

Jesus Ate Fish, Right?

A Study on Veganism and Christianity in Sweden Today

Degree of Master of Science (Two Years)
International Master's Programme in Human Ecology
CPS - Culture, Power and Sustainability
30 ECTS

Human Ecology Division
Department of Human Geography
Faculty of Social Sciences
Lund University

Author: Rebecka Blomberg
Supervisor: Thomas Malm
Term: Spring Term 2018

Department:	Human Geography
Address:	Geocentrum 1, Sölvegatan 12, 223 62 Lund
Telephone:	046 – 222 17 59

Supervisor:	Thomas Malm
-------------	-------------

Title and Subtitle:	Jesus Ate Fish, Right?: A Study on Veganism and Christianity in Sweden Today.
Author:	Rebecka Blomberg

Examination:	Master's Thesis (two year)
--------------	----------------------------

Term:	Spring term 2018
-------	------------------

Abstract

Why do Christians become vegans and how do they motivate their vegan lifestyle? I have talked to fifteen Christian individuals that have considered their diets and all of them have at one point in their lives thought about becoming vegans. Thirteen of them were vegans during this study. One pastor feels that she cannot become a vegan yet because of her line of work and a man stopped being a vegan because it was too hard to do it alone. However these fifteen people all agree that they as Christians have a moral obligation to protect the earth and animals that God created. This is mainly based on the interpretation of two Biblical passages: the Genesis Creation Narrative and the Great Commandment. The most common reason to become vegan was animal ethics, followed by environmental concerns and health. Although most of the informants felt that their faith encouraged their veganism, their vegan identity came in conflict with their relation to the Church and their parish, which created a cognitive dissonance in their lives.

Key words: Human ecology, veganism, vegan, Christian, religion, cognitive dissonance theory, environmentalism, food, animal ethics, Sweden.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Aim and Research Questions	6
Methods	7
On Christian Denominations in Sweden	10
Analytical Framework	12
Animal Ethics and the Bible	12
Cognitive Dissonance Theory	13
We-hood and Us-hood	16
Findings	17
Being a Vegan	18
Referring to the Bible	19
Network	21
Living Sustainably	21
Church Responsibility	22
Triangle of Association	24
Love, Grace and Feminism	27
Discussion	29
Church, Ideology and Feminism	29
Based on the Bible	30
The Genesis Creation Narrative and the Great Commandment	31
Triangle of Dissonance	33
Christian Vegan Us-Hood	35
Christian Responsibility	37
Conclusion	38
Future Research	38
Bibliography	39
Appendix 1	44

Introduction

At a gathering I told Kevin, a friend of mine who goes to the same Christian community as I, about a situation a couple of years back. My relatives and I had a visitor over, at our summerhouse by the sea on the west coast of Sweden: a convinced and fairly strict vegan. The vegan visitor brought with him a beverage marketed as a healthy alternative that he purchased in a common food store. After drinking about a third of the bottle he realises that this drink contains honey, which he cannot have because he is a vegan, so he lashes out with panic in his eyes and pours the rest of the drink out in the sink. Listening to the story, my non-vegan friend Kevin raises his right eyebrow and says rather ironically, “well, I rarely buy food that contains plutonium, but when it happens that I do buy it by mistake, I would definitely not throw it out but eat the plutonium, that one time, so it won’t go to waste”. I find it rather strange that my Christian friend would in such a sarcastic manner, defend the logics of being a vegan but not an environmentalist. Our guest that summer had a strong belief in veganism and animal rights but did not take it one step further to realise that throwing away food is a huge waste, that a lot of the clothes he buys might be sown by children or that travelling by airplane contributes a great deal to the emission of greenhouse gases. Of course, my friend Kevin could never buy food containing plutonium. That is absurd. However, the right of being a vegan in Sweden today that he defends is a right only because that is a possible choice to be made in Sweden today. It is a choice made in a core country state where the welfare and inflow of capital will provide a surplus of food (Wallerstein, 2004). Hence is it possible for my vegan friend to spill a drink because he knows he has access to clean water and he will not have to eat meat in order to survive.

My own interest as a researcher for this subject stems from my personal life. Since the year of my confirmation I have been a Christian and during that period I became quite active within my parish, which led to an interest in Christian history and theology. My background is in a conservative Christian community within the Church of Sweden. However, I was an environmentalist before I became a Christian and merging these two lifestyles became a point of interest in my everyday life. When I moved to Lund and began my studies in environmental science, I was quite annoyed and disappointed that there was barely any discussion about environmental issues, nature or responsibility in the parishes and religious groups that I visited. Of course my commitment to environmentalism affects my lifestyle, and although I eat mostly vegan food, I cannot call myself a vegan with a clean conscience because I do occasionally eat meat and other animal products. In my experience though, the lack of discussion within the church towards this topic is seen as a less important and trivial question. I have encountered this attitude with people of all ages within the Church.

The informants that participated in this study were asked to define a vegan and their answers to that question will be further developed in the findings. However, it is possible to preliminarily define a vegan in an everyday manner, where it is “a person who does not eat or use any animal products such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, or leather”

(Vegan, Cambridge Dictionary). Basically, vegans are against the use or consumption of products that contain any material or substance that is derived from animals: both land animals, fish, shellfish, by-products of slaughter, dairy, insects, and so on. (Vegetarian Society). The approach of veganism differs from the vegetarian. A vegetarian is less strict and would be defined as “a person who does not eat meat for health or religious reasons or because they want to avoid being cruel to animals” (Vegetarian, Cambridge Dictionary). I would argue that the religious, health and moral aspect goes for veganism as well, which I explore in this thesis. There are also a number of new terms defining lifestyles today: a flexitarian, for one, describes a person who mainly have a vegetarian food preference but that would eat meat occasionally (Flexitarian, Cambridge Dictionary).

According to the organization Djurens Rätt (in English, Animal Rights), four percent of the Swedish population is a vegan, and one out of ten is either a vegan or a vegetarian today (Animal Rights Sweden). Scarborough et al. (2014) has shown that a vegan diet, that discard meat and other products based on animals, is a good way to mitigate the contributions of greenhouse gases that induce climate change. The production of a diet high in meat has a 2.5 times higher contribution of greenhouse gas emissions than an average vegan diet (Ibid.). It is more efficient to produce protein through vegetable sources rather than through animal sources, because the amount of protein available correlates to the amount of greenhouse gas emissions (Carlsson-Kanyama and Gonzalez, 2009). Also, due to the basic ecological fact that animals are at a higher trophic level, being directly or indirectly dependent on exergy stored in plants, more vegetarian and vegan food than meat can be produced per areal (Miller and Spoolman, 2012:62-64). The choice to eat vegan food will most likely make an extensive contribution to the sustainability efforts making the planet viable, tomorrow and for future generations. It is important to note, the Living Planet Report from WWF (2016:78-79) highlighting how Sweden, in global hectares per capita, is one of the most resource draining countries in the world today, and if the consumption of an average Swede were the norm it would require about four planets to support the world’s population. This ecological footprint measures consumption and targets specifically the areas of: demand for cropland; demand for grazing land; demand for water ecosystems; demand for forest; demand for biologically productive land to build on; and the carbon footprint (Ibid.:74-77). Further reading in this interesting area of environmentalism and emissions that connects to several important approaches and analyses it from different angles in today’s society can be found in for example: Malm (2016); Nixon (2011); Klein (2014); Ciple et al. (2015); Wainwright and Mann (2013); Orange (2017); and Smith and Jenks (2018).

During the last fifty years the demand for resources has increased in a pace that is consistently above the possible level of renewal, and humans have impacts on the ecosystem in many deteriorating ways such as fertilizer consumption, cutting of tropical forest and fresh water use (WWF, 2016:74-75, 58-61). The deforestation of rainforests has mainly been happening due to the expansion of new agricultural land and the conversion to soybean farming, palm oil plantations and cattle ranching for commercial

use (Gibbs, et al., 2010, Kissinger, et al., 2012:10-12). The predicted trend for meat production is that the demand will increase by 85 percent until the year 2050 (FAO, 2009:2). This trend will most likely also put pressure on solutions such as farming of fish and shrimp, which are gravely degrading practices that destroy valuable ecosystems (Naylor, et al., 1998). Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (2000) sparked the debate on degradation and the concern for deteriorating ecosystems already in the early 1960s when a strange stillness came about and the birds went silent, which she connected to the pollution of nature from pesticides. The goal of sustainable development has been mentioned by many of the world's leaders since the Brundtland Commission in the late 20th century.

It is crucial to work together towards a more sustainable living, and there are many opinions on how to do that, although veganism is shown to be a part of that solution. The contributions of veganism have been explored extensively, and needless to say, there is a vast literature on why people choose a Christian lifestyle. Also, the sociology of vegetarianism and veganism has been an area examined, for example in: Povey et al. (2001); Lindeman and Sirelius (2001); Greenebaum (2012); Hoffman et al. (2013); and Cole and Morgan (2011). However the combination of being both a Christian and a vegan is an area that is yet to be explored, and especially aspects involving human ecology.

Aim and Research Questions

My aim is to contribute to the discussion concerning culture, power and sustainability by focusing on veganism and Christian beliefs in Sweden today. All humans have a more or less complicated relationship to food. It can be especially troubling in today's society where there is such a high pressure on being healthy and staying fit. Talking about food can be a very sensitive subject. Different diets are debated, the high consumption of meat is discussed or whatever food is all right to serve to kids. Even so, eating is an everyday necessity. It is a must that can feel dreary but food is so much more than that. Choosing what food to eat or not to eat is part of the lifestyle we live and it can be empowering. Whether these choices also correspond with other areas in our lives such as health, habits, ethics and environment differs. However, food is an important habitual factor that humans can change in accordance with different goals in life, but it can also relate to both culture and beliefs.

Our culture shapes our perception of what is acceptable to eat and what is not. Maybe there is a prejudice that food preferences are a thing of the past and that rational beings such as ourselves do not have that anymore. But would either of us eat a stew with cooked dog or a bowl of fried spiders? There will always be cultural food preferences, and Christian vegans argue that animals should not be harmed or exploited by humans. I see it as important to look at the reasons for becoming a vegan. Becoming a vegan is taking it one step further than becoming a vegetarian and the restrictive food

preferences would imply that it is more challenging in social spheres. I will focus on Christian vegans and their reasons and ways of motivating their life choices. A Christian belief that lays the ground for a lifestyle can be a strong incentive to keep to that conviction.

This thesis will be examining the identity of being a Christian vegan as well as the Christian religious grounds for the informants to become and stay vegans. I will focus on the stories and the important grounds pointed out by people who, at least during a consistent period during their life, consider themselves to be both vegans and Christians. I will also examine the relation between being a vegan, Christian and environmentalist. The cognitive dissonance theory will be central for the assessment of how a vegan conviction and a concern for animals and nature can co-exist with a Christian faith in an individual's life. Hence, the main research questions are:

- Why do some Christians choose to become vegans?
- How do they motivate their choice of veganism and maintain that choice?
- What is the interplay between veganism, Christian faith and environmentalism?

Methods

I decided to arrange focus groups and individual interviews. In order to come in contact with people to interview I wrote a short advertising text where I described who I was looking for, my thesis subject and how to contact me, as suggested by Magnusson and Marecek (2015:38). I posted this text in different Facebook groups. These were both groups for vegans, Christians and also Environmentalists. I organized the persons who contacted me via these posts through a doodle, an online tool, where people filled in the dates when they were available. I began the preparations with focus group one, which consisted of three acquaintances of mine. During this focus group I tried out different areas of interest and questions that I had prepared in advance, and the data from focus group one are also part of the results. After focus group one I finalised my interview guide (see appendix 1). The interview guide is translated into English, since the interviews were conducted in Swedish.

I conducted semi-structured interviews, that is, I had an interview guide with topics to be covered and some questions as guidelines but also a dynamically open possibility to follow my informant and follow up on specific subjects in the moment (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:130-132). The intention was to a large extent to have many open-ended questions inviting the informant to reflect and relate freely in their own way (Magnusson and Marecek, 2015:47). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:327) define a semi-structured life world interview as "A planned and flexible interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena". Hence I chose to do this kind of interview in order to ask my informants about their own lives and experiences as both Christians and vegans. My intention was to understand the perspective of the interviewees through a

form that “is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire” (Ibid.:27). I used the same interview guide for the focus groups since the participants knew each other, more or less well, before that occasion. I wanted to cover the same areas as for the individual interviews but I also tried to encourage a free conversation between the informants, and steer it only if I felt that it got too much off topic or that we needed to proceed in the direction of the next area, as encouraged by Wibeck (2010:86-87).

