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## **Welcoming Animals: Extending Christian Hospitality to Fellow Creatures**

In his recent book *The Ethics of Captivity*, author Tripp York reflects on the various reasons human beings keep elephants and other animals in captivity, and considers whether any of those reasons are justifiable. He determines that one basis for justification is the unfortunate reality that natural habitats where elephants can live in relative safety are vanishing; perhaps captivity is the only option for elephants' continued existence? York seems to recognize the suggestion is appalling, but given the evidence, he sees few alternatives. "The problem is not just that we have poached and decimated some elephant populations," he writes. "The problem is not just that we have culled elephants, leading to many of their young ending up in foreign countries. *The problem, it seems, is that we have somehow made the entire world inhospitable for elephants.* The even bigger problem is that we are making the entire world inhospitable for all animals – including us."<sup>1</sup>

Invoking the concept of hospitality in a context like this one should serve as – I hope you will pardon the pun – a “dog whistle” for Christians, helping us to see the survival-interests of nonhuman animals<sup>2</sup> in terms that have historically inspired compassion, advocacy, and outreach... but usually for humans. “At its core, Christianity is a religion of hospitality,” writes Laura Hobgood-Oster.<sup>3</sup> Hospitality is a “sacred duty,”<sup>4</sup> exemplified in its

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<sup>1</sup> Tripp York, *The End of Captivity: A Primate's Reflections on Zoos, Conservation, and Christian Ethics* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 128. Emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup> We all know that humans are animals, but for the sake of brevity, I will usually use the term “animals” where I should actually specify “nonhuman animals.”

<sup>3</sup> Laura Hobgood-Oster, *The Friends We Keep: Unleashing Christianity's Compassion for Animals* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 114.

truest form –unrestrained and with no expectation of reciprocity - in Old and New Testament texts and early Christian communities. In her book, *The Friends We Keep: Unleashing Christianity's Compassion for Animals*, Hobgood-Oster identifies hospitality as one of several Christian traditions worth retrieving or reviving for the purpose of mending human relationships with animals, and creating conditions for animals to thrive.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I embrace that suggestion, and ask if hospitality can “do justice” where justice must be restored – or instituted – when the parties who have been harmed are nonhuman animals. I will argue that, as a central component of a theologically-grounded biocentric communitarianism, hospitality can indeed do some heavy lifting.

### **Hospitality as a Justice Issue**

The ways in which humans are making the world inhospitable to elephants and other animals in ways are legion. We do so by seizing habitat and converting or diverting it to agricultural or residential uses – and then killing animals who venture too close to our “territory;” by dividing winding greenbelts into tiny wooded lots between gated housing developments and multi-lane highways; by building impenetrable or deadly barriers across hunting and mating territories and ancestral migratory routes; by filling air, water, edible plants, and prey with toxins; by altering the climate so significantly that food sources die off or move far out of range, and beings that have evolved for cooler temperatures or different chemistries are forced to migrate; by creating so much ambient industrial noise that creatures can no longer hear their own songs and signals to one another... Framed this way, the term “inhospitality” encompasses a great many injustices. We can restore justice

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>5</sup> Unsurprisingly, now that I think of it, Hobgood-Oster wrote the forward to York’s book.

by extending hospitality to the many nonhuman beings who have been displaced or directly harmed by human actions.

An important caveat must be mentioned here: Not everyone believes that “injustice” can be done to animals, or that justice is required, because – in this view – animals cannot properly be subjects of justice. I have argued elsewhere that there is no legitimate philosophical or (especially) theological reason to deny justice to animals, and that most of our difficulties in accepting this idea stem from conceptual limitations of the Western social contract tradition.<sup>6</sup> Instead of defending the point again here, I will proceed as if we all agree that animals are entitled to justice; the only question is how to imagine and accomplish it.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, I believe that the approach I describe here makes the justice-for-animals position ultimately less controversial.

