

# ANIMALS AS GRACE

## On Being an Animal Liturgist

*Andrew Linzey*

**B**ARNEY WAS A REFUGEE. Abandoned, he subsequently found a home at the local animal sanctuary. It was there that we first met him. His shaggy hair, dark brown eyes, and exuberant temperament endeared him to the Linzey family. ‘There goes the woolly rocket’, we would say as he raced before us on long walks. So glad was he to have a home that when any of us opened the front door he would pin us to the wall and lavish his affection upon us. He had, I recall, very large paws, and made ample use of them when he wanted our attention. Still, he gave us much more than we gave him.

One day he began to have fits, and an incurable neurological problem was diagnosed. Euthanasia was the advised course of action. The result was devastating for the whole family. Here was a dog badly treated by the world, yet, much as we loved him, we could not save him from suffering and premature death. We elected to bury him in the garden. As we stood around the open grave, I fumbled to find some appropriate words of parting.

But there were no prescribed words. The physical neglect that Barney had suffered was paralleled by a spiritual neglect as well. The Churches had really nothing to offer—and nothing to say. The Christian heritage of 2,000 years of spirituality and scholarship has produced only liturgical silence over the deaths of millions of members of other species, even those who share and enrich our lives. A tradition that has countenanced the blessing of cars and houses has never even registered a pastoral need in relation to the death of companion animals.

Struck by the existence of this lacuna, I was determined to do something. I phoned up my publishers and said that I wanted a break from my publishing commitments to complete a book on animal liturgy. They obliged with a contract. ‘Should only take a month or so’,

*The Way*, 46/1 (January 2007), 137-149

I foolishly commented. In fact, it took as long as six and consumed a whole summer. It was an agonizing process. It was all very flattering to be thought a pioneer but, in reality, I felt more like a scavenger in a wasteland. Some of my friends judged the project distinctly eccentric.

What was the problem then that I sought to address? Quite simply: the invisibility of animals in Christian worship. Christians currently worship God as though the world of animals does not exist. Contrary to some of the psalms, praise has become an exclusively human-centred affair; animals hardly get a look in at all. Behind this is a deeper impoverishment, or rather blindness: the sense that God the Creator is not much concerned with animals. If we neglect them, it is because we are representing traditional versions of divine negligence. But to maintain such a position is increasingly problematic once it is fully understood that God is the Creator not only of the human species but also of millions of other living things. Can the God who nourishes and sustains the entire created universe really only be interested in *one* species? 'An exclusive preoccupation with *human* well-being is beginning to seem distinctly parochial.'<sup>1</sup>

Allied to that is the question of the flesh. Traditional Anglican and Roman Catholic theology, it is sometimes boasted, is strongly incarnational. If this is true, it is odd that many clergy and theologians still have not grasped the spiritual significance of our relations with other fleshly creatures. It is worth pausing to reflect why the most 'fleshly' (at least in theory) religion of all has difficulty in celebrating animals, even in recognising them as proper objects of moral solicitude.

The doctrine of the incarnation teaches us, at least theoretically, to take the flesh seriously:

[Human beings] will thus come to realise that the originality of Christianity consists in consecrating their everyday lives through the Incarnation, and not in attempting to live in a world that is supposed to be holy but which is in fact artificial and out of contact with reality.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unknown source cited by Robert Runcie, 'Theology, the University and the Modern World', in *Theology, the University and the Modern World*, edited by P. A. B. Clarke and Andrew Linzey (London: LCAP, 1988), 20; original emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man: The Sense of the Sacral and Christian Liturgy*, translated by M. Joseph Costelloe (London: Burns and Oates, 1963), 9; cited and discussed in Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care* (London: SCM, 1999), 14.