The interview guide is divided into four subsections (see appendix 1). I started out by asking more specifically about veganism, after that I continued to the Christian context and the third part focused more on environmentalism. All the interviews and focus groups ended with the fourth part where I drew them a picture of a triangle (see Figure 1). I wanted the informants to picture their own situation in a more hands-on and creative way where they could reflect over their circumstances. I was inspired by Lindén (1994:31-38) because she writes about cognitive dissonance with the example of a triangle that illustrates the relationship between the individual, the environment and a car. Hence I exchanged her categories to make my own triangle between a Christian, a Vegan and an Environmentalist. I used that picture in my research and got successful responses from the informants. About half of them started to draw and write on the picture, hence there is not one picture per informant incorporated because not all of them wanted to draw something. For clarity, legibility and translation I copied the pictures before I inserted them in the paper.

To begin with, I had hoped on the snowball effect to come into contact with informants. However, this was not as easy as I had hoped. Most of the informants came from different contexts and they responded separately to the posts that I made in different focus groups. Also most of them did not know any Christian vegans that could be up to participating or that lived in the province of Scania (Skåne in Swedish). This resulted in a trip made to Uppsala and Stockholm, as there were several informants who answered my posts and said that they were keen on contributing, if it was possible to do it there. In the beginning of this process I hoped for more focus groups, but due to illness, personal emergencies and busy schedules of the informants I had to reschedule for mostly individual interviews.

In total I performed two focus groups and nine individual interviews during March 2018. The interviews and focus groups were set up beforehand. Either I suggested a place to meet that was central, calm and had coffee. Or the informants suggested a place they liked and wanted to meet, which is how I got to visit two of them in their homes, and my goal was to make it more optimal for them than for me. I had fifteen people who contributed to this study (see Table 1). Six of them participated in two separate focus groups. Focus group one consisted of Albert, Bianca and David, and focus group two consisted of Jennifer, Karl and Laura (see Table 1). Both of the focus groups were quite homogenous in age and background, and combined with a shared interest in veganism and Christianity, that would make a more comfortable setting and stimulate sharing

(Wibeck, 2010:63-64). The remaining nine informants participated through individual interviews, conducted at different occasions. Focus groups and interviews were held in Lund, Malmö, Uppsala and Stockholm. The interviewees were between the ages of 18 and 62, and there were in total six men, eight women and one non-binary¹. I chose to specify their Christian denomination even though it does not seem to affect their answers or make a difference in how the informants relate to these matters. Independent of Christian denomination there seems to be quite the same prejudice about other Christian communities among the informants. However there is more rigid literature and history concerning the Church of Sweden and therefore I want to show that not all of the informants come from that background.

Table 1: A summarised table of the fifteen interviewees in this study. Their fictive name, age, religious community and occupation are described.

Name:	Age:	Christian Denomination:	Occupation:
Albert	25	Catholic	Student in philosophy, part time worker
Bianca	18	Church of Sweden	Student (Swedish gymnasium)
Charlie	36	Church of Sweden	Computer programmer, has own company
David	23	-	Student in philosophy
Elliot	32	Church of Sweden	Student in sustainability, part time worker
Felicia	34	Church of Sweden	Studies to become a priest
Gabrielle	62	Free churches	Pastor
Harry	26	Church of Sweden	Student in Islamic studies
Isak	28	Church of Sweden	Social Worker (Socionom in Swedish)
Jennifer	27	Free churches	Student in agronomy and economics
Karl	27	Free churches	Multiple jobs and projects
Laura	24	Free churches	Student in history and economic history
Mona	29	Free churches	Studies to become a midwife
Naomi	23	Free churches	Student in history, part time worker
Olivia	43	Free churches	On sick leave

¹ Charlie, who is non-binary asked to be referred to as they, which is equal to the Swedish term hen, a gender-neutral personal pronoun, which bridges the gender categories of him and her for people who does not feel that they belong to either of those categories.

I recorded a majority of the interviews but for practical reasons I could not record the first two individual interviews. I only transcribed specific parts from the interviews since my intention was not to code specific words but to look for themes within the areas of interest. I wrote down notes from the recordings and coded different themes that occurred among the different interviews to be able to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena. Those were themes such as Bible references, vegan or non-vegan food availability within parish and other life-style choices.

It can be ethically challenging to conduct research asking about subjects that might induce discomfort stemming from dissonance in the informants life. However I did not perceive it as if any of the informants felt uncomfortable and I actually believe that it was an advantage that I am not a vegan myself, because they would not feel judged by a fellow vegan for not fitting in the template. All of the informants seemed enthusiastic about their participation and contribution in the areas of faith and veganism, subjects that matter to them greatly and personally. The area of faith was a common territory for me and the informants, which helped in understanding, and when talking about it they were quite relaxed. Although being a Christian myself might hinder me in the sense that situations that stand out could fly me by where I should have asked further questions or that I subconsciously avoid asking questions about areas that I know can be sensitive. I tried to a large extent avoid being subjective to my knowledge but there will always be a limit in how far that is possible even if I am mindful about it.

On Christian Denominations in Sweden

For a Christian there are many denominations to choose from in Sweden today. Still, there is one important general distinction to make, between the Church of Sweden and the free churches (frikyrkan in Swedish). Since the reformation five hundred years ago Christianity has been a state religion, because the Swedish king at that time broke free from the Catholic pope in Rome and made himself the head of the Church of Sweden and after that it came to be a part of the Lutheran tradition as well (Svanberg and Westerlund, 2011:89-91). The Church of Sweden was an official state church up until the year of 2000 (Ibid.:89). The state and the Church of Sweden are, however, still intimately connected because the Church also went through a democratisation, and in the early 20th century democratic elections among leaders were introduced (Ibid.:92). Nowadays there is an election every fourth year in the Church of Sweden, same as for the state, and the majority of the candidates in the election are connected to the political state parties (Ibid.:92, 95). Sundeen (2017) shows quite effectively in his book how there is a heritage of a strong connection between politics, ideology and religion in Sweden, focusing on the left movement since the late 1960s, which was not explicit to the Church of Sweden but a collective of opinions from many denominations active within Sweden.

The opposite of state religion and a state church in this sense is the free churches, that is, denominations which are decoupled from the state and the Church of Sweden (Svanberg

and Westerlund, 2011:91). For example, the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Equmeniakyrkan (Equmeniakyrkan is in English The Uniting Church in Sweden). A remarkable distinction worth mentioning is that the Church of Sweden receives money due to a church fee (kyrkoavgift in Swedish) imposed on all members through the regular tax system in Sweden, in comparison to denominations regarded as the free churches that rely upon gifts and volunteer contributions (Ibid.:95). As for today, in 2018, approximately a little bit more than six million individuals are members of the Church of Sweden out of a total population of ten million people (Statistics, The Church of Sweden). In respect to denominations regarded as free churches, the Church of Sweden is still the largest organization in Sweden, although it is hard to say exactly how many people that have church affiliations to different denominations. But for example, the Pentecostal Church in Sweden has today about 90.000 members, the Seventh-day Adventist Church about 3.000 members and Equmeniakyrkan about 63.000 members (The Pentecostal Church, The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Equmeniakyrkan).

Working possibilities for clergymen and clergywomen depends on the denomination and there are differences in the education and ordination. The most common titles to use in Sweden are priest and pastor. In regard to a priest they are specifically ordained within the order of the Church of Sweden and have to fulfil certain requirements: firstly, a master's degree (one year) in theology or religion studies; secondly, to be connected to one of the thirteen dioceses that the Church of Sweden is divided into; lastly, to attend the Educational Institute of the Swedish Church for a year and do more practical exercises (Educational Institute). Priests, as a career choice, are very employable within the Church of Sweden because there is a lack of priests now and the competition within the field in the coming five years is predicted to be very low (Saco). The Catholic Church also has priests but a more restricted situation since they consider the choice to become a priest to be a calling from God, for men, and not a career choice (The Catholic Church in Sweden), as well as the fact that they traditionally have to live in celibacy. The education is similar to the structure within the Church of Sweden but it lasts for a bit longer, include a one-year placement in Rome and focus on spiritual calling as well as rigorous theology studies (Ibid.). However, other denominations also have leaders, but they are usually called pastors, while they have similar roles as priests do within the Church of Sweden or the Catholic Church. For example, in the Pentecostal Church in Sweden there is still no formal demand on education but an emphasis on being chosen by a local parish and the calling from God, as well as to a certain extent today to be a part of a fellowship with other pastors (Pastor in the Pentecostal Church).

The Bible is a powerful scripture within Christianity, because it is seen as the word of God. However, the emphasis on the word of the Bible changes with people, denomination and parishes, and the interpretations vary even more. Altogether, the Bible is a collection of books, written by different authors at different times, and divided into two important sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament (see the New King James Version, 1982, which is used in this paper). In the Christian tradition the

New Testament is the most important one since it tells what happened when Jesus, the Son of God, became a human. The books within the Bible are also divided into chapters and verses, in order to make it easier to follow. When a certain passage in the Bible is referred to in this paper, the book, chapter and verse will always be noted, so as a reader it will be possible to easily look it up in the Bible, if desired.

Analytical Framework

Animal Ethics and the Bible

During the recent decades there has been a growing interest in animal ethics and consumption habits. This might not be surprising since the world's populations is increasing, which leads to an increase in food consumption, higher pressure on ecosystems, and hence an increased production of edibles and meat (FAO, 2009:5-6). One of the most well known and trend-setting texts on animal ethics is *Animal Liberation* written by Peter Singer in 1975. Singer wrote about subjects as animal testing, animal suffering and how the liberation of animals coincided with the women's rights movement (Singer, 1999). He specifically tried to advocate equality between species and refuted the concept of speciesism to legitimize the exploitation of animals (Ibid.:31-33, 41). Speciesism is a term originally introduced by Ryder (1970) through a leaflet circulated in Oxford, where he objects to animal experiments based on species membership. Singer (1999:41-43) believes that all animals have the right to life and if there is a difference based on specified borders or standards regarding what it is to be humans it would lay the ground to also treat children, senile and handicapped persons the same way we treat animals today. Other key writings in the area of animal rights can be found in for example: Midgley (1978); Salt (1980); and Regan (1983).

Singer (1999:173-184) talks about Christianity and he point out the focus on the uniqueness of humans by Christians, partly based in the Bible and partly based in traditions, although he also mentions Francis of Assisi, a catholic monk, who strongly advocated the rights of animals. Linzey (2009:11-29) who is a theologian and priest, considers and challenge six differences in his book *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology, and Practical Ethics* that are often mentioned in relation to animals: they are natural slaves; they are non-rational beings; they are linguistically deficient; they are non-moral agents; they are soulless; and they are lacking of the divine image. Specifically in the case of the divine image, Linzey (2009:28-29) refers to the Genesis Creation Narrative and point out that humans are created in the holy, loving and just image of God, and that implies a stewardship over the creation and animals. He concludes, "Those who wish to justify or minimise animal suffering frequently argue that animals are different from humans. But the question is whether any of these are *morally relevant* differences that could justify differential treatment" (Ibid.:40). Linzey is backed-up by a famous Christian thinker and author by the name of C. S. Lewis (1971:185) who wrote, "Once the old Christian idea of total difference in kind between

man and beast has been abandoned, then no argument for experiments on animals can be found which is not also an argument for experiments on inferior men". As seen in politics today there is a movement towards less experimenting on animals and a Regulation (EC No 1223/2009) on cosmetics in the European Union prohibit animal testing in cosmetic production (chapter V, article 18).

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Human behaviour is quite complex and in different ways individuals try as far as possible to feel content with their lives and their choices. This behaviour can partly be explained by the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, as proposed by Festinger (1957) where he argues that being in a state of dissonance is quite psychologically uncomfortable. Festinger (1957:2-3) uses the word dissonance with regard to "inconsistency" and he also replaces the word "consistency" with consonance. Illustrating this with musical terms, there is dissonance if a chord of tones is played that does not go together, and musicians often strive towards consonance and harmony between tones. When a person experiences dissonance that will lead to two states according to Festinger (1957:3): because the existence of dissonance is uncomfortable, the individual will be motivated to achieve consonance; and the individual will actively avoid information and situations that are likely to increase the discomfort and the dissonance in the situation at hand.

