translation, “Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.” The actual word “lamb” does not appear in the Greek, however. Paul says: καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός. Nevertheless, τὸ πάσχα is likely shorthand for the Passover lamb.

<sup>673</sup> I will leave aside the issue of whether the statement is something that the historical John the Baptist actually said. On this issue see Raymond Brown, “Three Quotations from John the Baptist in the Gospel of John,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1960): 292–98 and D. Brent Sandy, “John the Baptist’s ‘Lamb of God’ Affirmation in Its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 4 (1991): 447–59.

<sup>674</sup> Géza Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 206. See also Roy Rosenberg, “Jesus, Isaac, and the ‘Suffering Servant,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 4 (1965).

<sup>675</sup> See Eric Edward May, “Ecce Agnus Dei! A Philological and Exegetical Approach to John 1:29, 36” (Catholic University of America Press, 1947), and Helen C. Orchard, *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 230–35.

use amongst Christians as a text about Jesus. Some biblical scholars argue that the Passover lamb in Exodus 12 is the most appropriate context.<sup>676</sup> John 19:36 explicitly quotes Exodus 12:46, which deals with the Passover lamb: “These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘None of his bones shall be broken.’” Finally, Jewish apocalyptic literature may also provide a background for the lamb imagery in John 1:29. Though scholars generally see the lamb-who-becomes-a-ram in 1 Enoch 90:6-19 as a reference to Judas Maccabeus and the military wars he led.<sup>677</sup> None of these ways of interpreting John 1:29, 36—“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”—stands in opposition to the others. They all have interpretive problems. They all also have many merits as ways of reading the phrase. It is possible as readers to blend together several of these readings to make the Johannine lamb of God.

All of the approaches attempt to locate lamb Christology in Jewish tradition. The idea that Jesus is a paschal lamb and the suffering servant seem to fit best with the Johannine context. The *Akedah* tradition is simply not mentioned in the text, though it does in some sense connect with the paschal notion of sacrifice, and the apocalyptic lamb seems too problematic historically to be useful as an interpretive lens for this particular image. To deny the Incarnation its lamb imagery with exclusive focus on his “humanity” is to lose the rich Jewish intertextuality of the Incarnation and to miss the wider significance of Jesus.

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<sup>676</sup> See Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 176.

<sup>677</sup> See Larry Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 137n6 and James VanderKam, “1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Christian Literature,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James VanderKam and William Adler (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1996), 99. On the difference between the ram and the lamb in 1 Enoch see Loren Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 88–97. Johns sees a huge difference between the ram in early Jewish literature and the lamb in Revelation, leading him to say that there was no such thing as a lamb-redeemer in Early Judaism. The lamb of Revelation by virtue of its nonviolence is different than the militant rams of early Jewish apocalyptic literature.

Nevertheless, the search for a background to the imagery of the Gospel of John can obscure what the imagery does in the Gospel with a view toward theological investigation. To take Deleuze and Guatarri's notion of becoming-animal as a potential guide, the imagery of a lamb runs much deeper than references and metaphors. Or perhaps a better way to see this is to note how Derrida argues that metaphors are not easily separated from real world consequences.<sup>678</sup> In other words, we cannot separate Jesus the lamb of God from what happens to real lambs in these stories and life. The "metaphor" of Jesus as the lamb of God is depicted as violently killed outside the city gate, an activity that is perfectly acceptable according to the dominant ideologies of anthropocentrism. Humans kill lambs all the time. Why should Jesus's death as a lamb be a problem if his death is understood in this way?

The story that follows the prologue illustrates what it means for the Word to become flesh. The Word takes on a human name—Jesus—but as a lamb remains nameless, hidden from sight and barely noticed until somebody decides to violate her. The Baptist announced the lamb of God and then that lamb recedes from view in the story. Perhaps a better way to say it would be that the subtle becoming-animal that must take place for Jesus to truly be the lamb of God happens at a different level. Jesus did not go around bleating and eating grass. He did not imitate a lamb. But something else happens to Jesus.

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<sup>678</sup> See Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974), 5–74.

### Becoming-Meat

In the first chapter I looked at the bread of life discourse as an example of the Gospel of John's use of σάρξ as a broader term than that which would simply mean "human." Jesus's monologue in John 6 could be read as connecting to the lamb as he repeatedly speaks about his body being the bread of life and "flesh." Those who heard him were offended to the point that even some of his disciples left him. When Jesus saw that some of his hearers did not understand, he did not make it easier. When he saw that some were offended, he did not make his statements more palatable. His own disciples began to complain about him (John 6:61). When they left him specifically because he spoke about people having to eat his body and drink his blood, saying that his body was "meat" for consumption and a mandatory ritual of the new order, Jesus did not try to bring them back into the fold. It is hard to believe that Jesus was simply being enigmatic and deliberately obtuse. Jesus envisioned himself as consumable. His flesh could be eaten. His humanity was not such that he was above all other animals.