This everyday world which we claim has been consecrated by the incarnation is populated also with *other* creatures. 'There is something distinctly odd, even perverse, about an incarnational theology that cannot celebrate our relations with other creatures', I groaned. Even more despairingly,

I am getting a little tired of theologians who are eager, sometimes over-eager, to see incarnational resonances within almost every area of human activity (art, music, poetry, dance) but who look with astonishment that our relations with animals might be an issue worthy of spiritual, nay incarnational, concern.<sup>3</sup>

Christian theology is still deeply threatened by talk of animals, as if by taking their interests seriously we dethrone our own. Indeed, one theologian was recently foolish enough to state his fear dogmatically: 'The root of the case for animal rights lies there. Its advocates do not believe that [humanity] is unique.'<sup>4</sup> But this fear-projecting theologian clearly hadn't read my works which defend both animal rights *and* human uniqueness.<sup>5</sup> For some people, some things *can't* be true no matter how much evidence to the contrary.

Perhaps some Christians are simply frightened of displays of emotion towards animals. Some clergy, I know, look askance at celebrations of inter-species fraternity, arguing that they pander to sentimentality. 'People love animals', says Geraldine Granger, the eponymous Vicar of Dibley in the British TV sitcom, justifying her intention to hold an animal service. 'People also love food-mixers', replies the



<sup>3</sup> Linzey, *Animal Rites*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Kirwan, 'Greens and Animals', in *The Cross and the Rain Forest: A Critique of Radical Green Spirituality*, edited by Robert Whelan, Joseph Kirwan and Paul Haffner (Grand Rapids, Mi: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 111.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (London: SPCK, 1987).

straight-laced churchwarden, David Horton, 'but there are very few of us pressing the Archbishop of Canterbury for a special communion for the Moulinex Magic-Master'.<sup>6</sup>

But there are obvious differences between food-mixers and animals. The chief one is that animals are God's creatures. The point is an obvious one, but behind it lie weighty theological insights. Animals were created alongside us, according to Genesis 1, on the sixth day of creation. They are blessed by their Creator. They are given their own space in which to live and flourish. Their life, *nephesh* in Hebrew, is God-given. The God who creates also enters into a covenant relationship with all living beings. Given these insights, it is only appropriate that humans should experience a sense of fellow-feeling with other sentient species. And this is most keenly felt by people who care for them and keep them as companions. Some animal services, I accept, can make their prime focus little more than a celebration of childish emotion. But, as I get older, I am less censorious about 'childish emotion'. Vincent Van Gogh once remarked that in order to love God one needs to love 'many things':

Love a friend, a wife, something, whatever you like, and you will be on the right way to know more about it .... But one must love with a lofty and serious intimate sympathy, with strength, with intelligence and one must always try to know deeper, better, and more. That leads to God, that leads to unwavering faith.<sup>7</sup>

The bottom line is that many people love their animals and dare to think that God does too.

When people speak of 'sentimentality', what they often have in mind is that certain emotional responses are inappropriate, and some may be. This attitude is reinforced by the rather prim line of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 'One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons'.<sup>8</sup> This almost

<sup>6</sup> Richard Curtis and Paul Mayhew-Archer, *The Vicar of Dibley: The Great Big Companion to Dibley* (London: Michael Joseph, 2000), 84. I acknowledge my indebtedness to these fine writers who have helped put both Dibley and animal services on the map.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent Van Gogh, cited in *The Letters of Van Gogh*, edited by Mark Roskill (London: Fontana, 1983), 124; also cited and discussed in Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel: Christian Faith as if Animals Mattered* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), 173-174.

<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 517, para. 2418. In order to understand this odd comment, one needs to appreciate that for centuries it was standard Catholic teaching that one had no duty to love animals—a view which stemmed expressly from St Thomas

suggests that there is only a limited amount of love in the world so we should not waste it on animals. How can this be reconciled, one wonders, with the extraordinary love of other creatures displayed by many Catholic saints? Can the emotional rationing proposed coexist with Christ-like generosity?

But emotional response, even if it is a worthy beginning, is not enough. There are big theological questions that should be addressed. Although clergy are often reticent about giving them voice, many 'ordinary' worshippers have grasped them: if God loves and cares for creation should not the species uniquely made in God's image demonstrate that same loving care? If our power over animals is not to be its own self-justification, should not the example of moral generosity—of lordship expressed in service—glimpsed in the life and example of Jesus be the model for the exercise of our own 'dominion' over other creatures? Far from being 'made for us', is it not truer, and more adequately biblical, to say that humans are made for creation—to act as servants and guardians of what God has created? Animal services can, at best, provide a platform to say important theological things about animals: to express the need for a sense of wonder and awe at divine creativity; for an appreciation that God delights in differentiated being and that we should delight in it too; and, not least, for a penitential recognition of the human hubris and greed that results in animal abuse.

