# Intro

This is not the talk I usually give. In my opportunities to speak to Christian groups, academic and otherwise, about animals in recent years, I have tried to make a careful and patient case that Christians should at least agree not to treat non-human animals cruelly before killing them. This seems to me, and has seemed to my audiences, hard to disagree with. I often quote an early 15th century English Franciscan commentary on the 10 commandments called _Dives and Pauper_, which states:

> God that made all has care of all, and he shall take vengeance on all that misuse his creatures… And therefore men should have compassion on beast and bird and not harm them without cause and have regard for the fact that they are God's creatures. And therefore he who for cruelty and vanity beheads beasts and torments beasts or birds more than it is expedient to man's living, they sin very grievously.(fn)

While this position seems to have been the mainstream Christian view for the past 600 years, the reason I spend time speaking about it to Christians is that we either seem to have recently forgotten it, or to have become content to let our practice depart radically from the consideration for animals it requires. As I am sure you are aware, vast majority of animal products Christians consume, like everyone else, are derived from industrial systems of raising farmed animals that inflict all kinds of unnecessary cruelties on non-human animals in order to make production more efficient and the products derived from their bodies cheaper. If Christians today observed the injunction in _Dives and Pauper_ against being unnecessarily cruel towards animals, 95% of animal products currently on sale would be off the menu for us. This modest ethical position has become a radical argument for transformative change in our practice in the context of industrial animal agriculture. If you are unconvinced that Christians stop eating products derived from these systems, I refer you to my recent article ‘Consuming Animal Creatures’, which you can find via a quick Google search in Chester’s Open Access Repository.(fn) I refer you to it because I think it’s important, but it is not what I am going to discuss today. This is not the talk I usually give.
My first serious theological work, mostly during my doctoral studies, was on the ethics of Karl Barth. This may seem like an unlikely starting point for a discussion of Christianity and veganism, but there is still something about Barth’s account of divine command that won’t leave me alone. Divine command ethics aren’t widely discussed among Christian ethics these days. They seem too authoritarian, unhelpfully echoing past understandings of ecclesial and secular authority with which many Christians are now uncomfortable. I find James Cone’s critique of Barth’s inability to attend to the structural features of the oppression of black people by white people, and parallels in other oppressive relationships, highlighted by feminist and womanist analyses, to be convincing, and not unrelated to structure features in Barth’s work. Work is needed to correct, redress and supplement Barth’s work in the light of this critique. In my view, however, this remedial work is worthwhile because Barth frames the place of ethics in the Christian life in a way that keeps Christian ethics in strong and constructive relation both with systematic theology and with what it means to live the Christian life day by day.