### **Why hospitality?**

“Hospitality” might not strike contemporary readers as a radical word or a radical practice. As Henri Nouwen pointed out, it can “evoke the image of soft sweet kindness, tea parties, bland conversations and a general atmosphere of coziness.”<sup>8</sup> In even more recent experience, it is associated (ironically) with luxury hotels and “hospitality suites” - plush lounges in airports and sports stadiums, for use by the well-heeled and well-connected. But the kind of hospitality practiced by early Christian communities, retrieved by

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<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Matevia, “Breaking the Contract: Thinking Differently about Justice for Animals,” paper presented at Pacific Coast Theological Society-Spring 2011, Berkeley, CA; *ibid.*, *Casting a Net: Prospects Toward a Theory of Justice for All* (unpublished PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Humor me. This will make the paper much shorter.

<sup>8</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 46.

contemporary Christian theologians,<sup>9</sup> and invoked in this paper, is an active, open-ended, unconditional welcome, “without regard for reciprocation.”<sup>10</sup> It requires meeting another – *any other* – where they are and regardless of where they have been, and working to provide what they need in that moment: food, shelter, care, acceptance, respect, understanding, empathy, space, forgiveness, love... If hospitality shows any preference, its preference is for the “least of these,”<sup>11</sup> the beings with the deepest need, the lowest standing, the dimmest prospects. For Christians, hospitality is “the practice of God’s welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God’s actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis.”<sup>12</sup> It demands “actions of genuine solidarity with those who are different from us.”<sup>13</sup>

On the face of it, the central characteristics of hospitality make it an ideal vehicle for restoring or instituting justice for animals. Hospitality welcomes the stranger (and even the enemy)<sup>14</sup>, actively seeks understanding in order to provide what the stranger needs, and expects nothing in return. If we rely instead on our dominant Western view of justice for resolution of conflicts or restoration of necessary resources for animals, we find it unable to do the work. Under the “social contract” view of justice, benefits and protections are contingent on the recipient’s status and capacities.<sup>15</sup> Participants in a contractarian society are assumed to be rational, autonomous, and approximately equal in power and status.

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<sup>9</sup> Laura Hobgood-Oster, Thomas W. Ogletree, Christine Pohl, Letty Russell, and Arthur Sutherland, to name a few.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 25:40, *New Revised Standard Version*

<sup>12</sup> Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>14</sup> ...and in the struggle for habitat and food sources, the ecological competitor.

<sup>15</sup> The classic description and analysis of the social contract (“justice as fairness”) is John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1999).

They agree to terms (behaviors and conventions) that guarantee mutual and reciprocal respect for one another's safety, liberty, and property. Almost by definition, the social contract excludes individuals – animals and even certain humans – who lack the cognitive capacity to understand justice in this way, or who may not be able to hold up their end of the agreement.<sup>16</sup> In a sense, justice in the democratic West is based on a kind of “mechanical solidarity”<sup>17</sup> that is ultimately inimical to hospitality: we extend justice to those we see as most similar to ourselves – in those dimensions we most value about ourselves<sup>18</sup> – and have difficulty imagining justice other-wise. The greater the perceived differences between ourselves and a “stranger,” the greater the difficulty for our moral imaginations. And as Donna Haraway has observed, “Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination.”<sup>19</sup>

Hospitality, on the other hand – and thus the justice offered or restored through it, privileges the stranger, and respects and embraces their difference. “What is at stake here is the welcoming of the other as other.”<sup>20</sup> To achieve this ideal requires a radical cultural rethinking of *difference*. As Iris Marion Young has pointed out, “The marking of difference always implies a good/bad opposition; it is always a devaluation, the naming of an

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<sup>16</sup> Some theorists have tried to show that social contracts could be interpreted to include animals; see, e.g., Mark Rowlands, *Animal Rights: Moral Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) (in another book, *Animals Like Us* (New York: Verso, 2002, p. 58), Rowlands notes that “Rawls probably wouldn't at all like what I've done with his idea. Too bad.”); Donald VanDeVeer, “Of Beasts, Persons, and the Original Position,” *The Monist* 2 (1979). The fact that these more accommodating variations have not supplanted the dominant theory shows how entrenched the exclusion-conclusion is.

<sup>17</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1984)

<sup>18</sup> It is important to remember, prompted by cultural theorist Mary Douglas, that “Similarity is an institution” itself; it is not “a quality inherent in things” or “a power of recognition inherent in the mind.” A society determines which characteristics or properties that will be called “same.” And as Douglas notes, “Everything depends on which properties are selected” ... including and especially justice (Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 55, 58).

