

# **Where do we go from here?**

An overview of the thoughts & actions of  
Christian Vegetarian Association UK

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## **My Spiritual Journey**

I have always considered myself a 'back room boy' an organiser, I am not a theologian or an accomplished speaker. Also, I cannot speak for all CVAUK members. So the best contribution I can make to this conference must be based on my own experience as co-founder and administer CVAUK. I sincerely believe that the driving force behind my endeavours to establish and maintain a Christian vegetarian organisation can be traced back to two encounters I have had with God.

My first encounter was in 1986, a few months after giving my life to Jesus. It all started when my church ran a 6 weeks "Saints Alive" course. At the end of the course we asked God to baptise us in the Holy Spirit, but nothing happened to me. Early the next morning while getting ready to go to work, I was extremely disappointed and very angry with God who had so obviously rejected me. However, at one point during my ramblings and ravings, I promised God that no matter what happened, God could ignore me as much as he liked but I would still follow him and would never leave him. What happened next was not only unexpected but completely overpowering; I experienced an amazing feeling of joy as I was drenched in God's love.

I finally managed to get into my car and remember thinking, if a policeman saw me now he would think I was drunk. How I managed to control myself during the next three days I do not know. That was 24 years ago and I still have the residue of that love and joy today.

My second encounter with God happened a few years later, we had become members of a well attended Evangelical free church. I was taking the dogs for a walk before church and was feeling very happy and singing some praise songs to myself, when all of a sudden I became very tearful and distraught and received this message "Why are you hiding my glory"; that was it, nothing more. However, that Sunday morning I stood up before the whole church and described what had happened. After consulting with the other elders the Senior elder stated that he believed that I had received a word from God and that he knew why.

Apparently an amazing healing had happened two weeks earlier at one of our training courses chaired by Jennifer Rees-Larcombe, a disabled Christian in a wheel chair. During prayers, a new, young Christian lady felt a strong urge to inform Jennifer Rees-Larcombe that God wanted to heal her; and she was healed. She came into the church in a wheel chair and left holding the wheel chair above her head. However, the Elders were very worried and did not immediately broadcast the event, their concern; how would a young Christian be able to cope with the publicity? However, after my message they immediately organised a church meeting attended by Jennifer Rees-Larcombe and her husband, to explain what happened.

Looking back, I now believe that these encounters with God were designed to both strengthen my faith, and test my obedience to His will. These experiences left me in no doubt that God exists and how we respond to his guidance and commands is significant.

## **Why CVAUK**

*For a history of Veg4Lent & CVAUK please see booklet  
"A short History of Christian Vegetarianism in the U.K.."*

When I retired in 1996 my main concern was the welfare of animals. Due to the disability of my wife Audrie I joined my nearest church, St Mary's, Liphook in 1998. To my surprise my new vicar encouraged and approved articles I wrote on the care of animals, in the church magazine. However, he left and during the interregnum a church leader told me to "take my funny ideas elsewhere", however, I was convinced that the lord wanted me to stay, so I stayed. Our new Vicar however, considered Animal Blessing Services too sentimental. Why is it alright to ask God to bless humans but too sentimental to bless animals?

It soon became obvious that vegetarianism was going to be the final direction of my work. I felt like Jonah and said “O no Lord not vegetarianism that is an impossible task, any attempt to discuss a plant based diet will meet with even greater opposition, anger and denial. The scale of my task was soon confirmed when a vegetarian acquaintance in the evangelical church I had just left was given an ultimatum, give up being a vegetarian or leave the church. As he was in full time ministry he gave up his vegetarian diet.

### **The objectives of CVAUK**

To support and encourage vegetarian Christians in the UK.

To share with non-vegetarian Christians how a vegetarian diet can add meaning to their faith.

To show all those with ears to hear that a plant-based way of life represents good, responsible Christian stewardship to all of God's creation.

CVAUK is affiliated to the "International Vegetarian Union" and the "Christian Vegetarian Association" in America, who have been extremely supportive of CVAUK.

Over the past few years CVAUK has endeavoured to challenge both the Church and Environmental Organisations who ignore our vegetarian message. Many only favour lifestyle adjustments, such as driving smaller cars, reducing your energy and recycling. Rarely do we hear our church, or ecology group calling for a move towards a plant-based diet. This strategy may be politically wise, in that it does not "scare away" meat eating Christians from the church or members from the ecology group. However, this failure to encourage a plant-based diet, profoundly undermines the credibility of these institutions.

### **The Philosophy behind CVAUK.**

Down through history there have been sages and philosophers who have taught that within each of us there is a part of us that extends compassion to all of God's creation. However, in today's world the future of humankind must depend on more than just a few wise people understanding this concept.