For our purposes today, I would like to focus just on one key insight of Barth’s about the nature of God’s commanding. How, he asks, are we to distinguish between God’s command and the commands of the many powers and dominions and authorities which restrict human freedom? Barth’s answer, which is clearly not unrelated to Cone’s project of Black liberation theology, is that we recognize God’s commanding by the fact that instead of binding, fettering, and holding us fast, it liberates. Barth says that command of God sets us free, bursts open the door of the compulsions under which we have been living, meets us not with mistrust but with trust, appeals not to our fear but to our courage. The command of God tells us to do this, because this is how we will live again by grace, because this is how we live out the truth of the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ, because in Christ we have been born anew in God’s image, because we have been chosen and willed, because in freedom we may do this and may only do this. Barth states that the command is radical just because the command of God is the command of our true, best friend; because it comes up alongside us from behind as it were; because even in its majesty it addresses us absolutely from within in opposition to all that we allow ourselves, putting an end to our supposed freedom and joy; because it is just permission, and it wills only that we do what we are permitted to do; because everything else is not permitted and can therefore be only the fulfilment of a compulsion… Just because it is real permission the command of God separates us from the domination of all other commands and therefore from our desires and lusts. It does so by taking our part, by
engaging that we may begin to live at last in real freedom and joy, and therefore turn our backs on the foreign
domination under which we have placed ourselves. Expressing God's decision concerning us, that we belong to
Him, that the claim which He has on us as the Creator cannot be broken, it demands of us that we finally act on
our own decision - our very own, the one which corresponds to our determination. This is how it affects us. It
sets us on our feet. It is against us only in so far as we are against ourselves.(fn)
It's passages like that which keep me reading Barth. His emphasis on Christian freedom not as freedom of
choice, but as the liberation to be most fully ourselves, has deep roots in Christian understandings of freedom
going back to Augustine. Fundamentally, for Barth, we recognize the divine command in that it is a
_permission: _the permission to live in the freedom of the children of God.
# Barth: respect for animal life
Alongside this aspect of Barth’s account of the divine command, let us place a less well-known aspect of his
ethics: his discussion of the ethics of killing non-human animals. You may not be surprised to hear that Barth
defends the killing of animals for human food, but if you have not come across his discussion previously, you
may be surprised to learn that Barth's account is grounded in Albert Schweitzer's concept of reverence for life.
Barth does not accept Schweitzer's position uncritically: he argues that life itself cannot be a supreme principle
for theological ethics as it is for Schweitzer, a function Barth terms 'tyrannical' and 'totalitarian'.(fn) As he puts it
later in the same section 'Life is no second God'.(fn) But Barth accepts Schweitzer's central insight that life
should be accepted, treated, and preserved with respect as a fundamental feature of the ethics of creation. He
quotes with approval and at length Schweitzer's argument that human beings are 'only truly ethically 'if they are
'obedient to the constraint to assist all life' as they are able, if they refrain 'from afflicting injury upon anything
that lives', if they do not ask 'whether this or that form of life merits or does not merit sympathy as something
valuable' nor 'enquire whether it is sensitive'. Rather, they see that 'life as such is holy'. They do not 'pluck a leaf
from the tree, or pull a flower, or trample on an insect'. If they are 'working by lamplight on a summer night',
they 'would rather keep the windows closed and breathe stuffy air than see insect after insect fall on the table
with wings that are singed'. If they walk 'along the street after rain' and notice 'an earthworm which has lost its
way', they reflect 'that it must shrivel up in the sun if it does not wriggle in time into the earth' and so 'carry it
from the death-dealing stones to the grass'. If they come upon 'an insect that has fallen into a puddle', they take
'time to extend a leaf or a reed to save it'. They are not afraid of being smiled at as a sentimentalist'. Therefore
'ethics is infinitely extended responsibility to everything that lives'.(fn) Barth comments on this quotation from
Schweitzer that we certainly cannot dismiss it as 'sentimental', states that 'Those who can only smile at this point are themselves subjects for tears', and adds his own story that 'one of the most enlightened of the younger generation of German theologians immediately after the First World War…once discovered near Bamberg a weir on whose grating certain snails were always being caught and perishing, and that this made such an impression on him that from time to time he felt compelled to travel to Bamberg to help at least some of these creatures.\(fn\)

On this basis, Barth argues that even senseless destruction of plants is impermissible, and that while human beings have precedence and dominion over other creatures, which legitimates domestication, they should respect and show gratitude for their animal comrades, and that 'this gratitude will be translated into a careful, considerate, friendly and above all understanding treatment' of animals, taking sympathetic account of their needs.\(fn\) He then asks whether human dominion over other animals includes the right to take their lives for food, and immediately argues that it is different from using plants for food, because unlike harvesting of plants or fruit, killing an individual animal is annihilation. Harvesting a plant is therefore not a breach in the peace of creation, and nor is tending and making use of animals, but killing animals threatens the peace of creation, and the proximity of non-human animals to humans means, according to Barth's striking statement, that the act is 'at least very similar to homicide'.\(fn\) Barth goes on to observe that the peace of creation is unbroken in Genesis 1 and 2 by any killing, and that while explicit permission to kill animals for food is only given in Genesis 9, this does not detract from the recognition that the true original creative will of God did not include killing, and that prophetic texts such as Hos.2.18, Is. 65.25 and especially Is. 11.5f. look forward to the time when once again there will be no question of killing between humans and other animals.\(fn\)

Let us pause a moment with at this point. Barth reminds us that God's original creative will was for there to be no killing of animal creatures, and that the prophets look forward to a time when this original peace will be restored. What he does not mention is the Christological link in these prophecies. Isaiah 11 is not merely a vision of how things will be in the future, but how things will be when the Messiah comes. The first signs of the new Messianic reign, according to Isaiah 11, is that

\[\text{> The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.}\]

\[\text{> The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.}\]

\[\text{> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put her hand}\]
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 (Is. 11.6–9)

Peace between humans and other animals, therefore, is the first fruits of the coming of the Messiah, preceding even peace between God's people and their human enemies. For Christians looking for signs of the coming of the reign of God, such a vision — echoed in Isaiah 65, and in the covenant of peace promised in Hosea 2, and in the Christologies of the opening of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, where the work of Christ is to gather up and make peace between all things in heaven and on earth, and in the redemption Paul looks forward to in Romans 8, when all creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay — such a vision of peace between creatures is a vivid, compelling, and non-negotiable component of what it will mean for the will of God to be done on earth as in heaven. Patience is a virtue, and we should never be wholly impatient, but there is a holy impatience, explicit in the Lord's Prayer, for God's will to be enacted, even here and now, and for us to recognize, witness to, and participate in the inbreaking Messianic reign of God.