Val Plumwood describes her experience in 1985 of surviving a crocodile attack while searching for an Aboriginal rock art site in Australia. Her story may illuminate Jesus's becoming-animal in John 6. As Plumwood paddled along a side channel she had the strong and "unfamiliar sensation of being watched."<sup>679</sup> Soon she saw what looked like a floating stick, but the stick suddenly had eyes. It was a crocodile coming toward her canoe. The crocodile repeatedly attacked her canoe, so she hurried toward a bank lest she be capsized. As she reached for a tree limb to pull out of the canoe, she recalls seeing "a

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<sup>679</sup> See Val Plumwood, "Human Vulnerability and the Experience of Being Prey," *Quadrant Magazine* 39, no. 3 (1995): 29. I am indebted to Calarco who uses Plumwood's account in Calarco, *Thinking through Animals*, 59–61.

blurred, incredulous vision of great toothed jaws bursting from the water, as I was seized between the legs in a red-hot pincer grip, and whirled into the suffocating darkness.”<sup>680</sup> For a moment she could not believe it was happening—it must be a nightmare—only to realize that her own death was likely very near. “Indescribable, an experience beyond words of total terror, total helplessness, total certainty, experienced with undivided mind and body, of a terrible death in the swirling depths.”<sup>681</sup> But she survived the crocodile’s death roll, only to be subjected to a second bite and death roll in the river. Surviving again, she pulled herself free to a branch, yet the crocodile lunged out of the river again, biting her leg and pulling her under the river water, rolling furiously a third time. She survived but was badly wounded and the crocodile was growling as it still held her leg. She gouged its eyes and reached for a tree branch again, the crocodile let go and she was able to climb to safety, fortunately being found within hours or else she would have died in the swamp from the bite wounds.

Plumwood was and is a proponent of vegetarianism and environmentalism. Rather than allowing this attack to turn her against other animals or the environment more generally, Plumwood only deepened her commitments and was led to reconsider the place of humans in this world. Her incredulity at being the prey of a crocodile was part of the human exceptionalism that allowed humans to think of themselves as inedible while other animals are their food. She argued against rangers hunting and killing the crocodile, noting that the press and the park service both ignored her individual account of what happened, thus silencing her for their own purposes. But more profoundly, she began to see that her humanity was not apart from this world; she too is potential meat.

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<sup>680</sup> Plumwood, “Human Vulnerability and the Experience of Being Prey,” 30.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Yet her struggle to survive cried out that she is more than this. This becoming, as we might call it, led her to see through the eyes of a slaughtered cow or a hunted gazelle, whose will to survive testifies to all flesh being more than meat. In becoming “meat” or “prey,” as she calls it, she was transformed but so too were other animals.

Are we to imagine Jesus flippantly speaking about his “flesh” being consumed or was he serious? Was he merely trying to provoke his interlocutors with outlandish riddles or was he pointing to something thoughtful and concrete? Over and over he reiterates that his σάρξ is ζωή. He himself will be reduced to “bare life,” to animal life, and his flesh will have to be consumed.

Is it possible to hear the terror of Gethsemane in the places where he speaks of his flesh being consumed? “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me” (Matt 26:38; cf. Mark 14:34); “In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground” (Luke 22:44). “Deeply grieved,” “anguish,” “sweat . . . like drops of blood,” these are the terms that resonate with Plumwood’s “experience beyond words of total terror.”

Becoming σάρξ is risky business. The real scandal of the bread of life discourse is that Jesus is showing himself to be the lamb of God in a more disturbing manner than his disciples could have imagined when John the Baptist announced it. He would be hunted, killed, and consumed. He would lose his name and become a corpse. In the Gospels he cries out an indecipherable cry as his last act before dying. He would lose his language, the ostensible hallmark of humanity. He will become prey, but unlike Plumwood and like billions of other animals, he would not escape. The Roman abattoir will take him. There

is, it seems, a deep becoming in John 6: a becoming-animal. If there is a kenosis of humanity as Milbank suggests, there is a simultaneous becoming-animal.

In this regard, Saint Antony, whom Athanasius wrote about and I examined in chapter 2, provides another example. Like Jesus, he went into the wilderness and lived “with” the nonhuman animals. He lived with them peaceably, refusing to harm even those who had eaten the food in his garden. His kenotic life, in which he continually emptied himself of the desire to rule over others and define himself against others, but let other be who God created them to be, looks very much like Jesus. Athanasius thought we should imitate Antony, but Deleuze and Guatarri would warn us that Antony did not “imitate” Jesus. Rather he occupied a zone of indiscernibility like Jesus in which his own identity was constantly in negotiation and movement as he emptied his desire to use others for his own selfish desires even when it would have been “reasonable.”