If we are going to survive, we need an ever-increasing numbers of people to incorporate this understanding into their everyday lives. The health and survival of the human species may ultimately depend on how deeply we grasp the reality of our dependence on God and our understanding & compassion towards all of God's creation.

CVAUK believe that Christians are called to transform their minds by bringing them in line with the teachings of Jesus. How can we say we love God and his creation, then refuse to even acknowledge the violence and cruelty of a meat based diet, especially when we do not need meat or dairy to live long and healthy lives?

As Christians, our brutality towards God's other creatures and our pollution of his creation, should be a “wake up” call. Especially in today's world which is seeing a massive increase in meat consumption, due to the rise in affluence of countries like China & India who view the adoption of a meat based diet as a status symbol.

I am convinced that with all its delusions and broken dreams, our world today is still a place where our hearts can meet and grow. There is horror and agony here, yes, and it is at times overwhelming. But there are also countless opportunities for the illumination of beauty and the awakening of love. We are here to live, not merely survive. We are here to fully express and celebrate the gifts that God has given us, to be good stewards and care for a world he declared good, to be God's ambassadors by ruling in his image of love.

So, as Christians we do have a choice, to be accomplices in this violent world system, or follow the radical teachings of Jesus by becoming witnesses to God's violence-free, altruistic, new world; God's Peaceable Kingdom. However, in these troubled times this hope can seem like a romantic dream. Especially as the news is always filled with cruelty, violence and humanity's failures but CVAUK believe the real good news can be found, not in our technological advances but through our obedience to the prime directive of Jesus, love.

CVAUK believes that every creature should be allowed to enjoy God's gift of life and that humanity has no right to take that gift from them. However, due to our indifference to Jesus' message of love, Christians continue to sanction violence and cruelty even to their own species where, in this affluent world, 20,000 children a day still die from hunger and poverty. Many say "the problems are too big, we cannot do anything about it". CVAUK believe that Christians can make a significant contribution towards God's new peaceable kingdom, here and now; by simply removing meat and dairy from their diet.

Jesus is the apotheosis of being human, and Christians who follow his non-violent teachings are part of the new humanity that he brought into existence through his resurrection.

### **Further experiences of myself and our members.**

About 6 years ago I arranged a meeting with my house group leader and preacher, to explain my reasons for being a vegetarian. During the meeting he told me that "he would die if he gave up meat" when I pointed out that I had been a vegetarian for 15 years and was not dead, he lost his temper and told me to leave. However, I still remained a member of his house group and a few months later at the end of a meeting, he leaned over and asked if I approved of animal experiments, when I said no, he lost his temper again and stormed out of the room. Even though our verbal exchange had been private he wrote a letter to the vicar falsely accusing me of damaging the faith of a new Christian in the group. When asked, the lady concerned informed the vicar that she had not been aware of our conversation.

Most CVAUK members have experienced similar encounters within their church, very few have found a church receptive to our message. Methodist and Salvation Army members are very surprised to hear that their founders embraced a plant based diet. However, that knowledge did not make them more receptive to our message.

Robin, a CVAUK member relates the following experiences:

*A Salvation Army Major told me that if the Salvation Army were to become a vegetarian church, she would have to join a different denomination.*

*A member of the same Salvation Army church said "get behind me vegan" (instead of "get behind me Satan). The same person told me that she was helping to create a banner featuring a zoo, when in fact it was Noah's Ark.*

*I took a bag of vegan products, ie washing-up liquid, to my local Anglican Church for them to use. I was told not to bring any more. Having put a carton of soya milk on the refreshments table, I was told to not do so in the future as the people doing the teas and coffees found it "too complicated" to have both soya and cows milk displayed.*

*On another occasion I gave some vegan information to the vicar of the same church, herself a vegetarian, and she rather abruptly informed me that she was far too busy to look at it.*

*Beth a CVAUK member and a Mormon wanted to discuss with church leaders why the church never referred to the Word of Wisdom Sect 89 verse 12 & 13:*

*12. Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; NEVERTHELESS they are to be used SPARINGLY.*

*13. And it is PLEASING unto me that THEY SHOULD NOT BE USED, ONLY in times of winter, or of cold, or famine. (In other words only when absolutely necessary).*

*Over a 2 year period Beth sent letters about her concern to not only her local church but also the highest authority in the USA, in an attempt to receive some clarification. Finally she had an official meeting with her Stake President and Bishop. To cut a long story short, they refused to address her concerns and she was told*

that "her interpretation was wrong" and she was not to correspond on the subject anymore. At the end of the meeting the Bishop said: You are enforcing **your** thinking .....you are doing nothing for the world.

### **Why do Christians try to use the Bible to refute our message of compassion and mercy?**

The main stumbling block to CVAUK's message is anthropocentrism: interpreting the universe exclusively in terms of human values rather than God's values. Resulting in indifference to animal suffering on the one hand, and the denial of our destruction of God's creation, on the other.