There are also many, largely unmet, spiritual needs. People who keep animals have often made an elementary but profound discovery: animals are not machines or commodities, but beings with their own God-given lives, individuality and personality. At their best, relations



Aquinas; see my Chapter 7, 'Why Church Teaching Perpetuates Cruelty', *Animal Gospel*, 64-72. Although slighting, it actually represents an advance on the previous position.

with companion animals can help us to grow in mutuality, self-giving and trust. And yet, these spiritually sustaining relationships often go unrecognised. For many, animals are the 'significant others' in their lives. Indeed, one recent theologian has suggested that in these relationships of apparent 'excess' we see nothing less than the self-giving of God. 'I want to suggest that, from a theological perspective that takes pets seriously', writes Stephen H. Webb, 'animals are more like gifts than something owned, giving us more than we expect and thus obliging us to return their gifts'.<sup>9</sup> Far from decrying these relationships as 'sentimental', 'unbalanced' or 'obsessive', as frequently happens today, Churches could point to their underlying theological significance as examples of divine grace.

Some view liturgical concern for animals as selling out to a post-modernist, largely secular, sensibility. In fact, blessings for animals are found in the Catholic manual, *Rituale Romanum*, written in 1614, and left virtually untouched until 1952. Moreover, concern for animals as a Christian duty was pioneered by the SPCA (as it then was), whose first prospectus even proposed the funding of 'periodic discourses' from London pulpits.<sup>10</sup> Many clergy have not caught up with the fact that the modern ethical sensibility towards animals was largely Christian in origin.

Anyway, I worked away all summer, determined to find the words that the Christian tradition had not said but that (I thought) it had always, deep down, wanted to say. I began, unsurprisingly, with a liturgy for animal burials. What should one say when confronted, as I was, with a dead dog and a hole in the ground? I came to the conclusion that what we should want to say at that poignant moment is very similar to what one already says, and does, when a human being dies.

One should first pray a prayer of thanksgiving, and then commend the life of the individual concerned into the hands of almighty God. I wrestled in my own mind with the theology of hope and came even more firmly to the conclusion expressed without dissent at the Lambeth Conference of 1998 that 'the redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ extends to the whole of creation'.<sup>11</sup> The God of the

<sup>9</sup> Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Broome, 'Prospectus of the SPCA', *RSPCA Records*, volume 2 (1823-1826). I am grateful to the Librarian of the RSPCA for this reference.

<sup>11</sup> Lambeth Conference 1998, Resolution 1.8, Creation (a) (iii), cited and discussed in *Animal Rites*, 108. The resolution 'reaffirms the biblical vision of Creation', according to which 'creation is a web of

universe could find space even, and especially, for Barney. Immodestly, I felt pleased with at least some of my efforts, this one especially:

Pilgrim God  
who journeys with us  
through the joys and shadows  
of this world

be with us  
in our sorrow  
and feel our pain;  
help us to accept  
the mystery of death  
without bitterness  
but with hope.

Among the shadows  
of this world,  
amid the turmoil of life  
and the fear of death

you stand alongside us,  
always blessing, always giving  
arms always outstretched.

For this we know:  
every living thing is yours  
and returns to you.

As we ponder this mystery  
we give you thanks  
for the life of (*Name*)  
and we now commit *him/her*  
into your loving hands.