But Jesus was not a mere passive victim. Like the pigs in Galilee who acted to destroy the demon legion, like so many other animals who do not give up their lives easily or willingly, like Plumwood who fought to save her life, Jesus cries out on the cross asking, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). This cry is a cry that his flesh is more than meat. His life is more than the prey of a senseless hunter.<sup>682</sup> When his own villagers tried to throw him over a cliff, he ran and escaped.

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<sup>682</sup> Jesus’s cry is a quotation from Psalm 22, where the psalmist asks why God does not intervene when the psalmist has faced persecution. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus quotes this verse, not as a cry of personal abandonment, but as a faithful Jew who even at the point of suffering an agonizing death still quotes Scripture to make sense of his circumstances. Jesus is like the psalmist. I do not read this passage as teaching a breach between the Father and the Son, but as Jesus’s cry against his circumstances using Scripture to help him make sense of the agony, persecution, and abandonment by the humans around him. In Trinitarian terms, it is the Son offering up everything to the Father, who requires no punishment, but like the Son refuses to intervene to violently overthrow the structures. It is through the cross and suffering that these powers will be defeated, not through violent intervention.

Before his arrest he searched potential routes to forestall or halt the coming doom, only to find all paths blocked save those that would completely betray his own becoming-animal.

### **The Lamb of Revelation**

The Book of Revelation carries out the becoming-animal theme further. The resurrected lamb comes into full view. Revelation begins with John’s vision of a human in the heavens: “one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force” (Rev 1:13–16). This human says he is “first and last” and “I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever” (Rev 1:18). John leaves no doubt that Jesus, risen from the dead and ascended into the heavens, is the one speaking.

Many Revelation scholars are quick to point out the historical background to the imagery in Revelation 1. For example, this Son of Man has a cosmic element as he holds seven stars, recalling a coin from the time of Emperor Domitian (81–96 CE) in which Domitian’s son, whom Domitian declared to be a god, sits on the earth as Apollo, holding seven stars.<sup>683</sup> Within this historical context and highly charged iconography, John declares that Jesus, not the Roman Emperor, is the one true God who demands allegiance.

Yet this human Jesus quickly fades away in the face of the most prominent image for Jesus in the book, that of the lamb (τό ἀρνίον), who first appears in Revelation 5:6.

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<sup>683</sup> On this interpretation as well as an image of the coin see J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 37–38.



The human shifts into the nonhuman. The lamb's appearance surprises the reader because of what the elder tells John he will see: "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα), the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals'" (Rev 5:5). Yet, when John looks he does not see a lion. He saw "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered" (5:6). From here on out, the lamb appears throughout the book (Rev 5:8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). The "lion of the tribe of Judah," by contrast, never reappears in the book, recalling the lamb-human shift in John in which the lamb of God recedes into the background as the human Jesus goes to the cross.

Many scholars think that the seer deliberately shifts from a lion to a lamb.<sup>684</sup> The lion, it seems, was too complicated and ambiguous to associate with the Messiah in early Jewish Christianity. The lion was associated with violence, domination, and threat.<sup>685</sup> The lion is a warrior and hunter who produces victims. Bauckham claims that the announcement that John would see "the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David" who "had conquered" (Rev 5:5) are messianic titles that "evoke a strongly militaristic and nationalistic image of the Messiah of David as conqueror of nations, destroying the enemies of God's people."<sup>686</sup>

But what John sees is a slaughtered lamb. The contrast with a fierce, carnivorous lion could hardly be more dramatic. Lambs do not kill other creatures. They do not

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<sup>684</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 98–99; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 73–76; Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 186–89; and Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*.

<sup>685</sup> For the biblical and extra-biblical evidence about how lions were viewed see Brent Strawn, "Why Does the Lion Disappear in Revelation 5? Leonine Imagery in Early Jewish and Christian Literatures," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 17, no. 1 (2007): 37–74.

<sup>686</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 74.

threaten other creatures. They eat plants. They are vulnerable to attack and defenseless in the face of a lion. Even if there was a Jewish expectation of a Messiah who could be called the Lamb of God and who would violently overthrow Israel's enemies as scholars like John O'Neil claim,<sup>687</sup> that is not the portrait Revelation paints of the lamb: The lamb that John saw had been murdered. The expectation of a conquering lion or a conquering lamb is dashed with the image of a bloodstained, mortally wounded lamb.<sup>688</sup> The lamb is nameless, like so many slaughtered lambs (and women characters of the Gospels).

Commentators routinely note the book's high Christology. For instance Thomas Schreiner states, "Even though Revelation is an apocalyptic work, the Christology is astonishingly explicit and high. Indeed, the Christology is analogous to that in the Gospel of John. Jesus as the Lamb is on the same plane as God and is worshiped as a divine being. . . . Just as God is the Alpha and Omega and the first and the last, so too Jesus is the Alpha and Omega and the first and the last."<sup>689</sup> But as Stephen Moore has remarked, "Revelation's Christology is highest when it is an animal Christology."<sup>690</sup> It is as a lamb

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<sup>687</sup> See John Cochrane O'Neill, "The Lamb of God in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (1979): 2–30.