This is not a new insight in the Christian tradition: it’s deeply embedded in Christianity. Thinking a fellow monk had come to see him, he opened the door and was astonished to find that a hyena had been knocking on the door with her head. She held her puppy in her mouth, and offered the puppy to him, weeping. Macarius took the puppy in his hands and looked to see what was the matter. He saw that the puppy was blind in both eyes. He took the puppy, groaned, spat on the puppy’s face and signed it on the eyes with his finger. Immediately, the puppy could see, ran to his mother, suckled from her, and followed her away. The next day the hyena returned and knocked on the hermit’s door again. This time when he opened it he saw she had a sheepskin in her mouth. He asked her where she had got the sheepskin, if she had not eaten a sheep, and told her that he would not take the sheepskin if it had come of violence. The hyena struck her head on the ground, bent her paws, and prayed on her knees for him to take it. He said he would not take it unless she promised not to harm the poor by eating their sheep, and she nodded her head as if she were promising him. Then he told her he would not take it unless she promised not to kill another creature, and said if she was hungry she should come to him and he would give her bread. The hyena bent, nodded, and looked him in the eye as if she were promising him. So Macarius offered praises to God for giving understanding to the animals and letting Macarius come to understand God’s ways. He took the sheepskin from the hyena and she went away. From time to time she would come to Macarius for food, and he would give her bread. He slept on the sheepskin until he died. (fn) The story is collected with
many others in Helen Waddell’s wonderful little book, _Beasts and Saints_. Such stories seem to follow me around: when I lived in Durham I was delighted to come across St Godric, who had lived in a hermitage a mile or two down the River Wear from Durham, now a ruined priory on a wooded hilly river bank I often visited with my family. One day an exhausted stag being pursued by the Bishop of Durham’s hunt arrived shivering from exhaustion at the gate of Godric’s hermitage, and seemed by his cries to beseech Godric’s help. Godric was moved by pity, bade him hush his moans, and opened the door of his hut to let him in, at which the stag dropped at his feet. But Godric felt that the hunt was coming near and came out of the hut, shut the door, and sat down outside. The hunt hacked through thorns and briars with their blades to reach the man, and asked him where the stag was, to which Godric replied ‘God knows where he may be’. The hunters asked his pardon for intruding on him. The stag kept house with Godric until the evening, but would afterwards often visit him and lie at his feet in gratitude for his deliverance. After I moved to Chester, I found that the city’s Patron saint St Werburgh, was said to have had a farm outside the city walls, where wild geese would come and destroy her standing corn. Her steward tried without success to drive them off, and complained to St Werburgh of his difficulty. She told him to shut them up in the house, which he thought was a joke, but when she insisted, he went to the field and told the geese to do their lady’s bidding and follow him. With one accord they formed a flock and walked with bent necks after him to be shut up. But the steward took one of the geese, killed and ate it. The next morning the maid scolded the geese for destroying the crops, and told them to leave, but the geese protested to St Werburgh that one of them was missing. In response to their complaint, St Werburgh was moved with compassion, and God revealed to her that her steward had killed the goose. She told him to bring the bones of the goose to her, and at a healing sign from her hands, skin and flesh grew on the bones, and feathers fledged upon the skin, until the living bird, first took an eager hop and then was upon the wing, joined by the rest of the rejoicing flock, who thanked St Werburgh their deliverer before they left. I wonder at and delight in these stories of Macarius, Godric and Werburgh, along with the many others like them. As we smile at them, we recognize the insights that were treasured by those who passed them on that it belongs to Christian holiness to be compassionate towards other animals, that we should take a high view of the capacities of animals to be responsive subjects, and that we should have a deep appreciation that God’s will is for peace between all creatures, and that we can anticipate and witness to this peace in our actions here and now. These stories of the saints extend biblical visions of peace between creatures into a world closer to our own.