<sup>19</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: FAB Books, 1991), 161.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jennings, Jr., *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul: On Justice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 111.

inferiority in relation to a superior standard of humanity.”<sup>21</sup> The “standard” becomes a criterion for group membership, and consequently, for eligibility for justice. Those who do not meet or match the standard are excluded and devalued (or “dehumanized,” as we often say, betraying our most fundamental criterion for justice). But a hospitality shown only to those who look or think like the host(s) ultimately falls short of the Christian ideal when it is confronted by a stranger who fails to fully conform. There are outsiders, and there are “way-outsiders.”<sup>22</sup> Outsiders can probably be assimilated (by ignoring and thus “eliminating” their difference); way-outsiders will be other-ized. “Unless we confront the misuse of difference, there is no integrity in our talk about a God who welcomes all people, or in our actions as participants in that welcome,” writes Letty Russell. “God is an *inside out God*, who created a world of riotous difference in which creation and creature alike show forth a rainbow variety of God’s goodness. God’s intention would seem to be, not to eliminate difference, but to make it possible to communicate across the differences...”<sup>23</sup>

### **Building Community through Hospitality**

To demonstrate Christian hospitality, we must find ways to “communicate across the differences” while preserving them, and to welcome strangers, aliens, enemies, and others in a manner that honors their identities (or their *species*) instead of imposing our own. The task of the host is “to see the world as it is so that we can love it rightly.”<sup>24</sup> Sallie

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<sup>21</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 170.

<sup>22</sup> ...as my grandmother once called herself, after moving to a new town and struggling to “fit in.”

<sup>23</sup> Russell, 71.

<sup>24</sup> Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 32 (she notes that she is paraphrasing Iris Murdoch). Judith Scoville makes a similar point: “If we are to respond fittingly to the interdependencies and interrelationships of which we and all nature are part, we need to attend to the details, not merely to abstract affirmations.” (“Fitting Ethics to the Land: H. Richard Niebuhr’s Ethic of Responsibility and Ecotheology,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30 (2002): 218.)

McFague has drawn out the difference between observing an Other with a “loving eye” rather than an “arrogant eye.”<sup>25</sup> The arrogant eye simplifies complexity, denies difference, and views everything in self-centered terms, “as either ‘for me’ or ‘against me.’”<sup>26</sup> Approval and appreciation are conditional, and unlikely. In contrast,

The loving eye...acknowledges complexity, mystery, and difference. It recognizes that boundaries exist between the self and the other, that the interests of other persons (and the natural world) are not identical with one’s own, that knowing another takes time and attention.<sup>27</sup>

“Knowing another” requires faithful and concerted efforts to view the world from the other’s perspective, in order to enrich our understanding of what hospitality entails. To begin to understand what any one of millions of nonhuman animals requires to feel safe, we might consult published scientific literature, as well as experienced observers and caregivers. We might seek opportunities for face-to-face encounters, or even virtual ones.<sup>28</sup> In the process of doing that work, we begin to see continuities among the differences between ourselves and our various human and animal guests. “We start from difference to discover kinship.”<sup>29</sup> But these continuities are not just biological and evolutionary; they are

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, some technological elements of modernization – more often denounced for contributing to the loss of face-to-face human connections – are creating opportunities for humans to observe and even interact with more kinds of nonhuman beings than most of us encounter in our day-to-day lives: zoos and sanctuaries often provide live “web cam” views of animals in their care; some zoos also have interactive devices that allow human visitors to play games with animal residents. In the early days of live internet “chats,” a sign-language-using lowland gorilla named Koko corresponded with humans all over the world (Koko’s responses were translated by her human companion): <http://www.zdnet.com/article/koko-the-gorilla-chats-with-humans-on-aol/> (Here is a transcript of the “chat”:  
<http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jel/kokotranscript.html>)

<sup>29</sup> Eric Mount, Jr. *Covenant, Community, and the Common Good: An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 159.

also phenomenological, and it is the phenomenological continuities that give us the most immediate access to the another's point of view.<sup>30</sup>

In these encounters, we cultivate a deeper and more complex awareness of our own membership in what Paul Taylor called "the Earth's Community of Life,"<sup>31</sup> or what many theologians have called "the community of creation"<sup>32</sup> – and of the moral implications of membership. And by welcoming strangers, we enlarge and enrich the community.