<sup>688</sup> See J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 124. Sweet thinks that there may have been an expectation of a conquering lamb, but that the author of Revelation deliberately uses a slaughtered lamb to undercut Jewish messianic militarism.

On the other hand, Gregory Beale argues that the fact that the slaughtered lamb has seven horns means that the militaristic lamb of Jewish apocalyptic forms the background to the lamb. This is a militaristic lamb in Beale's view. In fact, the translation should be "ram" not "lamb" according to Beale. Beale's view is a minority one in current Revelation scholarship. In any case, though the lamb of Revelation does have horns, it is still a slaughtered lamb, hardly a depiction of a victorious military hero. See Gregory Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 351.

Yet even Beale points to the irony of using a lamb as a military hero. He says that "ironic use is to mock the enemy's proud attempt to overcome God and his people and to underscore the fitting justice of the punishment." See *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>689</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 430.

<sup>690</sup> Stephen D. Moore, "Ecotherology," in *Divinimity*, ed. Stephen D. Moore (New York: Fordham University Press, 2104), 209. See also Stephen D. Moore, "Ruminations on Revelation's Ruminant, Quadrupedal Christ; or the Even-Toed Ungulate That Therefore I Am," in *The Bible and Posthumanism*, ed. Jennifer L. Koosed (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

not a human in Revelation that Jesus receives worship (5:8–14; 7:9–12, 15–17; 19:7, 9; 21:22–23; 22:3). At the center of the throne room of heaven and the center of the New Jerusalem stands the Lamb, a curious icon of power through nonviolence. At the very heart of God’s power, the “situation room” of the universe, sits a slaughtered lamb, whose iconography signifies a rejection of the absolute power that so pervades political and military machines. But this lamb is also a critique of anthropocentrism. It is this lamb who holds the key to history, not the one Revelation first announced who looked like a human. It is as a lamb, that God interacts most fully with the world, a human emptied of his male and human pretensions.

Jesus’s death, in Revelation, is explicitly rendered in terms of an animal slaughter. Jesus’s death was one fitting for a nonhuman animal, not a human. Yet Revelation takes up this dehumanizing death into the very center of the divine. Any clear difference between humans and other animals in this theological vision is rendered insignificant. Jesus’s death and resurrection become linked to nonhuman animal life. To dehumanize Jesus is to put him in solidarity with the least of the animal creatures and only reaffirm his humanity even more strongly. God’s humanity is intimately linked to God’s animality and talk of one without the other would vacate Revelation of its most potent iconography for Christology.

It is in Revelation that humanity regains animality most fully in Scripture. Uniting human and nonhuman animal in the iconography of Christ, Revelation challenges us to think about what it means to be human without neglecting our animality. Does it mean we will ultimately resort to the “baser” instincts that so many theologians have feared through the ages? The lion, with its rich imagery in Davidic monarchy and military

might, recedes into the background, giving way to the slaughtered lamb. But this lamb wages a war. There is a sense in which the nonviolence of Revelation is horrifically violent. But the lamb wages this “war” with words alone, a sword that comes from his mouth. The lion/lamb/human Messiah of Revelation speaks rather than bearing canines or wielding a sword.

However, the scholars who argue that the lamb displaces the lion may argue too hastily. J. Nelson Kraybill, for example, says that the “ferocious carnivore” who is a “might Lion” would have to be powerful enough to defeat the beast. In other words, it made sense to announce a lion as the opponent of the monstrous beast in Revelation. Kraybill sees the lion as a metaphor or symbol of violence. “God’s fullest self-revelation has not come with brawn and bluster to match the muscle of Rome.”<sup>691</sup> Furthermore, Kraybill only uses imagery from the Roman context in which Revelation was written. The “lion of Judah” that the angel announces seems to refer to something in Jewish tradition every bit as much as the lamb.

The Hebrew Bible sometimes describes God as a lion. In fact, Scripture describes God in terms of a lion more than any other animal. Job accused God of hunting him like a lion (Job 10:16), which helps interpret Job’s later statement that God has “torn” him (16:9), since lions hunt, tear apart, and eat their victims. Jeremiah 49:19 and 50:44 depict God as a lion on the hunt ready to punish Edom and Babylon. “Like a lion coming up from the thickets of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly chase Edom away from it” (Jer 49:19). The prophet goes on to ask who can stand before such a

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<sup>691</sup> Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 98. This way of interpreting Revelation 5 is very common amongst Revelation scholars. For another example see James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 134. I do not wish to challenge that there is a political challenge to Rome in this book. However, I want to emphasize the Jewish roots of this passage and question the motives of erasure in most scholars’ interpretations.

lion. When God sets out like a young lion on the prowl, the result is that the land is laid to waste: “Edom shall become an object of horror; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters” (49:17). A corpse devoured by a lion would be just such a horror show.