Lindén (1994:33-34) exemplifies this with a situation in her book where she drew a triangle between an individual, a car and the environment. There is an obvious dissonance between the car and the environment since driving a car contributes to pollution and global warming. However different individuals will reason with themselves with the help of different arguments such as: constituting a good example, one car does not make the difference or avoiding traffic jams at rush-hour is my contribution, in order to either keep or get rid of their car (Ibid.:35-37). The relationship between the individual and the car, as well as the relationship between the individual and the environment, is a positive one and so their behaviour, information basis and argumentation is meant to decrease the dissonance towards the negative relationship between the car and the environment. As an individual cares about the wellbeing of the environment and can have great use of a car in their personal life there is an issue where these two elements are in conflict with each other, which creates discomfort and stress. As Festinger (1957:3) describes the phenomena:

In short, I am proposing that dissonance, that is, the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right. By the term *cognition*, [...], I mean any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior. Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction.

Hence a situation in which dissonance appears is quite unavoidable since there is an unimaginable number of opinions, conditions and knowledge that amount to so many different situations that can affect a person (Ibid.:4-7). If there are two elements of

either knowledge, opinions or beliefs in a person's life where one of them does not follow naturally from the other these are in a dissonant relation (Ibid.:13). As Festinger (Ibid.) illustrates, x and y are dissonant if x does not follow from y. The relation of dissonance between elements could arise from: logical inconsistency; cultural mores; the inclusion of an opinion, by definition, within a more common and general opinion; and past experience (Ibid.:14). These four areas can include many situations and this is not an attempt to be a comprehensive list but to give a more general picture (Ibid.). Festinger's theory of dissonance does partly resemble the work of Heider (1946) that describes balanced or unbalanced relations. As mentioned earlier, Lindén (1994:33-37) drew a triangle to illustrate relations, in the same way Heider (1946) did to illustrate positive or negative relations with a triangle, between a person (p), a second person (o) and an impersonal entity (x) that could be an idea, an event, a situation or a thing. Heider (1946) used positive and negative relations, which would signify emotional bonds, as well as relational units, which would describe proximity, possession or belonging, to illustrate the balanced or unbalanced relations in the triangle between entities. A state of imbalance that could occur from different variations of positive and/or negative relations within the triangle would produce tensions, which in turn would result in forces towards restoring the balance (ibid.).

When a dissonance occurs between different elements the immediate response would generally be to diminish that discomfort by changing one of those elements (Festinger, 1957:18). Reducing dissonance could be done by changing feelings or actions that are behavioural against an environmental element, which sometimes could be induced by the reception of new information (Ibid.:19). The other way around would mean to change the environmental element instead, which is not as common, because it is often not possible to change the physical environment (Ibid.:19-20). A third way to decrease dissonance is to add more cognitive elements to the mix and therefore reducing the proportion of the dissonance, which can be done by actively seeking and selectively avoiding certain information (Ibid.:21-23). The effect of post decision dissonance that could occur would for example be actively lessened if the proportion of relevant cognitive elements in consonance with the specific decision were increased (Ibid.:44-45). Most often the amount of dissonance between elements, and therefore the importance to reduce the magnitude of dissonance, is directly linked to the relevance of the elements' relevance to one another (Ibid.:17). It could either be a larger amount of relevant elements that are in dissonance with element x, or it could be fewer elements of greater magnitude that are in dissonance with x (Ibid.:17-18). The persistence of dissonance is also important, because if there were no persistence, there would be no problem in solving circumstances of dissonance. If there is any resistance against the reduction of dissonance, this probably stems from the absence of an easy solution and the persistence of dissonance would probably depend on: that the change could involve loss or be painful; that the current situation at hand is otherwise satisfying; or that it might not be possible to change (Ibid.:24-26).

In social groups the magnitude of dissonance will rely upon whether the elements of a given opinion, knowledge or belief are prone to be tested in the physical reality and how many people that one is acquainted with that agree on a given element (Festinger, 1957:179). The importance of the cognitive elements will be reflected in the magnitude of the dissonance, and more relevant groups or persons will have a greater effect on the disagreement and hence increase the dissonance (Ibid.:180). Other factors that will affect the extent of dissonance are the attractiveness of people in the group and how multifaceted the cognitions are that the disagreement builds on (Ibid.:180-181). Movement towards a unified opinion is the most common way to resolve a dissonance in a group where either one's own opinion changes or the opponent opinion of others in the group changes (Ibid.:182). A third alternative is to derogate the knowledge of the other person and make their view not comparable with one's own any more, which will reduce the dissonance by simply rejecting their knowledge (Ibid.:182-183). The drive to reduce dissonance will be stronger the more severe the dissonance is in the situation (Ibid.:188). A person experiencing dissonance seeks social support and it will "lead to the initiation of social communication, and the reduction of dissonance is followed by a lessening of such communication" (Ibid.:188-191, 225).

Festinger's theory builds on the perception, opinion and feelings of one person in relation to others and how a situation of dissonance will induce discomfort with that person and lead to strive towards a reduction in dissonance. However, Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) conducted a study in which individuals were put in a situation that encouraged them to go against their private opinion and make statements contradictory to that opinion. The situation of having one opinion and expressing a contradictive one will lead to dissonance and Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) tried to reduce that dissonance by giving an incentive for the individual to change opinion accordingly, to fit with the one expressed. Participants were financially awarded to contradict their opinion and under different amounts of pressure (either one dollar or twenty dollars) the tendency to change opinion correlated with the amount of money offered: "[t]he greater the reward offered [...] the smaller was the effect" (Ibid.:208-210). Hence a greater pressure to induce a changed opinion backfires and it will weaken the tendency to achieve a change (Ibid.:209-210).

Building on Festinger's theory Aronson and Mills (1959) found that if a person was a subject to an unpleasant initiation ritual this increased that person's liking for the group. The dissonance that occurred when a person would undergo an uncomfortable experience to join a dull group was reduced through overemphasized positive feelings towards the group (Ibid.). It seems as if the investment made by an individual plays a role in behaviour rather than a promise for compensation, reward or pressure. As Festinger's student Aronson wrote, "we come to like things for which we suffer" (Aronson, 1992:304). In his continued research, Aronson focused on the self-concept when experiencing a reduction of dissonance and found that most individuals want three things: "[t]o preserve a consistent, stable, predictable sense of self"; "[t]o preserve a competent sense of self"; and "[t]o preserve a morally good sense of self" (Ibid.:305).

Over the last sixty years since Festinger brought his theory of cognitive dissonance forward there have been so many reactions, additional writings and further research about it that it would be impossible to give a complete picture within this paper. The dissonance theory did spur research within many other paradigms in the field, as for example regarding what will happen after a decision is made by an individual (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999:5-10). There have been other revised alternatives of the dissonance theory throughout the years, for example the interpretation of dissonance as self-consistency or self-affirmation theory (Ibid.:13-15). Other alternatives mainly differ from the original in the theoretical aspects of what is considered to be the nature of the underlying motivations to have effect and lead to dissonance (Ibid.:13). The action-based model emphasizes that dissonance is specifically induced by cognitions to act, and not all elements per se, and point in the direction that action tendencies are the motivation that drives the dissonance process (Harmon-Jones et al., 2015). Even though dissonance theory is surrounded by controversy and revision due to previous mentioned differences among scientists, the original version is still viable (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999:13, 15). There is also a strong agreement on several elements, such as the occurrence of genuine cognitive changes due to dissonance and that the source of motivation is discomfort (Ibid.:15).

We-hood and Us-hood

As society changes, identities also change and they are not as private as common sense would imply, and as humans we classify each other due to degrees of difference (Eriksen, 2002:62, 66). Eriksen (2002:67) defines two modalities that he distinguishes between as “*we-hood*” and “*us-hood*” that express the solidarity aspect of a community:

Being *us*, people are loyal and socially integrated chiefly in relation to *the other*; through competition, enmity, symbiosis or the contrastive use of stereotypes and boundary symbols. Being *we*, on the other hand, entails being integrated because of shared activities within the collectivity.

The importance is to have a unique position in relation to other groups. Usually, the ethnic identity category is by definition a phenomenon of *us-hood*, but in order to be a viable group it is necessary to also have some sort of supplementary element of *we-hood*, which can be a shared religion (Ibid.:67). Certain elements can be crucial for the persistence of an ethnic identity through times of change, such as religion, kinship systems or language (Ibid.:68). At that moment when boundaries and social identity are under threat, that is also the moment when the identity becomes the most important (Ibid.). However, this work is not about ethnicity. What is applied in this thesis is ethnic identity in the concept of *us-hood* and *we-hood* that Eriksen (2002:67) defines. Christian vegans can be seen as a tribe, similar to academic tribes (Trowler, 2005; cf. Becher and Trowler, 2001). A group sharing the identity of the *us-hood* and a *we-hood*, being part of a tribe in this context, is about having something in common, sharing loyalty and uniting over borders, which also can be the case in the choice of food.

An ethnic identity takes shapes through being a part of a group that shares a common past (Eriksen, 2002:69). How far back this common past goes depends on the need in a particular social context, and the identity must be convincing to the members of the group as well as to be legitimized by non-members (Ibid.). “Ethnic identities can be seen as expressions of metaphoric kinship” as, described by Eriksen (2002:68-69) and the group needs to be acknowledged by others in order to function. However, in the shaping process of ethnic identity knowledge about one’s own history can be of great importance (Ibid.:71). The elements of interpretation of the past and subjective identification are both quite important for an ethnic identity to be viable (Ibid.:72). Writing history can probably never be a procedure done in a way that is not selective or subjective and “[w]hat we are looking at here is thus not the past, but present-day *constructions* of the past” (Ibid.:71, 73). Hence an ethnic identity has a need for a personal genealogy and “[s]ince it is not ‘objective culture’ that shapes ethnicity, it makes sense to state that ethnic identities can be maintained despite cultural change” (Ibid.:71-72). The most influential moment of social importance of ethnic identities is when the boundaries are threatened from the outside by a pressure that makes them become greatly important and when the identity at the same time is used as a symbolic tool in a political struggle (Ibid.:76).

Findings

Most of my informants ranked the different reasons for becoming and being a vegan and the three main reasons mentioned by almost all of my informants were animal ethics, environment and health. Animal ethics were used by six of the informants as the first and main reason for becoming a vegan. Four of the informants became a vegan because of environmental concerns and three informants became vegan for health reasons. Laura, one of the informants, actually became a vegan by accident, because when she worked in Norway she ate vegan due to financial reasons since it was cheaper. The last of the informants, Gabrielle, who works as a pastor in a religious community in Scania, is not yet a vegan. Although she wants to become a vegan, she cannot right now because of her profession.

Working as a pastor, Gabrielle meets lot of people in different situations that offer her food and she cannot be difficult in those situations. Her intention is to start as a vegan in the fasting period before Easter, and after that to maybe eat vegan in situations where she can control it herself. This will probably lead to her becoming vegan full time when she retires in a couple of years. Gabrielle emphasizes the importance of humans protecting God’s creation and that all living creatures are equally valuable. She has been a vegetarian for many years and that happened during a time in her life when her teenage daughter became a vegetarian and inspired her to do the same. The difficulties of working within the church and being a vegan were also mentioned by Elliot, who had a conversation with the priest in the parish that he goes to occasionally. The conversation concerned the food that was served after the Easter midnight mass,

because Elliot wondered if there could be vegetarian sausages as well. The priest he talked to said that he had been a vegetarian before but was not anymore, because in his line of work he did not want to be rude when he was offered food.

A few of the informants connected the environmental concept with equality, resources and a humanitarian thought. They expressed frustration about the fact that Christian communities have not yet made that connection, but this will be discussed more extensively further down in the text. Also, a few informants mentioned theology but this was not considered to be a main reason for becoming vegan. Though due to some arguments mentioned in Christian theology, it was considered important for many of the informants to continue being a vegan. These arguments will be described further down in the text as well.

Being a Vegan

Most of the informants talk about their food habits when asked what it means for them to be a vegan. The most basic accepted version of a vegan seems to be a person who does not eat meat, dairy products, eggs or other substances derived from animals. Felicia, who is a student in her mid-thirties, makes her choices out of the perspective that she wants to be able to stand for what she does until the day she meets Jesus. She is very strict with her food habits, although non-vegan food can occur in her home because the rest of her family are not vegans. However, many informants mention that there are different stricter definitions of veganism and how to be a vegan. Mona actually asked before of the interview if she made the cut to count as a vegan since she still had some leather garments at home. Items that were mentioned in this debated context are leather products (garments and shoes), honey, make-up and down feather. David actually commented on the matter of honey during the first focus group since he understands that it can be a more sustainable choice to eat honey because of the loss of biodiversity unless the bee communities are supported.