To offer hospitality to a stranger is to welcome something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our life-world. On the one hand, hospitality requires a recognition of the stranger's vulnerability in an alien social world. Strangers need shelter and sustenance in their travels, especially when they are moving through a hostile environment. On the other hand, hospitality designates occasions of potential discovery which can open up our narrow, provincial worlds. Strangers have stories to tell which we have never heard before, stories which can direct our seeing and stimulate our imaginations. The stories invite us to view the world from a novel perspective. ...<sup>33</sup>

Even animal-strangers have stories to tell, some literally (through the use of shared languages or symbol systems they have been trained to use), and some through their scars, postures, and attitudes. As we "listen" and observe, our ability to provide life-saving/justice-restoring hospitality increases – along with the responsibility to do so.

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<sup>30</sup> H. Peter Steeves, "Deep Community: Phenomenology's Disclosure of the Common Good," *Between the Species* (Summer & Fall, 1994): 98-105.

<sup>31</sup> Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 44.

<sup>32</sup> The phrase "community of creation" has been used by many writers, but see especially Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010); Jurgen Moltmann in his book *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985); Randy S. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 2.



## Sustaining Community through Hospitality

Whether in theological or secular usage, the concept of “community” carries a normative dimension that implies solidarity, interdependence, mutuality, concern for the common good, and shared responsibility for the well-being of others, including (especially) those who may not have the capacity to reciprocate.<sup>34</sup> In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Western communitarian theorists began to use these ideals – combined with insights from social theory – to advance a robust critique of, and alternative to, the radical individualism and exclusivity of social contract theories of justice.<sup>35</sup> The communitarians argue that there can be no individual “self” without a community of others from which to differentiate. Human beings are deeply relational and inextricably interdependent. They argue that humans are not motivated entirely by self-interest and will occasionally subvert their own interests for a greater good. Communitarians also recognize that the history, traditions, and context of a community will shape not only its individual members, but also its collective identity and common good – what is necessary for individual and communal well-being, and therefore, what justice requires. And they argue that this common good might, in some

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<sup>34</sup> For more on this concept of “community,” see, e.g., Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), especially chapter 8; Rod Preece and Lorna Chamberlain, *Animal Welfare and Human Values* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993), chapter 14; Gary Steiner, *Animals and the Moral Community: Mental Life, Moral Status, and Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>35</sup> Just a few of the formative Western communitarian theorists and works include: Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983). An environmental analogue that came to be known as eco-communitarianism was rooted in the Deep Ecology movement. See, e.g., J. Baird Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” in *The Animal Rights/Environmental Ethics Debate*, ed. Eugene Hargrove (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992). I have described a biocentric communitarianism that falls between these two systems in its scope of justice (Matevia, 2012, unpub. dissertation).

circumstances, take precedence over the (non-basic) interests of individual community members.<sup>36</sup>

Members of a communitarian society “conceive their identity... as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part.”<sup>37</sup> The self-identity that takes shape in the community of creation is biocentric: it acknowledges that all living beings, not just humans, have inherent or intrinsic worth and moral standing. When we begin to see ourselves as members of the community of creation, we develop an expansive, more-than-human view of the common good, and a desire to work for it.<sup>38</sup> A biocentric communitarian society thrives on difference and variation. Hospitality is “essential to any community that respects difference. It is the beginning of moral obligation.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Moral Foundations for a Christian Hospitality that Welcomes Animals**

The biblical witness and warrants urging hospitality toward other humans are numerous and familiar.<sup>40</sup> Less familiar – perhaps because we are not trained to see them as such – are the biblical examples of hospitality to animals. Laura Hobgood-Oster recounts several in her analysis of the texts. In Genesis 24:31, Rebekah offers water to Abraham’s

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<sup>36</sup> Feminist critics of communitarianism have raised important arguments against some communitarian ideals: for example, in its respect for local history and community identity, communitarianism can preserve institutions and traditions that are regarded by other communities as oppressive or exploitative. See, e.g., Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, *The Politics of Community: A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate* (Toronto, CN: University of Toronto Press, 1993). My very brief description of communitarianism here risks coming across as uncritical and idealistic; we can elaborate and clarify in our discussion session.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 150.