But back to Barth. From his reflection on God’s concern for non-human animals, and biblical visions of peace
between creatures, he draws the striking conclusion that the seriousness of the act of taking the life of an animal means, in another striking statement, that we 'obviously cannot do this except under the pressure of necessity'.

Such killing should not be thought of as normal or natural, and in the light of the sharp counter-question 'What is there in your life that you feel compelled to take this aggressive step in its favour?'(fn) Barth emphasizes that killing animals is not justified by human need, but only by divine authorization. Listen to the pressure he piles up on the possibility of legitimate killing of animals:

> Man sins if he does it without this authorisation. He sins if he presumes to do it on his own authority. He 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. He can only kill it, knowing that it does not belong to him but to God, and that in killing it he surrenders it to God in order to receive it back from Him as something he needs and desires. The killing of animals in obedience is possible only as a deeply reverential act of repentance, gratitude and praise on the part of the forgiven sinner in face of the One who is the Creator and Lord of man and beast.(fn)

# Putting it together

Let us take stock of three components in what I have presented to you. First, I have drawn your attention to Barth's account of the divine command as recognisable in its form as a liberation and enactment of true human freedom, rather than a fettering of human liberty. As we saw, Barth believes that we always encounter the divine command as permission. Second, I have given an overview of Barth’s view that killing animals is profoundly problematic as a breach in the peace of creation, possible only under the pressure of necessity with the authorization of the divine command, and that killing non-human animals beyond this context is murder. And, third, we have recalled the biblical visions of the original and final will of God for peace between all creatures, the pain of being part of the groaning creation in which killing is still taking place, and the holy impatience that longs for the peaceable Messianic reign in which the will of God for peace between creatures will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I want to suggest that these three key insights can be drawn together with remarkable focus in seven words: you may not kill animals for food. You may not kill animals for food. On a first hearing it sounds like the kind of command that takes away freedom, and a contradiction of Genesis 9.3. It sounds like the prohibition of humans killing other animals for food. But if we hear it again, in the light of Barth’s concept of command as permission, it sounds different: you _may_ not kill animals for food. You _may_ not kill animals for food. Heard in this way, we are no longer dealing with fettering of our freedom to act, but with the gift of a new and gracious possibility: the good news that we do not have to depend on the killing of animals to feed
ourselves.

Good news indeed! The good news is that we can live a life in which we are not in violent opposition to other creatures, that our living does not have to be at the cost of the death of other animals, that we do not need to participate in the predator/prey relationships that manifest a fallen creation, that in our humble daily practice of eating we can witness to nothing less than the inbreaking messianic reign of God. There is real joy in the living out of this gracious permission: for the Christian who recalls, as Pope Francis said in _Laudato Si_, that 'Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object' of God's love, enfolded with God's tenderness and affection,(fn) the possibility that we may not kill animals for food is an offer that is enticing, exerting a strong gravitational pull on us, almost irresistibly attractive. Barth quotes the potential objection to vegetarianism that it is a wanton anticipation of the new aeon prophesied in Isaiah 11 and Romans 8.(fn) Perhaps we shouldn't resist the criticism: I for one would be happy to be known for a wild and exuberant seeking after what it could mean for the reign of God to be present here and now, and it seems to me that many of Jesus's parables encourage exactly that kind of seeking. But on the other hand, if we are simply trying to be as compassionate and peaceable as we can towards non-human animals in advance of the new creation, it's hard to see why that should be a subject of critique, when the same project of being as compassionate and peaceable towards human animals is unquestioned as a Christian obligation here and now.

I hope you get the message that I'm not advocating veganism as an ascetic practice. I love good food. And drink. All the vegans I know do, too! Preparing and cooking good food, and sharing food with family and friends, is something I take delight in: for me those times are nothing short of glimpses of what it will mean to participate in the wedding feast of the lamb. I love to spend time cooking elaborate celebratory meals at Christmas, and at other times. To adopt a vegan diet is not to give up on feasting: it's to choose to feast on different foods. My number one favourite thing to cook at the moment is Yotam Ottolenghi's recipe for multi-vegetable paella, which you can find online. It's a remarkable array of colour, and texture, and aroma, and taste: abundance in every respect. The Christian veganism I am commending to you has nothing in common with a spirituality of denial or mortification: it is a rejoicing in the many good things God has provided for us to feast on peaceably. Perhaps you share with me the sense of a strong gravitational pull on the hearts of Christians towards the possibility of living without killing other animals, but are concerned that our heads might identify reasons to object. In fact, there are any number of other reasons for coming to the same conclusion that stopping using animals would be a good idea, which make it look a sober and wise moral project for our heads, in addition to
an enticing lure for our hearts. Philosophers and theologians from Plato onwards have argued that using land to raise animals is wasteful and leads to wars, and the scandalous inefficiency of using 78% of available agricultural land for raising animals and feeding 1/3 of global cereal output to livestock means that stopping eating animals makes sense even if you are only concerned about global human food security. Water security is an increasing concern, and raising livestock is a problem there, too. Global greenhouse gas emissions from livestock are bigger than all transport, and intensive farming also causes serious local environmental pollution, as anyone who has lived near the huge lagoons of excrement created by intensive pig farms will testify.

