

STATEMENT ARCHBISHOP THABO

It's an never ending cycle. Is it not? Its demands personal responsibility and care for creation.

Listen to this story. . . .farmed animals eat grass and bushes, and two thirds of land in South Africa is suitable for grazing. But we force animals into “factory farms”, where conditions are unhealthy and cruel. Animals are crowded together and forced to eat corn or soyabeans. To prevent the inevitable spread of disease from stress, overcrowding and lack of vitamin D, animals are fed a steady diet of antibiotics. Animals often develop antibiotic-resistant bacteria in their guts, which contaminates the food chain and poses a threat to human health.

The meat eggs and milk from these animals goes to feed our unhealthy lifestyle and we struggle with obesity and diabetes. The animals die without ever feeling grass underneath their feet or fresh air in their lungs. Not only is this cruel to animals, but the intensive livestock industry contributes to deforestation, reduction of biodiversity, pollution and water degradation. Globally the livestock sector is responsible for a major proportion of greenhouse gas emissions measured. It is also the single largest user of land by humans. Livestock production accounts for 70% of all agricultural land and 30% of the land surface of the planet. It is also responsible for massive deforestation – 70% of previous forested land in the Amazon is occupied by pastures, and feed crops cover a large part of the remainder. Factory farming is not a cheap, efficient solution to world hunger. For every 100 food calories of edible crops fed to livestock, we get back just 30 calories in the form of meat and dairy. That’s a 70% loss.

So why should I as a person of faith care?

Firstly because we are called to care for the Earth. The very first mandate that we as human beings were given was to “work the land and care for it” (Gen 2:15). We focus on the working of the land but forget to care for it! We can no longer use the Earth in such an unsustainable manner and reducing our meat consumption is one key way of reducing our impact on this beautiful blue Planet.

Secondly because each and every living thing is beloved by God.

In the Creation story God created living creatures and “saw that it was good” even before God created humans!

. . . And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. . . . And God saw that it was good.” [Genesis 1:21-25]

We can see from the beginning that God values all life. God regards animals as good in their own right, not because they would be good for humans (who were still to come in the Creation story.)

Like a good parent, God loves and cares for all that God has brought into being.

"He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry." [Ps 147: 9]

"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing." [Ps 145:15-16]

Should the Gospel not be good news for animals too?

We pray to God:

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.

What kind of Kingdom is God's?

What is His will?

We get some idea of the answers through the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

"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." [Isaiah 11:6-9]

So God's will is for peace on Earth.

Is it God's will that an animal should undergo cruelty in a factory farm in order to provide a meal for me? Should I not rather as a person of faith live mindfully, caring for all God's creatures?

What I dream of for my children is a free, revered and well cared planet with plenty for everyone and creation.