The first thing to learn from this Jewish tradition is that the “ferocious carnivore” and “mighty lion” of Revelation are worthy of being associated with God in Jewish tradition. While the language might seem like mere metaphor, as Derrida reminds us, this kind of language is never divorced from our practices. Western hunters pay tens of thousands of dollars to kill lions in “exotic” locations. The erasure that Kraybill sees in Revelation plays out in real life colonialism where an American dentist, for example, can lure a protected lion out of its sanctuary in Zimbabwe and shoot it with a bow as it eats. So whether the language of lions and lambs is code for political activities happening in the first century does not deal with the way that the metaphors still work to erase some creatures and reestablish the anthropological machine.

I would like to read the metaphors a little more literally for once and see the Son of God becoming animal. This way of seeing Revelation sits within a trajectory used within other Johannine literature, as I already noted. But even more, I would see this imagery within the Jewish vision for the peaceable kingdom:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. (Isa 11:6)

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. (Isa 65:25)

More basic than references to Roman imperial politics are the underlying Jewish images of Revelation.<sup>692</sup> Revelation alludes to the prophet Isaiah at least 122 times.

Scholars routinely claim that the author juxtaposes the lion with the lamb. The lamb contrasts with the lion as an alternative way of living on the earth. The lamb equals nonviolence. The lion means violence. But if we see Isaiah 11 and Isaiah 65 as the background to this passage, then the lion should not be contrasted with the lamb so sharply. Rather, Jesus's becoming-animal is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that predatory creatures will lie at peace with prey. In Jesus's eschatological body, a body explicitly animalized in the strongest of terms—Jesus is called a lamb more times than “Jesus” in this book—the lion lies with the lamb.<sup>693</sup> Rather than distancing the lion from the divine as a metaphor for unworthy violence, a better strategy is to read this passage as a fulfillment of Jewish peace visions.

Reading these images as pure “metaphors” for human politics alone erases the creation-wide redemption of Jewish peace visions. This is a common strategy in pacifist literature as well as the general literature on Revelation. But erasing the lion in Revelation has real-world consequences, as I already noted. The politics of animal

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<sup>692</sup> See, for example, Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Moyise represents a very common view of Revelation as completely “saturated” with allusions to the Hebrew Bible. In fact, nearly every verse has some link to Hebrew Scripture. The Book of Revelation alludes to the Book of Isaiah more than any other Hebrew Scripture and more times than any other book in the New Testament. See *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>693</sup> In Isaiah it is the wolf that lies with the lamb. The lion interacts peaceably with an ox. The ox is the lion's most natural prey. But it seems reasonable to suggest that the author is simply using the prophetic vision from Isaiah loosely. Christian tradition, moreover, often depicts a lion resting with a lamb, an image from Revelation not Isaiah strictly. But the power of the Christian image is from the Isaiah vision as well.

erasure, as Keller names it, is not simply read in benignly, but the erasure is “read” onto the bodies of real lions (and I would add all the major predators like wolves) as they are nearly rendered extinct. God, in these theological readings, has nothing to do with the lion. In the human realm, humans have nothing to do with lions either. The ethics of this reading has drastic consequences. Seeing Jesus’s theological body as utterly animalized as a lion-lamb within a Jewish vision for creation-wide peace erases the politics of violence much more thoroughly than the standard reading in which Revelation 5 engages in a bait and switch with the lamb for the lion. Revelation’s Christology is not highest when it speaks simply about the lamb, but when it announces the lion of Judah *and also* shows us the lamb. Jesus’s becoming-animal, to use Deleuze and Guatarri again, is so that animals can become something different. The lion can no longer be used as a mere negative trope for human violence. The lamb can no longer be used as a negative sacrificial “animal” whose body functions to establish human identity. Neither the lion nor the lamb is simply “bare life” in contrast to the humanity. The anthropological machine comes to a halt most fully in Revelation 5. The human/lion/lamb all live in Jesus’s theological body without regard for distinction.

**Conclusion: “Behold the Man!” Or “Behold the Lamb!”**

When the Church leaders at the Council of Trullo forbade the imagery of a lamb and demanded an exclusive focus on the humanity of God in the Incarnation, they unwittingly undercut the Incarnation’s most radical elements in halting the anthropological machine. But the Council was not the first to focus solely on Jesus’s humanity alone. This happened first in Jesus’s own life:

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” (John 19:1–5)

“Behold, the man!” or in the famous Latin translation “*Ecce Homo!*” Pilate’s words focus squarely on Jesus’s humanity and present us with a vision of Jesus as a male human.