Stopping eating animals would be beneficial more directly for human health: scientists expect devastating new pandemic diseases as intensive farming creates the conditions for new strains of bird and swine flu; 84% of antibiotics in the US are currently being fed to farmed animals, causing serious anxieties about developing antibiotic resistance; and consuming animal products at the unprecedented current levels is significant in increasing risks of coronary heart disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes, and stroke.(fn) [Google CNN's recent report 'The Last Heart Attack' to hear about medical evidence that a vegan diet substantially reduces the risk of heart attacks.] I have some conversations about veganism where anxieties about nutrition come to the for: scepticism that a vegan diet can be healthy; worries about various potential deficiencies in relation to calcium or vitamin B12. In fact, there is abundant evidence that avoiding animal products can result in a diet that is much more healthy than alternatives. Vegans are much more likely to be eating the wide range of vegetables and fruit that are regularly recommended by dieticians, consume much less cholesterol than meat-eaters and lacto-vegetarians, and have no trouble finding protein, as vegan long distance runners and body-builders make clear. As with any set of dietary choices, it’s important to ensure that your diet is balanced, and vegans need to ensure they get foods fortified with B12 in particular, but that’s not hard to do: most of the alternatives to cows’ milk are fortified, as are many breakfast cereals. Switching to a vegan diet is very likely to improve your health. For all these reasons, we don't need to be concerned that witnessing to God's will for peace between creatures in our eating will be problematic for other reasons: it turns out that it's positive in about every other respect, too.

For some people attracted by veganism, making a clean break with consumption of animals is an attractive prospect, but for others, the difficulty of thinking how they will make the transition to feed themselves or their families without animal products is a significant additional obstacle. For some reason, dietary ethics has a tendency to become an all-or-nothing sort of a thing. For several years I wanted to go vegan but didn’t because I wasn’t sure I could do it completely, all of the time. That’s an odd kind of ethics: I don’t stop trying to avoid
being greedy because I sometimes succumb to a tempting dessert, or stop trying to exercise responsible
stewardship of my money because I am sometimes extravagant. A friend helpfully pointed out to me that I could
just seek to avoid consuming animal products as far as was reasonably possible, and that’s still the kind of vegan
I am. I used to call myself a flexible vegan, but because I think all vegans, or at least all Christian ones, should
be flexible, I have come to think that sticking with the simple label ‘vegan’ is better, even though it might make
less flexible vegans grumpy. A Christian veganism cannot seek to be a realized moral purity: we are sinners, and
in the fallen world we live in our relationships with other creatures manifest a brokenness, which means even
growing crops means depriving other creatures of the means to make their living from the land. With the rest of
creation we groan in bondage, looking forward to the day when the agonizing labour we endure with all
creatures will be over, and the new creation is born in freedom. Christian veganism is no escape from the messy
realities of life between the times: it’s a good but imperfect strategy for living through it. One aspect of the
messiness of my veganism is that the rest of my family isn’t vegan, for a range of reasons, and our table
fellowship is a moral good, so we compromise: they eat more vegan food than they otherwise might and I
sometimes eat food containing eggs and dairy. When I’m travelling, am hungry, and don’t have access to vegan
food, again I will eat foods containing dairy or eggs. On the plane here, American Airlines told me they had no
record of my request for a vegan meal, so could only offer me a vegetarian one. I reflected that it wasn’t a great
start to my trip to come and talk about Christian veganism for the first time, but perhaps it was a perfect
example of the kind of veganism I’m laying out this evening: there was no longer any chance of affecting the
lives of the cows who had been used to make the meal presented to me, and the food would otherwise only have
been thrown away. Since my veganism isn't about dietary purity, I didn't have a moral reason for refusing the
food. I consider receiving hospitality as an important moral act, so if I’m offered food containing eggs or dairy
by my host where refusing would be unkind, I eat it. I haven’t eaten meat in over 25 years, but if I were offered
meat in a context where my dietary preferences were not known or not understood, and where refusing the food
would be morally offensive, I am clear that I should eat it, and should make every effort to mask the disgust I
would feel. The aim of a Christian veganism is not to keep myself pure from contamination, but to witness to
the inbreaking reign of God. Where being inflexible contradicts such a witness, Christian veganism has an
obligation to be flexible.
So if you feel the pull of the gracious possibility I have laid out this evening, that you may not kill animals for
food, but an immediate jump to a 100% vegan diet seems beyond you, be reassured, and be encouraged by the
messy veganism I am commending. We are creatures of habit, and our food practices can be some of our.
deepest habits, especially when we share food with others. Cherish the pull of the gracious permission to not kill
animals for food, and find ways to begin a path towards it. Plan a single meal without animal products as a
starting point, move to a day a week on which you don't consume animals: in whatever way makes sense for
you, plan a path in which you change your habits over time, rather than not embarking on the path because you
are not already at the destination. Feel the gravitational pull of the permission to not kill animals for food, and
look for ways to live into that gracious possibility.