Isak and Naomi specifically talked about the culture of veganism. According to them there exists a culture around veganism, which they consider to be something that can come to one successively after one has started to eat vegan. All the informants tried to define a vegan and what brings most definitions together is that a vegan should not contribute to the exploitation of animals or suffering by their lifestyle or consumption. Mona expressed a short and practical definition of “A person who excludes animal products from their diet and their lifestyle”. It was also mentioned that this should be the subject of an ongoing reflection and awareness. David argued that an important fact is that we problematize how we treat animals and not all the specific standpoints to take on different matters. Harry formulated a definition of a vegan as, “A person that deliberately opts-out from certain products to decrease suffering for others, as a fundamental lifestyle”. Bianca thought that there is too much shaming in veganism and too much hostile questioning, she wanted to bring up the term of a vegan box, that whoever wants to be a vegan can define their own box and live accordingly. She felt that

veganism should not be about putting people on the spot every time they seem to do something that does not fit with one's own definition of a vegan. And this she thought would lead to a more feasible veganism where the framing of the box sets the limits for something that one can manage. During the second focus group the informants emphasized the importance of talking about veganism with others to increase the understanding and knowledge.

Quite a few of the informants said that it can be hard to be a vegan in a Christian community. It can be a special circumstance that is unknown and scary, which can lead to a suspicious and frustrated response in the church context. Some of the informants also experienced a hint from other church members that their veganism was moralising and that it made the others feel bad. A couple of the informants also mentioned that there could be a cumulative effect. They said that it could be more challenging to be a vegan in a Christian Community if one has other special circumstances or other opinions as well. Charlie did specifically talk about this because they are vegan but also use a different pronoun, are visually impaired and in a same sex marriage. According to Charlie it is a bit odd and inconvenient to have more than one unique feature and they feel that the Church has always been their home and to be questioned there is for them comparable to be questioned in your own living room. Many of the informants have over time indicated a tendency to have less contact with their Christian community.

Several of the informants also mentioned the fact the Church of Sweden has quite quickly and heartily taken on both the issue of immigrants and fair-trade. These are two areas that are both political and widely debated in society today. The Church of Sweden has taken a clear stand in both of them and they are working hard for progress within these areas. Due to that several informants expressed that the question of food, vegetarianism and veganism is closely related to these issues and equally important. There is a frustration among the informants over the fact that veganism does not have an equally natural place within the Church of Sweden today.

Referring to the Bible

The informants used their faith and the Bible to different degrees to justify veganism and they were on different levels when it comes to theological knowledge. However some trends appeared when the informants referred to the Bible. The majority talked about the Genesis Creation Narrative, which is in the very first chapter of the Bible describing how God created the world (Genesis 1:26-31):

²⁶Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."²⁷So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

²⁹And God said, "See, I have given you every herb *that* yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. ³⁰Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for food"; and it was so. ³¹Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

This quotation reads partly what happened during the sixth day of the creation. God created all living creatures and humans during those two days. He created man and women in his own image and gives them "every herb that yields seed" and "every tree whose fruit yields seed" to eat (Genesis 1:27, 1:29). As such, it was pointed out that Adam and Eve were at least vegetarians and that in God's creation humans were not meant to eat meat. As Charlie saw it they thought that God's plan from the beginning was to hang out with two naked vegans in the garden. Relating to this, Albert and Isak acknowledged that eating meat is a consequence of the fall of man where Adam and Eve betray God and are cast out of Eden. The role of humans within the creation is further raised with regard to the role given to them by God to "have dominion" over all living things (Genesis 1:28). Among Christians in Sweden today there is a debate on how to interpret the word dominion. It could be interpreted in a more dictatorial way as to rule the creation (the Swedish translation is: *härskar*). The informants favour the understanding of dominion in a more responsible way where humans should care for the creation as a stewardship (the Swedish translation: *förvalta*). Practically all the informants feel responsibility for God's creation in different ways. Pastor Gabrielle also pointed out that God on several occasions "saw that *it was* good" when he made his creation. The Genesis Creation Narrative was the most common reference from the Bible. The second reference was the Great Commandment and several informants mentioned this, which states one of the most important teachings said by Jesus (Luke 10:27):

²⁷So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

Jesus said that you should love your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27) and that this is one of the two greatest commandments there is. However, the scope of the word neighbour is interpreted differently (the interpretation is made even more difficult due to different Bible translations, and in Swedish is the word neighbour translated to "*din nästa*"). Mona, who is in her late twenties and studies to become a midwife, stated that the more general societal and narrower definition of the word is our fellow humans, and by that she means only all human beings as opposite to all living creatures. Even so she pointed out that our daily food intake and consumption, affect not only humans, but also animals around the world, negatively. And after reasoning with herself, she sided with the wider definition of the word to include all living creatures. This is for Mona and some of my other informants a strong argument for being a vegan. Mona does not believe that animals were created to serve humans, but they have a high value in themselves. The same interpretation issue for excluding or including all living creatures

goes for the third reference from the Bible as well, which is the fifth of the Ten Commandments stating, “you shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). Some of my informants mentioned this as an argument, that killing animals for the pleasure of eating goes against the will of God. Felicia thinks that there is something within us humans that knows that it is wrong to kill and she feels that her studies in theology at the university has strengthened her conviction that the Bible is holy. However, Felicia mentioned that Jesus ate fish but that she did not think that he would approve of the common lifestyle in Sweden today if he were here. None of the informants originally became vegans due to their religious conviction, but that was a reinforcement layer added later.

Network

It seems that Christian vegans are not very organized and there is no clear network for them to lean on. Some of the informants mentioned an organization called “Vildåsnan” (translated to English it means “wild donkey”) which is an organization for Christian vegetarians. The informants who mentioned this were more or less active within this group. Two thirds of my informants got in touch with me through my posts in different Facebook groups. And only a few of the informants had people in their near surroundings that they could introduce me to. Hence most of them relied on their own personal conviction and self-control to maintain their vegan believes and lifestyle. Although some of them used social media to attain information and support for their veganism, but veganism rather than a network of Christian vegans. However, none of them had a strictly vegan society or network for support around them either. About half of the informants are strict vegans themselves and do not compromise on this end. For Albert it was too hard and tedious to be a vegan on his own so he went back to being a flexitarian. Felicia, who is strict for herself, still make compromises with her omnivore husband, for example about their child being a vegetarian. Different group constellations can create their own box of what it means to be a vegan. During the second focus group I met with a group of three people that lived together in a collective. They were all vegans, had common ownership of their possessions and financial means, prayed together and agreed on a low level of consumption. They had created their own style and box, and they were primarily vegans due to environmental reasons. Therefore they could eat non-vegan food at occasions and last Christmas they celebrated how well they were doing by having meat and dairy. Olivia explicitly stated that she would not feel any guilt if she happened to buy non-vegan food by mistake and neither does she feel guilty when she eats dairy products occasionally.

Living Sustainably

The informants talked about the different ways in which they live their lives more sustainably. The two ways most of them mentioned were consumption and travelling. At least two of the informants, Karl and Naomi, have chosen not to have a driver’s license because of the negative effects of travelling by car. Many of the informants talked about how they try to not fly anymore and stressed also the importance of biking in everyday

life. Many informants thought about buying fewer things and lowering their consumption. Some of them bought things and clothes second-hand and Laura used to make her own beauty products. Olivia tried to stay away from bad chemicals and only bought products that are free from perfume. The importance of buying products, both food and clothes were mentioned, with different eco-labels being very important to a couple of the informants. Felicia is convinced of the importance of separation of waste and recycling in order to live more sustainably.

Harry said that he believes that we also learn our religion through our bodies, for example by starting to cook at home, and there can be a learning curve leading to a changed behaviour and mind. Charlie also related through the physical embodiment of being a parent, where they looked at their two children across the table and likened them to calves that was taken away from their mother too early. All three laughed and Charlie said that they would never want to experience that pain, so buying milk is not an option. Fewer choices can also be a freedom. Both Olivia and Bianca were quite specific about their dislike for processed food and how they try to avoid it. Naomi mentioned the issue of presents because she wanted to buy Easter eggs for her nieces and nephews with vegan candy in them to be true to herself and her morals. Also, Karl and Jennifer use sustainability as an argument for having decided not to have children.

Gabrielle, who is a pastor, talked about some traditions and influences in the history of Christianity. She believes that the Judeo-Christian religion is very positive towards nature and the body, but that this was lost within Western Christianity, due to Greek influences that have a very strong emphasis on the soul. Influences from Greece saw the soul as something good but the earthly and bodily as something evil. Gabrielle sees this as leading up to the mind-set that the most important is for humans to save their soul and be accepted into heaven. In this view, it does no longer matter how our time on earth is spent and what we do right now.

Church Responsibility

As mentioned earlier the Church of Sweden has quite quickly opted to be a part of the fair-trade movement and it has also taken a substantial role in the immigration debate. Some of the informants saw this as a way for the Church to take responsibility, as it should. But they also pointed out that it would then be appropriate for the Church to take veganism and sustainability equally seriously and incorporate these as well. Since food is not a new subject within the Church. Gabrielle talked about her vision to be a vegan during the Christian Lent next year. Lent is a fasting period every year before Easter, during which Christians fast from different things for forty days, which has a long tradition within the Church. In the Swedish Christian tradition it is not as common today to fast from food, although the idea to be a vegetarian or vegan during this period has a long tradition in Christianity. Some informants mention the Lent as a trial period for veganism, to see how easy it is, and maybe it can be done on a more regular basis after that.

The informants mentioned several specific thoughts on how the Church can be more attentive to veganism and sustainability and help in spreading the importance of these matters. Quite a few informants mentioned the sermons in Church as a forum for that and Felicia who specifically studies to become a priest within the Church of Sweden said that she had actually preached about veganism. She received positive reactions from members in the parish but was specifically criticised for it by her colleagues and fellow priests because they did not see it fit to talk about that in a sermon. On the subject of education many informants talked about the importance of educational forums within the Church, such as Bible studies, lectures, seminars, workshops and confirmation teaching. They mentioned education with the purpose of talking about veganism and sustainability, both at a theological level examining the grounds for it but also on a more practical level, about the struggles and possibilities in one's personal life. Isak suggested that this education could be more structural, for example that the future priests and pastors receive it as a natural part of their education. As mentioned above the period of Lent is also a great possibility to do it in a collective challenge style within the church. Elliot also mentioned the alms specifically, where the Church collects money to different projects and organizations, which he sees as a great opportunity.

During the second focus group the informants talked about the need to construct a language within the church so that there can be a clearer and more common dialogue about veganism and sustainability, which will increase the opportunities to reach out with this to all different people and Christian communities. Jennifer, Karl and Laura have a dream that it should become an obvious path to be a vegan and environmentalist as a follower of Jesus. They see everyday conversations to be a natural and good way to start that process and they try to talk about it, but it can be hard. It is not always comfortable to live as a vegan or to make a change. Isak pointed out that this process might have to start at a grassroots level as well. Several informants talked about the need to start a dialogue within the church about these subjects and about traditions. Olivia felt that she would wish for leaders within the church to take a stand in questions concerning this subject, for example by condemning the meat industry. It is very common that meat, dairy and egg products are served in the parishes during meals and fika², with no effort being made to present alternatives, unless allergies count. The majority of the informants shared stories about church lunches, fikas and potlucks where there were no real good alternatives for vegans. Some informants met resistance when trying to talk about this in their parish and some are met with interest but less willingness to change. Only one informant, Felicia, has good experiences with food since her parish serves a vegan-only lunch on Sundays after mass. People in her parish do not really talk about it but due to strong leadership they serve vegan meals because they want to include everyone to come and eat. As described by Naomi it can occasionally be arranged in her parish that there are vegan alternatives during fika but that happened only since she joined the volunteer group that organizes and buys food beforehand.

² Fika is a Swedish tradition of taking a break together and having coffee, normally accompanied by a sandwich or a cookie.

Triangle of Association

All the interviews were ended in the same way. I drew a picture of a triangle on a white blank paper. In each corner of this triangle I wrote one word, so in total the three words: Christian, Vegan and Environmentalist (see Figure 1). Then I asked the informants what they thought about it and how the relations between these three concepts worked in their lifestyle. This exercise made it easy for my informants to transform abstract concepts into their own concrete personal experience. Some of them were more creative and started drawing themselves and also did their own picture based on the original that I drew. No one of the informants saw any difficulty with the relation between the concepts of vegan and environmentalist. That one was quite obvious and natural to all of them. Some informants were quite clear about the fact that neither of the relations between the three concepts caused any difficulties or concerns in their own life. However, some of them acknowledged that the relation of being a vegan and a Christian as well as the relation between being a Christian and an environmentalist can cause difficulties. There was a more obvious difference between some of the informants, as for Elliot who modified the picture that I drew with parentheses around the word Christian and an equal sign between vegan and environmentalist (see Figure 2). In contrast to Felicia who drew circles around the concepts in order to rank them (see Figure 3) and Charlie who drew a whole new picture of a star where the centre of it all were the Christian faith (see Figure 4).