In John 19, we look squarely at the particularity of the Incarnation through the eyes of the Romans. The Roman soldiers beat and mock Jesus, attacking his masculinity by calling him “King of the Jews.” This male king is powerless against Roman male aggression. Like all Jews, his maleness is suspect to the Romans. He is human. But his masculinity is effeminate and passive in Roman eyes. Pilate parades Jesus out to the crowd and puts his male humanity on full display: “Here is your male aggressor, utterly beaten into submission and passive.” Here is his humanity, barely human at all in the eyes of Pilate. This pathetic man is no threat to Roman power in Pilate’s eyes.

*Ecce homo.* “Behold the man!” He is only human. He is no god. Jesus, for Pilate, is nothing akin to the heroes of legend, the male warriors who threaten to take down kingdoms such as Odysseus and the great warriors of the Trojan Wars. He is just a human. He is just a male Jewish human, and to Pilate, that is to be subject to the true heroes of that world: Roman military and political warriors.



But there is an irony in Pilate's statement. Though he and his soldiers mocked Jesus's humanity and paraded it in front of the Jewish crowds as a passive colonial subject who could never present a real threat to Roman power let alone any patriarchal Jewish viewpoint, that view of Jesus's humanity has deep roots in Jewish tradition and is ultimately the greatest challenge to violent masculinity. Pilate attempts to place Jesus in a taxonomy that makes Jews passive doormats for Roman conquest. He rips Jesus out of the prophetic tradition. Pilate situates Jesus within a Roman story. Jesus is certainly a Jew, but one defined by Roman military might.

To focus on Jesus's "humanity" without situating that humanity within the particularities of what it means to be a male, Jewish person in that time and place is to distort Jesus's humanity. By focusing on Jesus's humanity without noting the Word becoming "flesh" and becoming animal—a lamb—Pilate and the Romans only see a parody of humanity. They see a mere object, whose masculinity is barely intact, more akin to females than males because of the visible cuts on his genitals—they disrobed Jesus—and the subjected place of his people. But this is to miss the way in which Jewish tradition often situates masculinity at different place that does not make violence the defining character of what it means to be male. What it means to be male is to do the nonviolent work of listening to the Word of God and giving up all claims to ruling. It is, as Mary Douglas claimed, a "kenosis of patriarchy." What it means to be human is to be in God's "image." And that image is performed in taking care of the earth and befriending nonhuman animals in Genesis 2.<sup>694</sup> It is to take on *σάρξ*, animality, and lay down one's life as a good shepherd on behalf of another creature. It is not to claim special

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<sup>694</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), §67.

lordly status within creation based on some fictional attribute within humanity (reason or language). Being human, as defined by the Incarnation, is a kenosis of anthropocentrism.

The Council of Trullo and other Christians who see animals as a threat to the doctrine of the Incarnation in general do not do justice to the particularity of the Incarnation because they separate Jesus's humanity from his Jewishness. They miss the way the Baptist's exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God," stands in stark contrast to Pilate's focus on Jesus's humanity, "Behold, the man!" When the Baptist told his followers to see Jesus as a lamb, whether he knew and liked it or not he placed Jesus in a particular tradition that absolutely challenges the nations, their war machines, their views of masculine violence, their stereotypes of female subjectivity and passiveness, and the sharp lines we draw between humans who we do not kill and nonhuman animals whom we do kill. *Ecce agnus Dei* coupled with the language of the Word becoming *σάρξ* is a statement that the Word becomes human/animal/flesh/meat. The lion/lamb/human Messiah who is human/animal/flesh/meat/bread is utterly incomprehensible to anthropocentric theology. This is a monster Messiah if one has a commitment to human exclusivity and uniqueness before God. But this is the cosmic Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, for those who read it well.

And Jesus himself shifts our view of human identity away from a violent dominion over others to one that serves and even dies for the other. When Jesus talks about his own death in the Gospel of John, he does not depict himself as an involuntary lamb going to the slaughter. Rather he reverses the Baptist's imagery and makes himself into the human shepherd who dies in place of and for nonhuman animals. Jesus is the

shepherd who knows his flock intimately and loves them (all of which presupposes an experience of lambs and sheep that is one of companionship not domination). All of the imagery about the shepherd and the sheep are ones of affection and intimate knowledge. The fact that Jesus talks about his own death as a human death for animals, human and nonhuman, does not undercut the lamb imagery. To declare Jesus as human is also to declare him to have taken on animality, in all that animality entails.

In fact, that Jesus refers to himself as a good shepherd and is yet also presented in the New Testament as a lamb may underscore an important point to learn from the Incarnation. What we too often want to see in Jesus is a reflection of our own glory and immortality. Instead, what we see is a Messiah who gives up his privileges as a male and human and who defies our strict boundaries. If Jesus is fully human and that humanity defines our own, then we have to give up the strict boundaries of an anthropocentric Christology. God took on *σάρξ*, a term with rich meaning and deep connections to other creatures. If the Incarnation is to guide theological reflection, then it is in taking on *σάρξ* that we become human, not in touting our mental prowess and linguistic skills (or whatever unique trait we think sets us so apart from other creatures so that they are no longer deemed worthy of consideration).