Gentle God:  
fragile is your world,  
delicate are your creatures,  
and costly is your love  
which bears and redeems us all.  
Amen.<sup>12</sup>

Some people may cavil at the confident notion that animals are redeemed *individually*.<sup>13</sup> Even among those who believe in animal redemption, there are some who do not believe that animals have the right kind of 'soul' for immortality. Roman Catholic tradition has distinguished between the 'rational' soul, which equips humans for eternity, and the 'non-rational' soul of animals, which perishes after

inter-dependent relationships bound together in the Covenant which God the Holy Trinity has established with the whole earth and every living being'. It goes on to make three affirmations: '(i) the divine Spirit is sacramentally present in Creation, which is therefore to be treated with reverence, respect, and gratitude; (ii) human beings are both co-partners with the rest of Creation and living bridges between heaven and earth, with responsibility to make personal and corporate sacrifices for the common good of all Creation; (iii) the redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ extends to the whole of Creation'. This is a remarkably adroit theological statement and deserves to be more widely known. See <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-8.cfm>.

<sup>12</sup> Prayers from 'A Liturgy for Animal Burial', *Animal Rites*, 113-114.

<sup>13</sup> For a helpful survey and discussion of the various models of animal redemption, both individual and corporate, see Petroc and Eldred Willey, 'Will Animals be Redeemed?' in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, edited by Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (London: SCM, 1994), 190-200. My own view is that all sentient beings will be redeemed in a way that compensates them for the injustice and suffering that they have had to undergo. That, I believe, is required by the doctrine of a just God. How precisely that will be done is a matter that I happily leave to the Almighty.

death. But that absolute emphasis on rationality (at least as we understand it) seems inappropriate when we are talking of divine grace. It misses the point. And the point concerns *God's* benevolence, not ours. I cannot with certainty look into an animal's psyche and come to a conclusion about its spiritual status, but I can be sure—as sure as I am of anything—that the merciful God disclosed in Jesus Christ will not let any loved creature perish into oblivion. To deny this gospel of hope to all other species except our own strikes me as an arrogant, mean doctrine of God.

In fact, the idea of cosmic redemption (and, by implication, the redemption of individuals within it) is hardly new. The Logos doctrine, so prevalent during the early years of Christian history, encapsulates it all. Indeed, Allan Galloway in his classic work, *The Cosmic Christ*, argues that the doctrine of cosmic redemption 'was at the very heart of the primitive Gospel'.<sup>14</sup> Developing precisely that theme, my words of commendation were prefaced by a robust theology of the Logos:

Christ is the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega	who transforms all suffering into joy;
who reconciles and redeems every form of created life; the source and destiny of all living things; who bears the wounds of all suffering creatures;	Christ is the first and the last the Alpha and the Omega; the Saviour of the Universe: in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>15</sup>

But my book did not only contain liturgies for animal burials. It also included services in celebration of animal companionship, services for animal welfare, healing liturgies, new eucharistic prayers 'for the whole creation', and forms for the blessing of individual animals. Underlying all these attempts was the need to develop liturgy that helped us celebrate the God-given lives of other creatures. The following are some examples:

<sup>14</sup> Allan Galloway, *The Cosmic Christ* (London: Nisbet, 1951), x. He convincingly argues that much of the cosmic imagery of the New Testament was designed to 'symbolize all the distortion in the structure of existence' on one hand, and to assert 'that the work of Christ is universally effective for all creation', on the other. The doctrine of the cosmic Christ 'arose as a necessary implication of the fundamental insights of Jewish and Christian theology'. See pp. 28, 29, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Prayers from 'A Liturgy for Animal Burial', *Animal Rites*, 110-111.



God of the universe  
 all creatures praise you;  
 the sun setting on the lake,  
 the birds flying upward toward  
 the heavens;

the growl of the bear;  
 the darting of the stickleback;  
 the purring of the cat,  
 the wide eyes of the tiger;  
 the swift legs of the cheetah,  
 the dance of the hare;

the lapping of the dog,  
 the descent of the dove.

God of a thousand ears  
 the music of your creatures  
 resounds throughout creation  
 and in heaven a symphony is  
 made.

Christ in all things:  
 in the waves breaking on the  
 shore;  
 in the beauty of the sunset;  
 in the fragrant blossom of  
 Spring;  
 in the music that makes our  
 hearts dance;  
 in the kisses of embracing love;  
 in the cries of the innocent.

Help us to wonder, Lord  
 to stand in awe;  
 to stand and stare;  
 and so to praise you  
 for the richness of the world  
 you have laid before us.