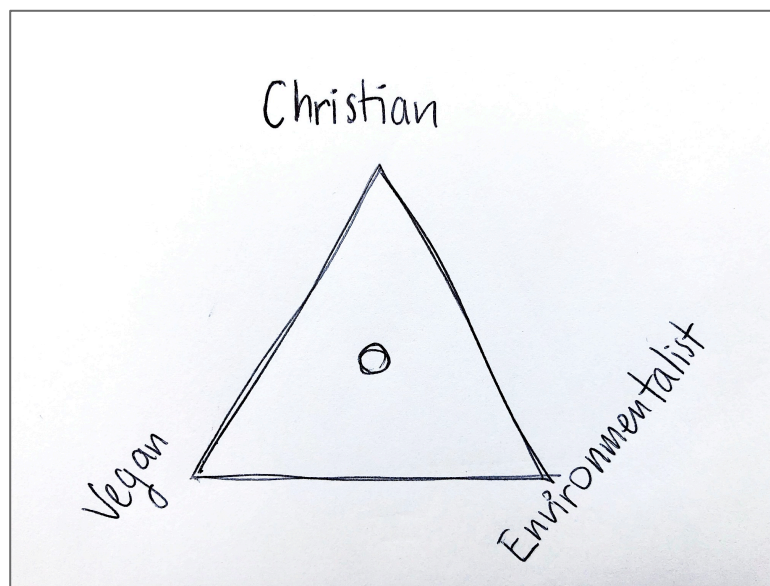


Figure 1: The figure of a triangle that I drew at the end of each interview to ask my informant about the connection between these three concepts. (Translated to English from Swedish.)

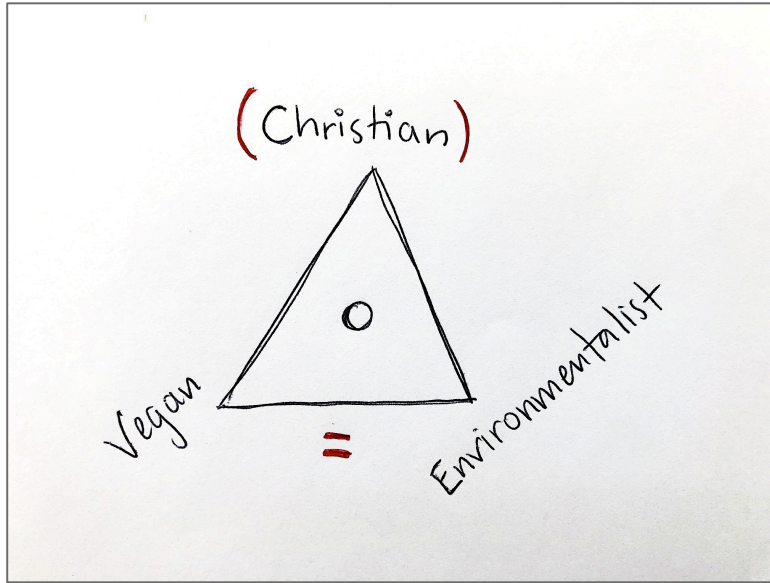


Figure 2: Drawing from interview with Elliot. (Copy of the original made by the author, translated to English.)

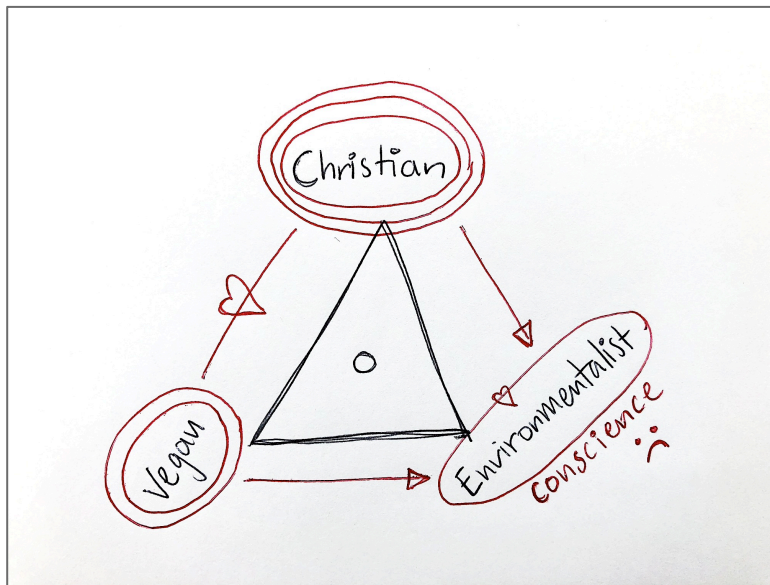


Figure 3: Drawing from interview with Felicia. (Copy of the original made by the author, translated to English.)

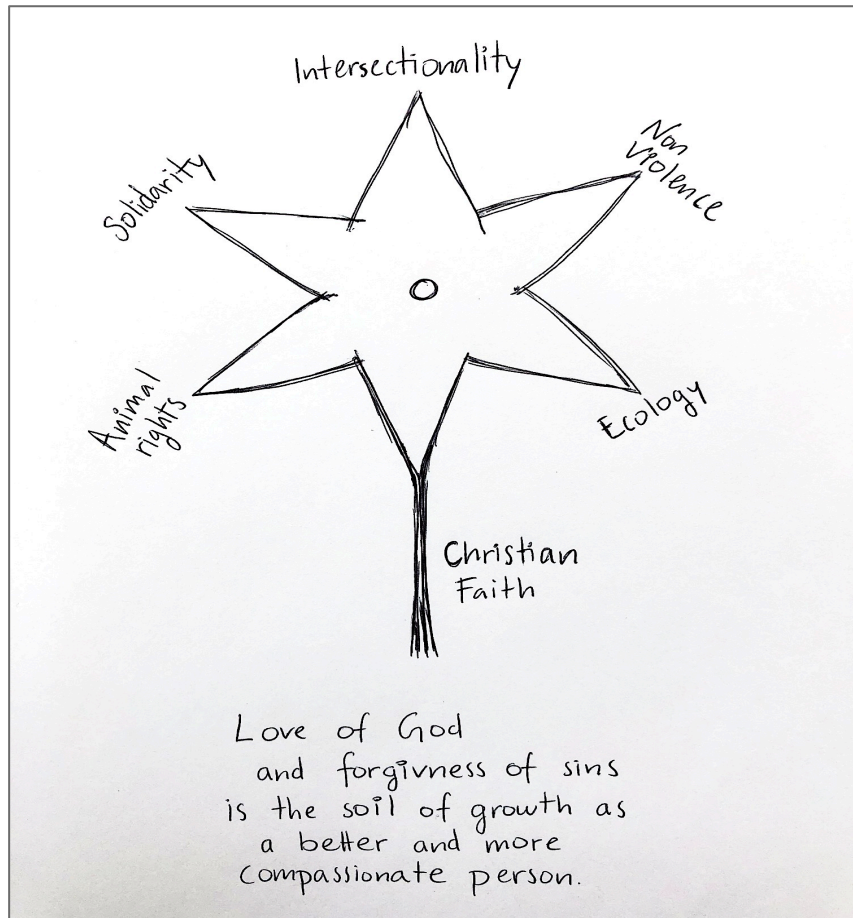


Figure 4: Drawing from interview with Charlie. (Copy of the original made by the author.)

A majority of my informants agreed that being a Christian came first in their life, which was the important foundation that everything else rests upon. Therefore Felicia drew (see Figure 3) three circles around Christian because that is the most important thing to her, and descending from that vegan got two circles and environmentalist got one circle. She was a vegan before she became a Christian and she described that veganism had become the religion in her life. Therefore, she had a moment in her life when she felt that she had to break that by eating all kinds of food to start over. For her it was a victory to break the spell, but she came back to veganism and now she studies to become a priest in the Church of Sweden. Environmentalism came as consequence from being a vegan and a Christian and it causes a bad conscience for Felicia. Although Felicia ranked the concepts she thought that they are all connected and that the relations between them are possible. Charlie shows a similar thought but they drew a modified picture with added concepts and Christian faith as the ground for it all (see Figure 4). It actually looks like the star of these concepts draws its power from the Christian faith, based on the poem they wrote at the bottom of the drawing in which God's love represents the soil from which everything grows. In Figure 4 Charlie interpreted the vegan concept as animal rights and environmentalism as ecology. For them the triangle was not sufficient, but it needed the added values of intersectionality, solidarity and non-violence to complement. As Charlie thought these concepts would be needed to achieve the original

triangle, as they are equally important to be part of it, although the Christian faith is still the ground on which it all rests.

Three of the informants did not consider the Christian concept to be most important in their lives. As David no longer considered himself to be a Christian it cannot be at the centre of his life and therefore he valued it less than the other concepts. Even so, the fact that he chose to become a vegan is not related to him rejecting the Christian faith. He actually considered Christian faith and veganism to be compatible. For Elliot and Olivia, on the other hand, they considered themselves to be Christians but they did not give the Christian faith a special status. As seen in Figure 2 from the interview with Elliot he drew parentheses around Christian and emphasized the positive correlation between being a vegan and an environmentalist. Neither of them practiced their faith regularly and they both described moments and happenings of disappointment and conflict with the Christian faith and the Church of Sweden. Olivia specifically said that she does not read the Bible. Both of them described it as that they have not taken an active decision to be Christians but kept their faith from their upbringing. However, Olivia considers veganism a requirement for being a Christian.

Love, Grace and Feminism

Two additional drawings from the second focus group, which were made by Jennifer and Laura, also put the Christian faith at the centre (see Figure 5 and 6). Laura described that her life builds on the cell of Christian DNA at the centre, which shapes how she thinks about all other issues, as seen in Figure 6. The layer of feminism is also added because that is something to take seriously, which integrates with the spirals of Christian DNA. Many informants talked specifically about feminism and how that was a natural implication in their own lives following from being Christians. When I listen to Gabrielle talk about feminism I surmise it to be a cause that she has fought for her whole life. Additionally, a few mentioned intersectionality, for instance Charlie, who included it as one of the tips in their star (see Figure 4). Jennifer and Laura made their own drawings to emphasise how important their faith is, but Jennifer also made another important feature stand out when she put Love as the second most important (see Figure 5). According to Jennifer love is the connection between God and how we act in the world as humans. A theme emerged from the interviews since nine of the informants talked about grace within the Christian belief system. Many of the informants moved quite rapidly between the concept of love and the concept of grace, which indicates that these two are very tightly connected. This is also suggested in the Great Commandment (Luke 10:27) where the love for God and the love for one another are the most important issues.

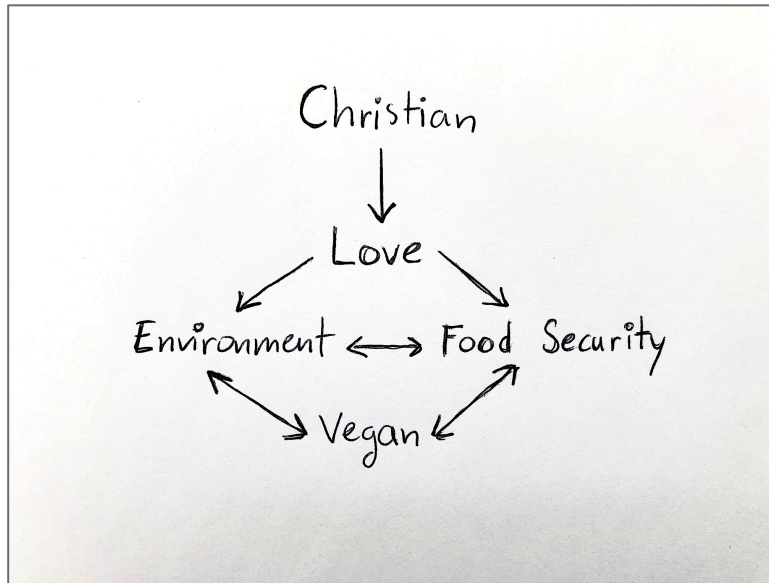


Figure 5: Drawing from the second focus group, made by Jennifer. (Copy of the original made by the author, translated to English.)