In this regard the Incarnation is a critique of human self-definition and grasping for divinity by seizing *λόγος*. By emptying ourselves of this tendency we take on Jesus's most telling characteristic: Jesus the one "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross"

(Phil. 2:6–7). This classic passage for kenotic Christology should be read alongside the passages in which Jesus speaks of himself as edible, his flesh as meat, his seeing through the eyes of a lamb.

### **A Challenge**

Becoming-animal and becoming-flesh are a central characteristic of the Incarnation in my reading. Jesus is the one who empties himself of his humanity to allow a becoming that many humans think impossible and undignified. This is an exchange that can lead further and further toward renewed relationships and a new creation in which humans do not dominate other creatures. Yet, as I noted at the outset to this chapter, one particularly troubling challenge to my project is that Jesus, even after his resurrection, is said to have eaten a piece of fish. Regardless of the restraint we might note in this action, it is still there. On the one hand it would be easy to simply say that Jesus inaugurated an eschatology that is not fully realized, therefore his fish-eating is not as problematic. But “not as problematic” is still problematic for the Prince of Peace, who empties himself of humanity and becomes animal. Can he not, after experiencing the indescribable terrors of the abattoir, refrain from committing the same?

So I will end my exploratory argument with a simple illustration of becoming animal that points to a theological path forward. In Matthew 15:21–28 a Canaanite woman approaches Jesus, requesting that he heal her demon-possessed daughter. In response, Jesus answered callously, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” She pleaded with him, but Jesus replied even more sternly, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Her answer elicited from Jesus surprise that

he commended her for her faith, something he never did to his own disciples. She said to Jesus, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Even before this encounter, Jesus had met a centurion who wanted him to heal his servant. Jesus did so without any seemingly tone-deaf responses. Therefore, it was not simply because the Canaanite woman was an outsider that Jesus refused her, but most likely because she was a female and a Canaanite (people Israel had supposedly wiped out according to some version of the conquest narrative).<sup>695</sup> Postcolonial feminist readings of this passage tend to focus on the fact that in relationship to a Canaanite woman, Jesus, son of David, would have been a powerful colonizing male figure. In this vein, Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz reads the Canaanite woman’s initial “shouting” at Jesus and his irritation with her as her having a quite different tone than one of pleading, “a tone of anger of the displaced and rebellious woman . . . coming to get compensation for what was taken away from her.”<sup>696</sup> She knew how to flatter Jesus by calling him “son of David” and the proper formulas for asking powerful men for favors. She even kneels before him. But this, according to Guardiola-Sáenz’s reading, is part of her persistent agenda to get what she needs and deserves. She was not a submissive woman, but a strong and determined person. Her presence before Jesus is a testimony that her condition as an impoverished Canaanite is a consequence of Jesus’s own privilege seen in his royal lineage, a family lineage that is replete with genocidal intentions in the monarchy.

Jesus calls her and her daughter dogs. According to Guardiola-Sáenz, “She will not rest until the oppressor realizes that the cost of his privileges is not just the

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<sup>695</sup> On this interpretation, see Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 165.

<sup>696</sup> Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz, “Borderless Women and Borderless Texts: A Cultural Reading of Matthew 15:21-28,” *Semeia* 78 (1997): 76.

dehumanization of the oppressed, but his own dehumanization. That effect on himself is due to his inability to respect and engage in dialogue with the Other.”<sup>697</sup> While I certainly agree that Jesus’s response to the Canaanite woman was one of disrespect born out of male privilege based in a violent heritage, I am not sure that the best way to interpret this story is to see the Canaanite woman as taking back her “humanity” and forcing Jesus to recognize his own “humanity.” That reading relies much too heavily on the anthropological machine: nonhuman animals are killable and subject to abuse; humans are not.

But this woman challenges Jesus by taking the position of a nonhuman animal: a dog that Jesus thought was not worthy of his messianic time. Yet the woman’s challenge—that even dogs eat crumbs from their human masters’ tables—caught Jesus off-guard. Is it that he recognizes her humanity and his own, or that the very idea that there are creatures on this earth who should be cast away and given no compassion is counter to the very idea of the Messiah? He sees the dog in her anew. Later in the story Jesus does the unthinkable: he compares himself to a mother hen, a female chicken (Matt 23:37). This Canaanite woman, it seems, pushes Jesus’s anthropocentric boundaries to the extent that he can now compare himself to a nonhuman animal that he at one point would have used as an insult to another human.

It is possible to read Jesus’s encounter with the Canaanite woman as provoking what Deleuze and Guatarri call a “becoming-animal” in which rather than simply redrawing the lines of anthropocentrism to include a Canaanite woman, he begins to obliterate the lines altogether. She provoked this becoming with her persistent, obstinate demands of the oppressed. Jesus shifted as a result.