Large and immense God  
 help us to know the littleness  
 of our lives without you;  
 the littleness of our thoughts  
 without your inspiration;  
 and the littleness of our hearts  
 without your love;

you are God beyond our  
 littleness  
 yet in one tiny space and time  
 you became one with us and  
 all those specks of dust  
 you love for all eternity;

enlarge our hearts and minds  
 to reverence all living things  
 and in our care for them  
 to become big with your grace  
 and signs of your kingdom.  
 Amen.<sup>16</sup>

### Media Reactions

I expected that *Animal Rites* would arouse interest, but I was not prepared for the media roller-coaster that it set in motion. Scores of journals world-wide focused on the book, ranging from the *Washington Post*<sup>17</sup> and *Der Spiegel*<sup>18</sup> to the Dutch daily *Trouw*.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the

<sup>16</sup> Prayers from 'Celebrating the Creatures: A Liturgy', *Animal Rites*, 28-30.

<sup>17</sup> 'Pet's Death Inspires Liturgies for Animals', *The Washington Post* (3 March 1999). Among the many other reports (which seemed to go on for a year), both satirical and serious, see: 'They Are God's Best Friends Too: Ben Fenton on the Theologians Who Believe Heaven Would Be Hell without Dogs', *The Daily Telegraph* (18 September 1999); Robbie Millen, 'Barking Dogma', *The Spectator* (18 September 1999); 'Will Your Pet Rise Again? Yes, Some Faiths Say', *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (7

*Independent* gave over almost a page to an extended interview.<sup>20</sup> I spent three weeks either on the phone talking to journalists or darting from one studio to another.

Two reactions predominated. The first was theological puzzlement. Many questioned whether what I was doing made any theological sense, and whether such liturgies were legitimate. A brother of the Society of St Francis at its house in Hilfield, who preferred not to be named, commented:

We like animals. We have several ourselves. But our main interest is in people. Animals were peripheral to St Francis, which many people don't realise. He was more concerned about people.<sup>21</sup>

The idea that St Francis could be concerned about *both* humans and animals—as could modern-day Franciscans—obviously eluded him. More seriously, it was a bit disconcerting to discover that a Franciscan brother really had not grasped that the gospel that St Francis preached was about the love of God the Creator, which sustains all living beings—not just the human ones. Not all reaction was hostile. *The Tablet* managed a fairly serious news announcement,<sup>22</sup> and the liturgical journal of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales managed some mollifying comments:

These prayers are serious and carefully compiled. There is much merit in them as regards liturgical structure and general style. They are not maudlin or sentimental.

Pretty amazing, I thought. Then came the final paragraph:

February 1999); 'Do Dogs Go to Heaven?' *Dog Fancy Magazine* (Los Angeles) (September 1999), 25-28; 'Animals in the Afterlife', *Charleston Post and Courier* (10 February 1999); "'I Totally Believe in Animals in Heaven", Says Animal Rights Theologian', press release, *Ecumenical News International* (8 March 1999); 'God Loves Animals Too', *Christian Herald* (7 April 1999); 'Tail-Wagging Theology', *Reform* (magazine of the United Reformed Church) (April 1999).

<sup>18</sup> 'Sittichs Seele: Der britische Theologe hat ein Gebetbuch geschrieben, das der Menschheit noch fehlte: für die Tiere', *Der Spiegel*, 7 (1999). See also 'Ein Gebetbuch für Tiere. Anglikanischer Priester sorgt mit Werk für Aufregung', *Die Welt* (April 1999).

<sup>19</sup> 'Nee, de doop voor dieren is niet nodig', *Trouw* (4 August 1999), 12.

<sup>20</sup> The initial press report, 'Prayer Book for Pets Launched', *The Independent* (29 January 1999), was followed by an interview with Paul Vallely, 'The Lord is My Shepherd', *The Independent* (3 February 1999).

<sup>21</sup> 'For Pets We See no Longer', *Church Times* (29 January 1999). There was also a page in the same issue devoted to the interview with Margaret Duggan, 'Talking of Animals', 12.

<sup>22</sup> 'Pets in the Pew', *The Tablet* (6 February 1999).