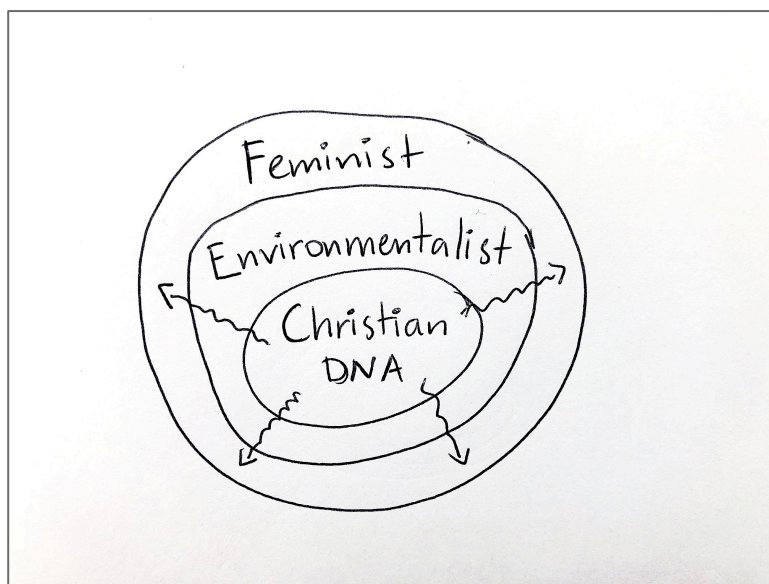


Figure 6: Drawing from the second focus group, made by Laura. (Copy of the original made by the author, translated to English.)

Within the concept of grace, the love for oneself was mentioned because it is all right to fail and try to do better tomorrow, for God will forgive. But it also contained the concept of love for our fellow human, which includes not being judgemental towards each other. Felicia talked specifically about the shortcomings of humans and that she has to come to peace with the fact that she fails constantly and trusts in the grace of God. Harry mentioned that he sees it as if humans get stunned by all the consequences of their behaviour if they aren't able to receive grace. Then their hearts will harden and be incapable of love if grace did not exist. Naomi mentions the importance of grace in order to let the process take time to transform into the vegan person she wants to be. In that way, she can for example use up all her non-vegan cosmetic products before she buys

new ones. She expressively proclaims that as it is an active decision to follow Jesus that she chooses to do every day, it is also an active decision to be a vegan, which she chooses to be every morning. The love of God is again at the centre in the poem in Figure 4 that Charlie wrote when I asked them to think about the meaning of the triangle. The connection is made because with the love and forgiveness of God we shall become better persons. Christians grow to become loving humans in the soil of God's love.

Discussion

In Sweden today it is possible to be vegan by choice. This choice can be seen as a double-sided choice. Since Sweden is a welfare country with an excessive amount of food there are very few people who cannot afford to eat healthy on a regular basis. Based on this it can therefore be seen as a typical rich and welfare choice to be a vegan in Sweden today. It is specific to our time and circumstances that a person can choose to eat a lot of meat every day, at every meal, if that diet is desired. I would say that neither of these two possibilities are a reality for the majority of people living outside of Sweden today. However, choosing to be a vegan is something that only a small group of Christians have actively done in Sweden today. If the approximate number of vegans in Sweden today is four percent of the total population (Animal Rights Sweden) the share of that group who are Christians will be even smaller.

Church, Ideology and Feminism

As shown by material that supports the notion of a degradation of the environment due to human activities and food production (see WWF, 2016; Gibbs, et al., 2010; Kissinger, et al., 2012; FAO, 2009; Naylor, et al., 1998; Scarborough et al., 2014; Carlsson-Kanyama and Gonzalez, 2009) this situation can be regarded as unfair and morally wrong. This is also along the lines of the development within the Catholic Church where Christian vegans would be backed-up by the current Pope Francis, who dedicated his first encyclical letter as a pope to the importance of the "care for our common home" and global environmentalism (Encyclical letter, 2015). However, according to the informants there is very little talk about these matters within their denominations and it can be both exposing and challenging to be a vegan in a Christian parish. As I perceived it the movement of being a vegan and pointing in a direction where Christians in Sweden today can adjust their eating habits in ways of animal ethics and environmentalism has not really sparked. The informants have a lot of interesting thoughts but their dedication is not always taken seriously in the parishes.

I perceived frustration among the informants due to the fact that other areas and important topics were generally prioritized and encouraged more than veganism, within the Church of Sweden especially. Topics mentioned specifically were fair-trade and the immigration question. Both of them can be categorized within ideology, together with feminism and socialism, which are to a great extent incorporated within the churches in Sweden today. In the 1960s originates the starting point of a great movement within the

Church of Sweden where the radical Christian left is taking the lead and reshapes the organization, which is illustrated at great length in Sundeens book *68-Kyrkan* (2017, translates to Church of 1968). This started a movement towards a different church in which ideology is put first and Christian beliefs comes second (Sundeen, 2017:13-40). This was a very radical, violent encouraging and socialistic worldview that had a break through, which originated mostly from the universities (Ibid.:14-16, 64-73, 86-89). From the start of this process the environment was not an aspect that mattered, as can be illustrated by the fact that the Swedish Green party (Miljöpartiet de gröna) did not make it into the Swedish Riksdag (body of national legislature) until 1988. Both socialism and feminism have a longer stronghold historically within Sweden.

Veganism was born into a divided context in the church with many conflicts and sore points. One point of great divide and conflict is the ordination of women to become priests that also has its base in ideology and politics (Dagen News Paper-1). I see a polarization between the two areas of interests, as feminism on the one side is put in a position of conflict and on the other side is social welfare, fair-trade and immigration embraced by Christians. Many informants would want to call themselves feminists, and acknowledge that issue as well (see for example Figure 6). Unfortunately, I believe that it can be the case that veganism is boxed together with feminism and therefore they are put in a vulnerable position that they do not deserve. Although veganism does not concern as many people and is a much smaller movement, it can be categorized as an ideology within the church. In contrast to social welfare and feminism, strict veganism is a bit harder to motivate with Christian faith, as I perceived it among the informants. There could also be a contradiction between veganism today and the left movement that grew in the 1960s that was connected to violence and radicalism (Sundeen, 2017:14-16, 64-73, 86-89). The Christian vegan movement would take its stand in non-violence and the love for nature, the creation and living beings (Spalde and Strindlund, 2012:134). As Charlie wrote in their poem love can be seen as the fertile soil to grow and become “a better and more compassionate person” (see Figure 4). And obviously as seen in Figure 4 Charlie believed that non-violence has an important role achieving this goal, and they reflected over the thought of a violent separation away from their children, as calves are taken away from their mothers.

Based on the Bible

Arguments for or against veganism can be based on the Old Testament and the informants do that to a certain extent (see Findings). The first five books of the Old Testament are filled with laws: the Mosaic laws. It is important to remember here that arguments brought forward from the Old Testament are in company with the Mosaic dietary laws. The book of Leviticus (chapter 11) talks about what meat is allowed to be eaten. It is clean to eat animals with cloven hooves and that chew the cud but unclean to eat camels, the rock hyrax, hares and swine (Leviticus 11:1-8). Many other animals are mentioned such as fish, birds, flying insects and creeping things as well as carcasses (Leviticus 11). If these laws were to be followed there is no reason for a human to

become a vegetarian or a vegan. Another argument brought forward by a few informants took a standpoint in the old covenant in the Old Testament where Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God, among them the commandment not to murder (Exodus 20). If reading further in the Bible there were many things that God told Moses in the old covenant, and among them for example that: animals should be sacrificed as burnt offerings and peace offerings (Exodus 20:24); guidelines on how to treat Hebrew servants (Exodus 21:1-6); and rules concerning death sentences (Exodus 21:12-17).

There are Christian traditions of sacrifice and laws concerning clean and unclean food among other laws. But there is a risk in basing arguments on the Mosaic Law and the Old Testament because I would say that the majority of Christians would probably believe that these are not applicable on our current society since Jesus's coming. This is complimented with comments from both Albert and Isak, who said that eating meat was a consequence of the fall of man. Also, Jesus ate fish, as he appeared before the disciples after his resurrection they offer him fish and honey, which he ate (Luke 24:40-43). Within Christianity there is a tradition to offer meat and other non-vegan foods when it is a special occasion. As for example when a guest is visiting, which Gabrielle experiences in her work as a pastor. Already in the monasteries a couple of hundred years AD it was customary to break the fast if a guest arrived because the meals were eaten together and the guest should not be neglected (Edsman, 1983:74). Along that line, it is during festive occasions that meat and milk have been offered since historically they are expensive and luxurious products. Also the Parable of the Lost Son in the Bible points in this direction where a father decides to kill a calf to celebrate that his lost son had returned (Luke, 15:11-32). So the way that the informants in focus group two, who live together, celebrated Christmas with non-vegan food fits the pattern of festive food occasions.

The Genesis Creation Narrative and the Great Commandment

The two main arguments from the Bible brought forward by the informants to support a vegan lifestyle were the Genesis Creation Narrative (Genesis 1:1-31) and the Great Commandment (Luke 10:25-37). God did, to start with, in the very first chapter in the Bible create nature and all living things and he gave humans the responsibility to care for it (Genesis 1:1-31). The informants interpret this as if Christians should not contribute to industries that harm creation or eat food that is degrading the planet. The idea of harming animals goes against their understanding of this responsibility. And even though some of the informants point out that a majority of Christians probably would say that it is fine to have fish, meat, egg or dairy occasionally, they strongly emphasized that the Genesis Creation Narrative holds an argument for a major cut-down in consumption. As children are given certain considerations in our society, animals should receive that same treatment as both humans and all living creatures are children of God (Spalde and Strindlund, 2005:49-55). Charlie expresses their wish to never have to experience a traumatic separation from their children by calling them

calves and note the resemblance of the early separation of calves from their mothers. A parent with children wants to care for them and would be absolutely terrified if they were treated badly, taken away or neglected in a way that would hurt them. Humans can in the same way care for the creation and all living creatures on the planet. Actually only one informant, Naomi, became a vegan because of environmental reasons. The most common reason among the informants was animal ethics. However, none of them became vegans because they had talked about it in their parish or among other Christian friends. As Felicia, Charlie, Jennifer and Laura (and Karl as a part of focus group two) most vividly pointed out, they thought that it might be time to go back to the roots and put Good at the centre again within Christianity and veganism (see Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6).

The Great Commandment (Luke 10:25-37) was the second most common paragraph from the Bible mentioned by the informants. Also, Spalde and Strindlund (2012:13) write about this in the first paragraph in the introduction in one of their most recent books and Jesus's words of love flow as a connecting thread through their work. However, the story continues after the commandment of love and a lawyer asks Jesus "and who is my neighbor" (Luke 10:29)? To answer that, Jesus tells a parable about a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan to present a situation of exemplary human behaviour (Hultgren 2000:94-95). Both the priest and the Levite walk past the injured man and only the third man to pass, the Samaritan, helped (Luke 10:29-37). Normally, the word neighbour is used in reference to a fellow Jew, i.e. someone that is of one's own people, which is also seen in the Commandments in the Old Testament (Hultgren 2000:94-95). However, Jesus proclaims by this story that also fellow Israelites should be considered to belong to their own people (Ibid.), and that they should not make a difference between groups of people because all humans can be one's neighbour.

It was probably so obvious when the Gospel of Luke was written that Jesus referred to humans here, because he does not seem to include animals in this story or to explain it further. This passage in Luke (10:25-37) is the only place in the Bible where Jesus is asked to explain who our neighbour is. During that time and in that context it is most likely that Jesus meant only people. There are specific words in Greek that mean animals or humans but the word used as 'neighbour' in this context is within neither of these groups. The word used is πλησίον (plésion), which means near or nearby (Heikel and Fridrichsen, 2013:180). Jesus is probably in the context of Luke (10:25-37) referring to 'the fellow human' when talking about one's neighbour. Spalde and Strindlund (2012:110-111) agree on this subject but they choose to interpret this passage in the Bible as if Jesus is encouraging us to look for vulnerable groups in our society today. As a consequence they think that the animals in agony is such a group (Ibid.:111). Many of the informants would probably agree with this interpretation since a majority of them referred to this section and included animals within the scope of the word neighbour.

Whether these arguments are considered strong enough to support specifically strict veganism will depend on the person interpreting them, the audience and the context. Also, these arguments could shift weight in the future based on the general prospects of

food shortages and global justice as well as the food geography of Sweden specifically. One method for this could be, as Bianca pointed out during the first focus group, to create the Christian vegan box. Whatever this contains and if it is the same for everyone is not the point, but this can start to take form during a dialogue among Christians. Since many of the informants mentioned grace I see it quite fitting in this perspective. And it goes with the thought of creating the Christian vegan box where there is no point in criticising each other's boxes but to encourage change and commitment. Due to environmental issues, food security and inhumane industry conditions for both animals and humans this is an important subject that should not be neglected by the Christian denominations in Sweden. As David's definition of a vegan is not dependent on the strict abandonment of all animal products but on the constant reflection over food and life choices one makes. He added that it could actually be a wise choice to eat honey from an ecological standpoint because there needs to be a wide fauna of bees if the cultivation of crops shall be possible in the future.