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<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

With regard to the fish-eating in Luke 24, Christians could all be Canaanite women to Jesus and ask him persistently but no less adamantly, “Can the Prince of Peace do justice to all creatures?” “Are not fish God’s good creatures too?” “Do fish not also receive God’s blessing?” These are the kind of questions that Jesus responded to with favor and deep learning. Challenging Jesus toward peace and justice was something he accepted. What he did not accept was challenges from his disciples in the other direction: to reign down fire from heaven on detractors (Luke 9:54) and to fight the authorities with swords (Matt 26:51). Jesus the mother hen, Jesus the lamb, these mark out the Son of God and begin to sabotage the anthropological machine. Pushing the boundaries of the Incarnation further in this direction just might elicit the wonderfully surprising response of “see what great faith” that holding onto the anthropological machine will not.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to show how Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish, male human, matters for how we think about the Incarnation in relationship to nonhuman animals (and to a lesser extent creation as a whole). In recent decades, the Gospel of John's statement that "the Word became flesh" has served as a theological impetus to develop a view of the Incarnation that has significance for all of creation. Focusing almost exclusively on nonhuman animals and theology, Andrew Linzey was an early proponent of this idea, though it never played a role beyond a few lines in his work. More recently theologians such as Gregersen, Edwards, Johnson, and others have developed a notion increasingly termed "deep Incarnation."

Deep Incarnation is the idea that in taking up "flesh" the Son took up all that "flesh" would consist in, including the stardust we now believe helped to form earth, evolutionary history, and a sense of interdependence with other creatures and our environment. For The Word to become human flesh, and be truly human, the entire history and environment of creation has to be involved. Humans are not humans without all of this. God takes it all up in becoming flesh. In the first chapter I argued that, indeed, the idea of "flesh" in the New Testament is very much in line with much of what these theologians have been saying.

Yet these theologians, including David Clough, who has written the first systematic theology focused on issues around nonhuman animals, largely dismiss the particularity of the Incarnation. Instead they focus on the cosmic dimensions of



Christology. Jesus's Jewishness, his maleness, and his humanity do not play an important role in the recent literature.

I have tried to show that these three particularities are important for any doctrine of the Incarnation. Bypassing Jesus's Jewishness, maleness, and humanity leaves theology impoverished and distorted. We have two early examples of this problem in Athanasius and John of Damascus, who used the Gospel of John to claim that the Word became "matter." But in switching from the New Testament language of "flesh" with its deep ancient Jewish roots and its ambiguous meaning (does it mean human, animal, flesh, or meat?), these authors opened themselves to undermining basic insights of the Incarnation from particularity. Athanasius prefers to speak about planets and stars rather than nonhuman animals. Celestial bodies seem more fitting than animal bodies to his way of thinking. The story he tells is one that looks hard for the beauty and goodness of creation broadly speaking, but his story is mostly anthropocentric. It is also vehemently anti-Jewish, which keeps him from looking at the particularity of the Incarnation. There are similar problems in John of Damascus, who waxes eloquently about the necessity of hypostasis, but misses the particularity of Jewishness, even deriding Jews as a bunch of infants for painting animals in their synagogues, a practice that Christians also engaged in at that time. Some of these mosaics reflected Jewish eschatological hope of creation-wide renewal.

Jesus's Jewishness is not a hindrance to developing a theology on behalf of nonhuman animals. Rather it is extremely helpful and necessary. The eschatology involved in the specific trajectory of Jesus has to do with a transformation of relationship in creation so that predators like lions and wolves do not harm prey animals like lambs

and calves. This eschatology looks forward, but Jewish people also look backward to God's original intention of vegetarianism, signaling peaceable relationships as God's intention all along. Even Jewish laws that restrict what Jews can touch or eat in relationship to nonhuman animals point back to God's intention, and possibly forward to the messianic age in which the Torah would be fulfilled. That Christians have largely left behind these laws as "Jewish" is one of the greatest tragedies of Christianity.

Jesus's maleness shows us that Jesus was a male in a particular way: he was not the Greco Roman ideal hunter/warrior. Rather, like most Jewish people, he was not a hunter. When he was in the wilderness it was not as a killer of wild animals, but as the peaceable messiah. Jesus's circumcision marked him off in the Greco-Roman world as a less-than-human male. But, in line with many Jews of his time, Jesus takes this dehumanization and stands it on its head.

He does this by problematizing what it means to be human. I used a number of contemporary philosophical ideas about animals and humanity to read Jesus's humanity in a way that challenges the most common definition of humanity as sole possessors of language and reason. The idea that Jesus "becomes-animal" and challenges the anthropological machine at the heart of defining human identity finds deep resonances in the Bible as Jesus is depicted as several animals. Most notably this becoming-animal resonates in Revelation's human/lion/lamb Messiah, whose own body is animalized in a way that fulfills the Jewish vision for a creation-wide peace.

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