To this end Christians turn to isolated passages from the Bible to justify their attitude. So CVAUK now recommend that vegetarians approach Christians with moral rather than Biblical reasons.

To illustrate this point, after 8 years my new vicar finally became very supportive by organising, with my help, and then leading, an environment course during Lent 2008 and 2009, from which we formed a monthly Ecology Prayer group also led by the Vicar. This gave me the platform I needed to gently voice my concerns about the animals and the environment and our need to consider lifestyle changes. However, half the people soon left the group on the pretext that "we were making God too small", I suppose they meant we should leave everything to God; a good excuse to do nothing. To my surprise the Vicar actually went vegetarian during Lent 2010 and just when we appeared to be making progress, the Vicar left. The good news is that after 18 months the Ecology Prayer group still meet once a month and are quite happy to include my concerns in our prayers and activities.

A further illustration. In 2009 I was discussing vegetarianism on the United Christian Broadcasting email/phone-in "The big Discussion". The first half hour I based my reasoning on the Bible. During musical interludes the presenter stated that many emails were too nasty to read over the air. I then decided to change my tactics and used moral reasons, the number of calls/emails reduced considerably. By removing any reference to the Bible from my argument, dissenting Christians could no longer challenge my reasoning.

### **Our interpretation of the Bible.**

CVAUK believe that the Bible should not be used to justify the ways of humankind but seek the face of God.

*Walter Wink wrote: Anyone who needs scriptural guidance to decide that destroying the ecosystem is wrong is a moral idiot.*

Is the Bible infallible, or do we need to identify "divine inspiration" from "human manipulation". Do Christians need some guiding principles to direct their understanding? CVAUK believe that Jesus has given Christians a Prime Directive to help us distinguish God's message, from human prejudices and passions: 'Love the Lord your God..... and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." In both Jewish and Christian traditions these two commandments should rule supreme. So any interpretation that contradicts these two commands cannot represent divine inspiration. This approach was supported by Pope John Paul II who stated: *Any interpretation of the Bible that contradicts a rational understanding of God's goodness and mercy is incorrect.*

To assist our understanding, Christ did all he could to divert our attention from the letter of the law (what is written), and direct our attention to obeying the spirit of law (the basic principle). In brief: Get the spirit of what I am telling you and then try to apply it in the ever changing circumstances of life ; I am not giving you a rule of thumb for every possible contingency. I am giving you intelligence, I am giving you free will, and, above all, I am giving you of My Spirit; take and use all these to discover the true character of God.

Jesus confirms that his instructions were not complete and that he has more to teach us through the Holy Spirit. *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth..... and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16v12,13)*

In other words the written word alone can never tell you all you need to know in every future circumstance you find yourself in. The Bible does not contain all that Jesus wanted to teach us, this will only be made known to us when we “need it” or are “ready to receive it”, via the holy spirit.

**So why do vegetarian Christians see our diet as a response to Jesus’ message of faith, hope and love while carnivore Christians do not?**

*Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth - Albert Einstein*

*The following are Extracts from “Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows” by Melani Joy Ph.D - Professor of psychology.*

*We all know what a vegetarian is—a person who doesn't eat meat. Though some people may choose to become vegetarian to improve their health, many vegetarians stop eating meat because they don't believe it's ethical to eat animals. Most of us realise that vegetarianism is an expression of one's ethical orientation, so when we think of a vegetarian, we don't simply think of a person who's just like everyone else except that he or she doesn't eat meat. We think of a person who has a certain philosophical outlook, whose choice not to eat meat is a reflection of a deeper belief system in which killing animals for human ends is considered unethical. We understand that vegetarianism reflects not merely a dietary orientation, but a way of life.*

*In contrast, the term "meat eater" isolates the practice of consuming meat, as though it were divorced from a person's beliefs and values. It implies that the person who eats meat is acting outside of a belief system. But is eating meat truly a behaviour that exists independent of a belief system? Do we eat pigs and not dogs because we don't have a belief system when it comes to eating animals?*

*We don't see meat eating as we do vegetarianism as a choice, based on a set of assumptions about animals, our world, and ourselves. Rather, we see it as a given, the "natural" thing to do, the way things have always been and the way things will always be. We eat animals without thinking about what we are doing and why because the belief system that underlies this behaviour is invisible. This invisible belief system is what I call carnism.*

*It is a sight to behold. Children giggle and clap, mothers and fathers smile fondly, and everyone seems determined to touch and be touched by the pigs, cows, and chickens. Yet these people, who feel so deeply compelled to make contact with the animals will soon leave the grocery store with bags containing beef, ham, and chicken. These people, who would undoubtedly rush to the aid of one of the barnyard animals were it suffering, are somehow not outraged that ten billion of them are suffering needlessly every year, within the confines of an industry that is left entirely unaccountable for its actions. Where has our empathy gone?*