Triangle of Dissonance

Faith is personal. Through Christian believes and actively seeking certain information, a way to decrease dissonance as suggested by Festinger (1957:21-23), the informants handle the dissonance that arise in their lives. As illustrated in the findings and in the Figures drawn by the informants (see Figure 3, 4, 5 and 6). It is common that dissonance arises but it is also painful and hard, especially when it has to do with areas that are deeply valued and important. As for the ground in the triangle that most of the informants have in common, their faith, animal ethics, environmentalism and justice. They motivate and create a situation within their personal life that they can live with and be satisfied with. The informants were quite excited in the beginning of the interviews and I started out with asking about why they became vegans. It really struck me that all of them have a strong sense of commitment and that they are more than happy to share it with me. However, none of the informants became vegan due to Christian theology arguments and the conviction that it was the right thing to do, that layer, was added later. As the interview progressed the informants developed a more thoughtful attitude and they opened up about their situation and their relationship to their parish, family and friends. I got the feeling that it is not that easy to be a vegan. Even though there are far more vegan alternatives in the supermarkets and in restaurants today there are still negative attitudes towards veganism in many situations as my informants shared their stories. Also, Jennifer and Carl had taken the decision to not have kids in accordance with their life-style and sustainability conviction, which is something that other Christians consider odd since there is a strong expectation for Christian married couples to have children.

Before I started this research I expected that there would be a dissonance in the informants' lives regarding how to be both a Christian, vegan and environmentalist. However I was a bit off with that prediction. The dissonance appears when the corner of Christian in the triangle is specified to be Christian denomination or religious

community. Many of the informants argue that their parish is not taking veganism seriously. It is not preached as a way to love your neighbour, it is not really practised, and it does not have a place in theological discussions were arguments mentioned by some of the informants. Only Felicia has experienced support of the leadership within her parish where the lunch on Sundays is vegan. Naomi describes a wholly different situation where the only way to have vegan alternatives is if she herself takes charge of the food committee. Dissonance in this case will probably be intense since I perceive that both Christian faith and veganism are important life choices and Festinger (1957:17) argues that the dissonance is proportionate to the importance of the elements. Food is a platform for companionship with other humans that affects everyday life. Due to situations in her working life Gabrielle does not feel that she could be a vegan. In her working situation as a pastor where she has to meet people in different situations, she does not want to offend anyone by declining to eat food when offered.

I perceived a dissonance in the lives of the informants based on the relations in the triangle between their own vegan lifestyle choices, the Christian communion/parish and environmentalism. A theory suggested by Festinger (1957) and in this paper supported by Heider (1946) and Lindén (1994). Based on the material brought forward in this paper, where the informants have a strong conviction of a vegan lifestyle, I perceived the existence of a discomfort in relation to Christianity. My understanding from the interviews is that: there is no given platform for vegan discussions, vegan food is normally not on the table, food is a sensitive subject, a vegan conviction can be perceived as judgemental against other Christians and there is different opinion on the importance of strict veganism. The connection to Christian faith is important to the informants, it is nevertheless a big life commitment, and I would say that the dissonance that arises is uncomfortable. There is also a desire within this triangle to protect the very environment and animals that they hold dear, and the relation between their veganism and environmentalism I would conclude to be positive. Many of the informants show sustainable behaviour initiatives in their daily lives concerning for example transportation, eco-labels, buying presents and making their own make-up products. The third and last relation between the Christian community and environmentalism would also be positive. All the informants agreed on this as well and exemplified with the commitment to fair-trade. On a local level many parishes advertise themselves with an environmentally friendly profile or ecological profile, especially within the Church of Sweden. The Church of Sweden has on a national level committed to established environmental management goals and follows up by both internal and external revision (Environmental objectives, The Church of Sweden). However, the relation between veganism and the Christian community is a negative one and I would argue that the informants would want to get rid of the dissonance created by that relation.

A way to reduce dissonance is to unify the opinion of the group and to actively avoid certain information, respectively seek out new information and cognitions, to fit with

that opinion (Festinger, 1957:19-23, 182). Since none of the informants became vegan due to religious reasons or had an expressed supportive network of people in their parish, that could explain the tendency among about half of the informants to have had less contact with their parish over time. This is illustrated by Elliot in Figure 2. The informants are probably reducing the dissonance by avoiding certain conversations and certain Christian opinions, even though all of them knew why it is good to be a vegan and the sustainability advantages. To deal with the dissonance it is most likely that they either have to change their own opinion, modify the grounding elements or change the surrounding structure of opinions (Ibid.:182). The informants combine the Christian “rule” and emphasise on love and care for humans with the vegan commitment to “rules” regarding food that emphasize a love and care for animals. However, veganism does not follow naturally from a Christian faith and this implies a dissonance according to Festinger (1957:13). This induced dissonance and strengthening of borders between Christianity and Christian vegans could be illustrated by the fact that Felicia got critique from her fellow priest colleagues when she preached about these subjects in communities within the Church of Sweden.

Only Harry talked about that he used to openly seek confrontation about the subject of veganism within the context of his parish, both among leaders and friends, because he thought that the theology behind it is important. I interpret that as having more to do with Harry’s personality, he seemed to be a very confident and strong person, secure enough in his own beliefs to do that openly with the risk of criticism. I guess there is a risk involved in taking those battles, because if the support of the majority of the group will not be on your side, there will be an uncomfortable dissonance to live with. Unless the goal to change the opposite opinion in the group is achieved and the group unify around a vegan standpoint (Festinger, 1957:182). Only three of the informants felt that the theology behind veganism is important and all of them had some sort of outlet in their parish. Where they either chose to talk about it anyway and spread the word or they had their needs satisfied in some other way through a consideration for their food preferences by members or leaders in the parish. Albert, however, witnessed the lack of support and he grew tired of being a vegan and quit because he felt too lonely and it was too hard. Even though only two focus groups were conducted in this research there was a great interest and enthusiasm for them beforehand and I received an expressed desire to meet others who share this view and the longing to meet individuals from the tribe that they belong with. The informants I ended up having individual interviews with did not know each other from before (with the exception of two of them) but they still had a strong sense of belonging. The smaller (or non-existent) network an informant had of other Christian vegans, the stronger was the desire to meet the others.

Christian Vegan Us-Hood

It might be a way of empowerment to become vegan but it can probably also in some ways be discouraged among other Christians if they do not agree, as confirmed by the informants. However there is a high level of commitment to veganism among the

informants. They invest time, effort and endurance when they abstain from something that others might conclude a necessity. As Aronson (1992:304) claimed “we come to like things for which we suffer”. I do not think that the informants themselves would call it a suffering but it can still be described as a sacrifice that they make for the bigger cause and their beliefs. That will make the relationship to the group affiliation stronger and I believe that there is an ethnic identity, an us-hood, of being a Christian vegan. As Eriksen wrote (2002:67) there is need for both a sense of us-hood and we-hood. The interviewees display a strong loyalty to veganism and the us-hood, which marks a strong frontier against *the others* who does not agree on that premise. Their religious Christian view will effectively define their we-hood, as a common boundary. Combined, the Christian vegan identity is a synthesis between precisely these two: vegan and Christian, which make a new category.

The importance for a vegan identity is not the membership in an organization (Vildåsnan for example was mentioned by a few of the informants) or what makes a person religious is not the membership in the Church of Sweden. People going to church every Sunday are an example of that identity, or the Christian vegan collective that Jennifer, Karl and Laura formed together. That which forms identities are shared activities and negotiations with others of that same identity group (Eriksen, 2002:59-60). Many of the informants displayed a longing to be a part of a focus group to meet the other informants and were keen on sharing their stories. That would imply the need for a context or a space to share knowledge and experience in the sense of us-hood. Not all informants are strict vegans but they still live (or have lived) accordingly during the majority of their lives (Vegan, Cambridge Dictionary). Even so, I would imagine that all of them are the same in the eye of the beholder in the context of acknowledgment by other Christians within their parish (Eriksen, 2002:69). Almost all of the informants have experienced situations of exposedness where individuals outside of the group saw them as difficult demanding special diet preferences and were judgemental, which would strengthen their sense of us-hood. I would argue that the informants represent a radical stereotype of a Christian vegan.

It will create a situation of dissonance in a Christian context where an ethnic vegan Christian identity will lead to the urge to be both accepted by the others and at the same time wanting to avoid the others in order to escape certain opinions. This leads to a further tightening of the group and the need for a common history and interpretation of that history (Eriksen, 2002:69, 72). Traditionally it has been men who have had the societal advantage of having the interpretative prerogative of Christian faith and values. Based on the material that I have collected I think that Christian vegans want to interpret the Bible and Jesus in their own way. Gabrielle connected this to feminism as a way to challenge the power and the right to interpret. Animal rights are an issue that many of the informants mentioned. As the Christian animal activists Spalde and Strindlund (2005:88-89) argue in their book, animals should have equal political and judicial rights to their bodies and their entire life span as humans do. Of course, animals do not have an interest in education or the right to vote but animals should be able to

live a full life due to an intrinsic value and not as a resource for human exploitation (Ibid.). This correlates with the interpretation of the Great Commandment (Luke 10:25-37) and the Genesis Creation Narrative (Genesis 1:1-31). This is a common foundation, which most of the informants would agree on. And accordingly this could be seen as a common construction of the present Christian vegan identity based on a shared history. They form an us-hood that the others confirm and this leads to a partial alienation and distancing from Christian communities.

Christian Responsibility

All the informants agreed that the Christian denominations in Sweden have a responsibility to try to advocate for a new approach, in which veganism is an important part. This might not come easy and Lindén (1994:37) argues that only effective channels and theories about how to design information will not be enough. How individuals argue and motivate their composed triangle (of being a Christian, vegan and environmentalist) depends on background and context, which should be known by the informer to properly have a chance to meet individuals and induce change (Ibid.). Adapting to the situation today is stressed by Spalde and Strindlund (2012:118-120) because even if Jesus ate meat it is not therefore morally right to do it today, but there is time for reflection. Lynn White Jr. (1967:1207) expressed this urge for change already in the 1960s when he concluded that whether there is openness in society today or not, there is need for a solution through religion since the ecological problems today are so deeply embedded in religion from the start. One of the main points made by White (1967:1206) was also the increasing dependency and belief in technology:

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.

There is an awareness that surrounds the subjects as shown by the efforts made by the informants to live more sustainably. Gabrielle's speculation was that the level of awareness has to do with generations and that matters surrounding veganism and environmentalism are more important to younger people. A symptom of this could be seen in the newly started group called God Jord (translates in English to Good Earth). This is an organization created by young Christian adults that want to bring these matters back to the table for discussion. The aim is to gather like-minded Christians that believe in the responsibility to care of God's creation (God Jord). They express the need for a debate and a discussion about this and they convey that message through for example opinion pieces in newspapers, where they recently argued that every one should be an environmentalist (Dagen News Paper-2). Spalde and Strindlund (2012:113-114) pick up on this in their latest book where they argue that humans and animals might not be equal in the eyes of God but that humans nevertheless should understand that they are part of something bigger, a great communion of living creatures that God created and protects.

Conclusion

The main three reasons mentioned by the informants to become a vegan were animal ethics, environmental concerns and health. None of the informants became vegan in the first place due to contact and conversation with other Christian vegans, or because of Christian morale. They added the layer of Christian argumentation eventually and it came to be the important motivating factor to continue being vegan. Two major arguments from the Bible were brought forward: the Genesis Creation Narrative (Genesis 1:1-31) and the Great Commandment (Luke 10:25-37). They were important for the enforcement of their Christian veganism and also accompanied by other certain significant features such as animal ethics, food security, feminism and love. Charlie demonstrated most of these features in Figure 4.

The individuals that I interviewed committed to varying degrees of strictness of veganism but there was a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to the group synergetic as Christian vegans. This was more explicitly demonstrated in the collective consisting of Jennifer, Karl and Laura. Through belonging to the ethnic identity of Christian vegans and basing their arguments in their religious faith they maintained their choice to be vegans in their daily life. Also many of them think about environmentalism leading up to a commitment to sustainability efforts. Even so, I conclude that the major dissonance in the triangle (see Figure 1) lies specifically between their vegan conviction and the Church and Christian community. There is no expressed encouragement for veganism within the parishes and that has led to a partial withdrawal and distance. The fundamental nature of the elements of veganism and Christianity induces a dissonance. The informants work out ways to handle this in their own lives and they have a strong drive to share their conviction.