<sup>38</sup> With Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, I consider the common good to be “a ‘pluralistic socio-ecological common good’ that seeks the good of all and is arrived at through public interaction that expresses difference and seeks to include the perspectives of the most vulnerable.” Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 35.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Mount, Jr., 159.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Genesis 18:2-5, 24:31, Exodus 22:21, 23:9, Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 10:19, 2 Kings 6:22-23, Isaiah 58:7, Matthew 5:43-44, 25:31-46, Luke 9:58, 10:30-37, 14:12-14, Acts 28:2,7, Romans 12:13, 15:5-7, Galatians 5:14, Titus 1:7-8, Hebrews 13:1-2, 1 Peter 4:9, 3 John 1:5.

servant and his camels. Likewise in Psalm 104: “Praise for divine hospitality and for the centrality of animals to the whole picture of life on Earth is central to the vision of this psalm.”<sup>41</sup> (We could add that when God speaks to Job from the whirlwind, Job is reminded that God extends hospitality to lions and ravens (Job 38:39-41).) The extra-canonical literature is an equally rich and suggestive source of guidance, according to Hobgood-Oster; she points to the “striking and abundant” stories of encounters between animals and the early Christian saints, and to the examples of hospitality and compassion extended to the animals by the saints.<sup>42</sup> She laments that in this post-modern era, these stories “are rarely told” in worship services or Sunday School. “Yet at no other time has the question of welcoming, including, and making space for animals been so vitally important.”<sup>43</sup>

When read from the context of membership in the community of creation, these texts are can be especially authoritative and instructive. A “motif” emerges and signifies that the comfort and safety of all animals matters to their creator. As fellow creatures bound in covenant, humans are obligated to offer that hospitality when we encounter the need. Inspired and infused by that covenant, we should be eager to do so, though it will often require learning new ways of being hospitable.

The covenant that binds the community of creation is the universal “Noahic” covenant established between God and “*every living creature*” (Genesis 9:8-17):

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ‘As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 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. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be

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<sup>41</sup> Laura Hobgood-Oster, *The Friends We Keep: Unleashing Christianity’s Compassion for Animals*, 118.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 129. See also her book *Holy Dogs & Asses: Animals in the Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), especially her accounts of hospitality-to-animals shown by saints Jerome and Brigit.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

a flood to destroy the earth.’ God said, ‘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: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.’ God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.’<sup>44</sup>

As John Olley has pointed out, there are not two separate covenants here – one made with Noah and another “lesser one” made everything else; there is a single covenant in which Noah and the other animals are equals and partners.<sup>45</sup> In five nearly identical phrases in this text, Noah and “every living creature” are paired (and five more times, the covenant is declared between God and “all flesh”). But in our retellings in churches and Sunday schools, the universal Noahic covenant becomes a covenant “between God and man.” Like the missing hospitality stories lamented by Hobgood-Oster, the animals are lost to memory.

To be sure, Genesis 9 packs some “mixed blessings,” as Olley puts it.<sup>46</sup> The text opens with a declaration that the “fear and dread” of human beings “shall rest on every animal of the earth” and that “every moving thing that lives shall be food” for humans.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (New York: Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989/1995). (In case the point is missed, the phrase “every living creature” is repeated five times in verses 10, 12, 15, 16, and 17.)

<sup>45</sup> John Olley, “Mixed Blessings for the Animals: The Contrasts of Genesis 9,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, eds. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 130.

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

<sup>47</sup> Difficulties are introduced by other covenants, as well, such as Genesis 15, in which Abraham is instructed to sacrifice certain animals in order to “seal” the covenant made between God and Abraham. As an aside: it’s important to critique covenant, even as we use it to knit together a theology of hospitality: covenant commitments can be used to justify harmful or degrading rituals, traditions, and regimes. Covenant communities can become biased and exclusionary. But these are corruptions of covenantal intent. See Carol Robb and Carl Casebolt, “Introduction,” in *Covenant for a New Creation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991).