My CreatureKind project seeks to engage Christians with thinking about non-human animals as a faith issue.
We're seeking to encourage churches, other Christian institutions, and individual Christians to sign up to take
the next steps in the direction of a more peaceable eating, wherever they're starting from. I'd like to challenge
Calvin College to sign up as a the first CreatureKind institution in North America, which would mean working
with us to set targets to reduce consumption of animal products and move to higher welfare sources of
remaining animal products. The University of Winchester in the UK signed up to this programme in November,
and I'm hopeful that my own University of Chester will be next, and with help on strategy from the Humane
Society will set a goal of reducing consumption of animal products by 20% over two years, which means many
thousands of animals will not be drawn into the cruelties of industrial agricultural systems. Could Calvin
College lead the way in what it could mean for Christian institutions to eat more peaceably? By the way:
CreatureKind has also just released a wonderful new free course for Christian small groups on Christianity and
animals, with great videos, a leader guide, session handouts and beautiful promotional materials all available
online, and we'd love your help in running a group. You can find details at becreaturekind.org.

In conclusion, I recognize that there is a danger — at the beginning of the Trump presidency, at a time when
racial minorities and refugees are the targets of attacks in the US and Europe as a result of dangerous political
rhetoric, at a time when famine threatens large parts of sub-Saharan Africa, when climate change and our lack of
an adequate response to it endangers a significant proportion of God’s creatures on earth, and when we are still
waging war in the Middle East — there is a danger in these days that reflecting on the ethics of dietary choices
as I have done this evening could be seen as a decadent indulgence that risks distracting us from confronting
evils that should be higher priorities. I believe strongly that this is not the case, and am inspired by the invitation
offered by Emilie Townes at the conclusion of _Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil_. After
diagnosing and deconstructing many aspects of systemic injustice using the lens of the many stereotypes
imposed on black women in the US through what she terms the fantastic hegemonic imagination, her call to action is arrestingly simple: to ‘live our faith more deeply’ through the ‘everydayness of moral acts’, through ‘getting up and trying one more time to get our living right’, through witnessing ‘to a justice wrapped in a love that will not let us go and a peace that is simply too ornery to give up on us’. (fn) ‘Won’t you join me?’, Townes invites us graciously and generously in the last words of her book. What could be a clearer everyday witness to this ornery peace, what could be a clearer response to Townes’s invitation, than living out the graced possibility we are offered by God of not having to kill our fellow animal creatures for food? Far from disconnecting us from the wider ethical challenges that confront us on every side, here is manna for our Christian journey, a source of sustenance that both strengthens us for other aspects of our vocation, and makes a practical difference to feeding the hungry, reducing conflict for scarce land and resources, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and reducing demand for products that subject workers in meat-packing plants — who are disproportionately migrant and Latino/Latina — to appalling work, with high injury rates, for low pay.

We can see, then, that the possibility to adopt a vegan diet for Christians is a graced possibility, a gracious permission: you _may_ not kill animals for food. It is a simple, everyday witness to the ornery peace of God that will not let go of us, or any of our fellow creatures. Won’t you join me?