This study contributes to the examination of Christian vegans and, even though it is hard to make a general conclusion, I can point to a situation in which individuals have a hard time to maintain their relation and to assert themselves in relation to Christian denominations in Sweden today. The combined identity of being a Christian vegan does increase their exclusion from both original groups.

Future Research

I would like to do further studies with more focus groups and explore the dynamics between Christian vegans and the ethnic identity. If possible it would also be very interesting to include focus groups in the study consisting of Christian people who used to be vegans but are not anymore. This is an area that needs more attention and reflection on this subject. Exploring this I would want to go beyond the borders of Sweden to see if there could be such a thing as a transnational ethnic identity of Christian vegans.

Examining the theological grounds for veganism and environmentalism would be a natural and beneficial step as well as looking into how Christian veganism connects to

political ideology in Sweden and what affect that has on the relation to a Christian community. The dissonance in relation to the church and Christian communities could be an area to explore. Both by reviewing how a parish specifically could reduce that dissonance and how the Christians denominations in general respond to and treat marginalized groups with differentiating opinions.

Bibliography

Animal Rights Sweden. Djurens Rätt. Var Tionde Svensk är Vegetarian. Available at: <https://www.djurensratt.se/blogg/var-tionde-svensk-ar-vegetarian> [Accessed 09-05-2018]

Aronson, E. 1992. The Return of the Repressed: Dissonance Theory Makes a Comeback. *Psychological Inquiry*, 3(4):303-311.

Aronson, E. and Mills, J. 1959. The Effect of Severity of Initiation on Liking for a Group. *Journal Of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59(2):177-181.

Becher, T., and Trowler, P. R. 2001. *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Culture of Disciplines*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Open University Press.

Carlsson-Kanyama, A., and Gonzalez, A., D. 2009. Potential Contributions of Food Consumption Patterns to Climate Change. *American Journal Of Clinical Nutrition*, 89(5):1704-1709.

Carson, R. 2000. *Silent Spring*. London: Penguin Books

Ciplet, D., Roberts, J. T., and Khan, M. R. 2015. *Power in a Warming World: The new Global Politics of Climate Change and the Remaking of Environmental Inequality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Cole, M., and Morgan, K. 2011. Vegaphobia: Derogatory Discourses of Veganism and the Reproduction of Speciesism in UK National Newspapers. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 62(1):134-153.

Dagen News Paper-1. Article. Available at: <http://www.dagen.se/femtio-konfliktfyllda-ar-med-kvinnliga-praster-1.195174> [Accessed 11-05-2018]

Dagen News Paper-2. Opinion piece. Available at: <http://www.dagen.se/debatt/god-jord-alla-borde-vara-miljovanner-1.1135758> [Accessed 26-04-2018]

Edsman, C-M. 1983. *Kristendomen, Födan och Födoförbunden*. Book chapter in, *Kultur, Religion och Nutrition: En Seminariereserie Arrangerad vid Institutionen för Näringslära, Uppsala Universitet Vårterminen 1981*, ed. by Edsman, C-M., Hambraeus, L., and Mellander, O., pp. 67-86. Uppsala: Institutionen för Näringslära, Uppsala Universitet.

Educational Institute. Church of Sweden. Att bli präst. Available at:
<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/utbildningsinstitutet/att-bli-prast> [Accessed 23-04-2018]

Encyclical Letter. 2015. Laudato Si, of the Holy Father, Francis, On Care for Our Common Home. By Pope Francis, released on June 18, 2015. Available at:
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html [Accessed 12-05-2018]

Environmental objectives, The Church of Sweden. Available at:
<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/miljomal> [Accessed 13-05-2018]

Equmeniakyrkan. The Uniting Church in Sweden. Statistics. Available at:
<https://equmeniakyrkan.se/> [Accessed 27-04-2018]

Eriksen, T. H. 2002. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. 2nd edition. London: Pluto Press.

FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2009. How to Feed the World in 2050. Discussion paper prepared for Expert Forum: 12–13 October 2009.

Festinger, L. 1957. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Festinger, L., and Carlsmith, J. M. 1959. Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance. *Journal Of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2):203-210.

Flexitarian, Cambridge Dictionary. Available at:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/flexitarian> [Accessed 27-04-2018]

Gibbs, H. K., Ruesch, A. S., Achard, F., Clayton, M. K., Holmgren, P., Ramankutty, N., and Foley, J. A. 2010. Tropical Forests Were the Primary Source of New Agricultural Land in the 1980s and 1990s. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States of America*, 107(38):16732-16737.

God Jord. The vision. Available at: <https://www.godjord.nu/visionen/> [Accessed 24-04-2018]

Greenebaum, J. 2012. Veganism, Identity and the Quest for Authenticity. *Food, Culture and Society*, 15(1):129-144.

Harmon-Jones, E., Harmon-Jones, C., and Levy, N. 2015. An Action-Based Model of Cognitive-Dissonance Processes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(3):184-189.

Harmon-Jones, E., and Mills, J. 1999. *An Introduction to Cognitive Dissonance Theory and an Overview of Current Perspectives on the Theory*. Book chapter in, *Cognitive Dissonance: Progress on a Pivotal Theory in Social Psychology*, ed. by Harmon-Jones, E., and Mills, J., pp. 3-21. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- Heider, F. 1946. Attitudes and Cognitive Organization. *Journal of Psychology*, 21:107-112
- Heikel, I. A., and Fridrichsen, A. 2013. *Grekisk-Svensk Ordbok till Nya Testamentet och de Apostoliska Fäderna*. Uppsala: Bibelakademiförlaget.
- Hoffman, S. R., Stallings, S. F., Bessinger, R. C., and Brooks, G. T. 2013. Differences Between Health and Ethical Vegetarians. Strength of Conviction, Nutrition knowledge, Dietary Restriction, and Duration of Adherence. *Appetite*, 65:139-144.
- Hultgren, A. J. 2000. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Kissinger, G., Herold, M., and De Sy, V. 2012. Drivers of Deforestation and Forest Degradation: A Synthesis Report for REDD+ Policymakers. Lexeme Consulting, Vancouver Canada.
- Klein, N. 2014. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kvale, S., and Brinkmann, S. 2009. *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Lewis, C. S. 1971. *Vivisection*. In, *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Hooper, W., pp. 182-186. London: Geoffrey Bles.
- Lindeman, M., and Sirelius, M. 2001. Food Choice Ideologies: The Modern Manifestations of Normative and Humanist views of the World. *Appetite*, 37(3):175-184.
- Lindén, A-L. 1994. *Människa och miljö*. Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag.
- Linzey, A. 2009. *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology, and Practical Ethics*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Magnusson, E. and Marecek, J. 2015. *Doing Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Learner's Guide*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Cambridge University Press.
- Malm, A. 2016. *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*. London; Brooklyn, New York: Verso.
- Midgley, M. 1978. *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Miller, G. T., and Spoolman, S. 2012. *Living in the environment*. 17th edition. Hampshire: Brooks/Cole Cengage Learning.
- Naylor, R. L., Goldburg, R. J., Mooney, H., Beveridge, M., Clay, J., Folke, C., Kautsky, N., Lubchenco, J., Primavera, J., and Williams, M. 1998. Nature's Subsidies to Shrimp and Salmon Farming. *Science*, 282(5390):883-884.

Nixon, R. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Orange, D., M. 2017. *Climate Crisis, Psychoanalysis, and Radical Ethics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Pastor in the Pentecostal Church. Pingst Pastor in Sweden. Available at: <https://www.pingst.se/sverige/natverk-i-pingst/pingst-pastor/> [Accessed 29-04-2018]

Povey, R., Wellens, B., and Conner, M. 2001. Attitudes Towards Following Meat, Vegetarian and Vegan Diets: An Examination of the Role of Ambivalence. *Appetite*, 37(1):15-26.

Regan, T. 1983. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Regulation (EC), No 1223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on cosmetic products. *Official Journal, L 342, 22.12.2009, pp. 59–209*.

Ryder, R. D. 1970. Speciesism. Original leaflet. *Critical Society*, issue 2, spring 2010. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20121114004403/http://www.criticalsocietyjournal.org.uk/Archives_files/1.%20Speciesism%20Again.pdf [Accessed 18-05-2018]

Saco, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations. Here are the jobs in five years. Available at: <https://www.saco.se/studieval/var-finns-jobben-i-framtiden/> [Accessed 23-04-2018]

Salt, H. S. 1980. *Animals' Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*. Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania: Society for Animal Rights.

Scarborough, P., Appleby, P. N., Mizdrak, A., Briggs, A. D., Travis, R. C., Bradbury, K. E., and Key, T. J. 2014. Dietary Greenhouse Gas Emissions of Meat-Eaters, Fish-Eaters, Vegetarians and Vegans in the UK. *Climatic Change*, 125(2):179-192.

Singer, P. 1999. *Djurens Frigörelse*. 2nd edition. Nora: Bokförlaget Nya Doxa.

Smith, J. A., and Jenks, C. 2018. *Sociology and Human Ecology: Complexity and Post-Humanist Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Spalde, A., and Strindlund, P. 2005. *Varje Varelse Ett Guds Ord: Omsorg om Djuren som Kristen Andlighet*. Lund: Arcus.

Spalde, A., and Strindlund, P. 2012. *Kärlekens Väg: Djurrätt och Kristen Tro*. Tived: Back to Being.

Statistics, The Church of Sweden. Available at: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik> [Accessed 27-04-2018]

- Sundeen, J. 2017. *68-Kyrkan: Svensk Kristen Vänsters Möten med Marxismen 1965-1989*. Stockholm: Bladh by Bladh.
- Svanberg, I., and Westerlund, D. 2011. *Religion i Sverige*. 2nd edition. Stockholm: Dialogos.
- The Bible, New King James Version, 1982.
- The Catholic Church in Sweden. Stockholms Katolska Stift. Att vara präst i Katolska kyrkan. Available at: <http://www.katolskakyrkan.se/kallelser/att-vara-prast-i-katolska-kyrkan> [Accessed 23-04-2018]
- The Pentecostal Church. Statistics. Available at: <https://www.pingst.se/om-pingst/fakta-och-forskning/statistik/> [Accessed 27-04-2018]
- The Seventh-day Adventist Church. Statistics. Available at: <https://www.adventist.se/fakta-statistik/789/1> [Accessed 27-04-2018]
- Trowler, P. 2005. Academic Tribes: Their Significance in Enhancement Processes. Keynote speech i Utvecklingskonferensen för högre utbildning 2005, pp. 12–21.
- Vegan, Cambridge Dictionary. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/vegan?q=vegan> [Accessed 27-04-2018]
- Vegetarian, Cambridge Dictionary. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/vegetarian?q=vegetarian> [Accessed 27-04-2018]
- Vegetarian Society. What is a vegetarian? Available at: <https://www.vegsoc.org/definition> [Accessed 27-04-2018]
- Wainwright, J., and Mann, G. 2013. Climate Leviathan. *Antipode*, 45(1):1-22.
- Wallerstein, I. M. 2004. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- White, L. Jr. 1967. The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis. *Science*, 155(3767): 1203-1207.
- Wibeck, V. 2010. *Fokusgrupper: Om Fokuserade Gruppintervjuer som Undersökningsmetod*. 2nd edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- WWF. 2016. Living Planet Report 2016: Risk and Resilience In a New Era. WWF International, Gland, Switzerland.

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Pronoun:

Age:

Occupation:

Christian Denomination:

1. Why did you choose to become a vegan?
 2. For how long have you been a vegan?
 3. What does it mean for you in your life to be a vegan?
 4. How would you define a vegan?
-

11. What is your experience of being both a Christian and a vegan?
 12. How do you motivate veganism with your faith?
The Bible?
 13. Have you experienced any divergences or opposition within Christian contexts when it comes to veganism?
 14. What network of Christian vegans do you have?
 15. How can you feel as a vegan in a Christian context?
 16. How can you feel as a Christian in a vegan context?
-

21. In what other ways/areas (other than food) is your lifestyle affected by being a vegan and a Christian?
 22. In what other ways do you live sustainably?
Are there any current environmental issues that you are concerned by?
 23. What do you think that the Church should do to encourage more people to live in a more sustainable way?
And eating more vegan food?
-

31. The Triangle

- What do you think about these relations? Positive or negative?
- How do you make these relations work in your own life?