*In order to consume the meat of the very species we had caressed but minutes before, we must believe so fully in the justness of eating animals that we are spared the consciousness of what we are doing. To this end, we are taught to accept a series of myths that maintain the carnistic system and to ignore the inconsistencies in the stories we tell ourselves. Violent ideologies rely on promoting fiction as fact and discouraging any critical thinking that threatens to expose this truth.*

*There is a vast mythology surrounding meat, but all the myths are in one way or another related to what I refer to as the Three Ns of Justification: eating meat is **normal, natural, and necessary**. The Three Ns have been invoked to justify all exploitative systems, from African slavery to the Nazi Holocaust. When an ideology is in its prime, these myths rarely come under scrutiny. However, when the system finally collapses, the Three Ns are recognized as ludicrous.*

*The Three Ns are so ingrained in our social consciousness that they guide our actions without our even having to think about them. They think for us. We have internalised them so fully that we often live in accordance with their tenets (a religious doctrine that is proclaimed as true without proof) as though they were universal truths rather than widely held opinions.*

*They alleviate the moral discomfort we might otherwise feel when eating meat; if we have a good excuse for*

*our behaviours, we feel less-guilty about them. The Three Ns essentially act as mental and emotional blinders, masking the discrepancies in our beliefs and behaviours toward animals and explaining them away, if we do happen to catch on.*

### **So where does CVAUK go from here?**

CVAUK members are wanderers in a lonely wilderness, trying every tool they know to reach non-vegetarian Christians with our violence-free message.

Should we worry about why people initially become vegetarian? A CVAUK member Elizabeth wrote: *The 'system' seemed back-to-front. I only discovered the many reasons for becoming a veggie after I became one.*

A man in an old Jewish joke constantly prayed that he would win the lottery. Eventually, he shook his fist heavenward and demanded that God explain why he wasn't answering the man's fervent prayer. "My son," God replied, "you need to come halfway to meet me. You could at least buy a ticket!"

Through witnessing, CVAUK should encourage Christians to buy a ticket and start their journey towards the Peaceable Kingdom.

Why, because our land needs God's healing hand. Oceans are being poisoned and raped, forests are being trashed and with them our biodiversity - plants and wild animals.

Soil is degrading and deserts spreading, water and air are being polluted and fresh water is disappearing. It is vandalism on a massive scale and each act threatens the stability of life.

In 1 Chronicles 7.14 God tells us:

*If my people, who are called by my name, will **humble** themselves and **pray** and **seek my face** and turn from their **wicked ways**, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will **heal their land**.*

So we should be **Humble**: We are to be servant kings, not tyrants.

**Pray**: We must take our concerns to God and seek His guidance.

**Seek His Face**: We must get to know his character of love before we can act in his image.

**What are these wicked ways?** God and the teachings of Jesus have made it perfectly clear that he hates cruelty and violence.

*And God said to Noah: I have determined to make an end to all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them (Genesis 6 v 13).*

*And God said through Isaiah: They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11 v 9)*

*Jesus said twice: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9 v 13 and 12 v 7).*

**Heal their Land**: At the right time heaven will come down to earth and inaugurate the new Peaceable kingdom.

Fundamentally, our work is about engaging with the issues raised and making deliberate, positive decisions: living with a purpose, rather than living by default - indeed, living according to God's purpose, rather than living according to the world's standards.

Too often Christians can use their faith as an excuse to take a step back and avoid the difficult choices, rather than allowing it to influence the whole of their lives: we fail to meet the challenge of being in the world, but

not of the world (John 17.14-15). As such, we miss too many opportunities to live as God intended, to be salt and light to others, and to shape the world in which we live.

*As St Augustine once said:*

*Without God we cannot; without us God will not”.*

CVAUK members may be in the desert, where we will feel lonely, but it is a place where God's loving voice can be heard in our hearts and witnessed through our thoughts and actions.

Bruce Friedrich PETA writes:

*Vegetarianism allows me to live my values -- to "pray ceaselessly," as St. Paul puts it: Every time I sit down to eat, I cast my lot: for mercy, against misery; for the oppressed, against the oppressor; and for compassion, against cruelty. There is a lot of suffering in the world, but how much suffering can be addressed with literally no time or effort on our part? We can just stop supporting it, by making different choices.*

So, where do we go from here? Has vegetarianism a future in the Christian faith and church? Since the birth of Jesus, God's non-violent, yes vegan Kingdom has been here on earth, so it is not a journey in space but a journey in time. But like the man in the Jewish joke, as followers of Jesus we must start that journey by buying a ticket, but this ticket can only be purchased by giving our lives, including our lifestyle, to Jesus Christ.

Thank you, any Questions