Yet the overarching message is one of a just universal order in which *all creation* participates:

(T)he story symbolizes a cosmic covenant that is built into the earth ecosphere and the effects of which are empirically verifiable. There is a rational order of interdependence – which Christians also see as a moral, purposive order of relationality and ecological integrity – that appears to be universal and that demands respectful adaptability from moral agents.<sup>48</sup>

If hospitality is, as Eric Mount Jr. suggests, “the prerequisite for covenant,”<sup>49</sup> then the Noahic covenant confirms that “the stranger” can be human or animal, and our practice must adapt accordingly.

### **Restorative Justice through Hospitality**

Hospitality is integral to covenant and communitarian traditions, and will “do justice” for animals as long as those traditions allow it. I hope I have begun to demonstrate here that, in theory, they do; in practice, they must do better. That is to say, the humans who embody these traditions must do better. Caring for animals that have been displaced, starved, wounded, poisoned, or oppressed by human activity is far more than a *noblesse oblige*; it is constitutive of a fully realized system of justice.

Laura Hobgood-Oster offers a few of the ways we can enact hospitality for animals:

Sometimes it will mean simply leaving spaces alone, not encroaching on the homes of other animals; leaving forests standing, wetlands intact. Other times it will involve creating spaces for animals who have already been displaced, providing sanctuaries or wilderness preserves. Regardless, the call to Christians for radical hospitality in the twenty-first century is a call that encompasses many species, not just humans.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Olley, 130.

<sup>49</sup> Mount, Jr., 159.

<sup>50</sup> Hobgood-Oster, 139.

Other kinds of hospitality will take greater effort, and more ingenuity: building wildlife corridors over highways; creating ways for migratory land animals to negotiate border walls; completely removing hydroelectric dams from critical habitats, and creating more “fish ladders” and other bypass mechanisms at other dams; reducing the use of pesticides and herbicides on agricultural crops; dampening or otherwise reducing industrial noise levels on a seasonal basis...

Christian communities must also be vocal and visible advocates for these policies. They must participate in public meetings, and bring the discussions into the church: they must talk about culling deer, geese, and coyotes, raise money for a restoration project, invite a conservation biologist to talk to Sunday School classes. My interest in pursuing Hobgood-Oster’s retrieval of hospitality is in finding a way to talk meaningfully about justice for animals in sermons, Sunday School, and bible studies. A treatise on theories of justice will put a congregation to sleep. Showing the connection between justice and hospitality could resonate more deeply.

### **A final thought**

In a lovely essay for *High Country News*, a publication that covers western environmental issues, Ana Maria Spagna describes a visit she made to the fish ladder at the Rocky Reach Dam on the Columbia River. Hydroelectric dams are treacherous for salmon and other anadromous creatures that use fresh water rivers to migrate between the inland streams where they are born, and where they return to die, and the ocean, where they mature. To reduce the carnage and population loss, many dams now feature these “ladders”

- more like staircases - to help fish bypass the deadly turbines. In that accommodation, Spagna sees a miracle of hospitality:<sup>51</sup>

*A digital ticker above the emergency exit lists the number of each species that passes through the dam. So far today the video monitor has counted 238 chinook, 242 steelhead, 28 sockeye, three lamprey. The miracle, I realize, is not just that the fish survive, but that they're shepherded past this dangerous place. By biologists, engineers, activists, judges and ratepayers. We've made mistakes, God knows. No surprise there. The surprise is that, despite rancor and derision, despite terrorist protections and antiquated facilities, despite our ignorance, even, about why salmon runs swell or deplete, we can still, collectively, decide to spend \$107 million to try to get juvenile fish downstream. Just so they can come back up. What hard-wired instinct is this? In a world of such weight and trouble, to care for a creature shorter than my shin.*

This is hospitality. If it is a "hard-wired instinct," so much the better.

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<sup>51</sup> Ana Maria Spagna, "Grace Behind Glass," *High Country News* (November 8, 2010); <http://www.hcn.org/issues/42.19/grace-behind-glass>