But is there any justification for incorporating specific animal liturgies in our worship? Animals may well have souls, but they are not immortal souls, and animals are not part of the salvific and sacramental economy in which humans are incorporated. Matthew 6:26 and 12:12 makes it clear that God cares for animals, but he values humans much more. Regrettably we must conclude that most of Professor Linzey's interesting liturgical texts are misconceived and inappropriate. They would assuredly not get past the Congregation for Divine Worship!<sup>23</sup>

It is not the fact that my texts did not win their approval that is vexing (that would have been too much to expect), but the theological reasons stated for their disapproval. 'Not part of the salvific and sacramental economy' sounds weighty until one pauses to reflect that the Logos is the origin and destiny of all creaturely things, as many patristic writers have affirmed. How can animals not be part of the salvific economy if the Logos is the source of all life, as John's Gospel makes clear: 'In him was life' (1:4)? What sense does it make to affirm God as the Creator of all but as the redeemer of only the human species? After all, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms quite unambiguously that the 'world was created for the glory of God', and that 'the ultimate purpose of creation is that God, who is creator of all things, may at last become "all in all", thus



© J. Jackson, Clayton News Daily

*Blessing at the Anglican Church of St Francis of Assisi, Jonesboro, Georgia*

<sup>23</sup> Review of *Animal Rites*, in *Liturgy* (Journal of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales) (1999), 180-181.

simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude'.<sup>24</sup> 'All in all' strikes me as difficult to reconcile with any 'economy of salvation'.

The second reaction was ridicule. To some the whole idea of liturgically sanctioned concern for animals was something akin to a divine joke. That well-known and respected writer A. N. Wilson offered one of the more exuberant satires:

We've been agonizing for some time about whether to have Percy baptized. It is difficult to subscribe to the old orthodoxies. On the other hand, if no one in future gets baptized, the Church will die out. Do we really want Chartres Cathedral and the parish churches of England to become mere museums? And then there is the question of Percy himself. While I might feel shy about saying the creed, how can I know what is passing through his little head? .... It is a relief to discover, then, that the Rev. Professor Andrew Linzey of Oxford University has published a series of 'Animal Rites'. There is not, as it happens, a form of Baptism for Dogs. For that, one would have to turn to Firbank's immortal *Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*. But there is a form of Swearing a Covenant with a Companion Animal .... Such a ceremony would definitely help me to be more tolerant of the little fellow, a dog whose flatulence, halitosis and insatiable greed sometimes make him a difficult life-companion .... I shall remember it when Percy howls in the middle of *University Challenge* for no obvious reason. Professor Linzey has done much to correct the absurd anthropocentric view of the world which has formed so much Christian theology.<sup>25</sup>

There were also, however, some thoughtful and interesting reviews which showed that the authors had understood what I was trying to do. All in all, it was clear that the book had touched a nerve. This was evidenced by the scores of letters and phone calls from those who had recently lost animals they loved, and who were struggling to make sense of their loss. Many of them were deeply heartened to find a priest who actually thought that their situation merited concern, even

<sup>24</sup> *Catholic Catechism*, 69, paragraph 294. I accept, however, that the Catechism tends towards a very human-centred view of redemption, which I think is the result of a failure to grasp the significance of the Logos doctrine at this point, see 68-76. It quotes Bonaventure, for example, on how God created all things 'not to increase his glory but to show it forth and to communicate it' (68-69), but fails to acknowledge that Bonaventure saw all creatures as icons of Christ: 'for every creature is by its nature a kind of effigy and likeness of the eternal Wisdom' (Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, translated and introduced by Ewert Cousins [London: SPCK, 1978], 77).

<sup>25</sup> A. N. Wilson, 'Diary', *New Statesman* (5 February 1999), see also <http://www.newstatesman.com/199902050005>.

sympathy. Some of the letters were in fact heart-rending. Despite the bruises, I was glad that had I put up with ridicule to be of some small help to those who felt pastorally abandoned. In addition, I was pleased that some had seen a connection (however garbled the reporting) between the Word made flesh and people's actual lives with other fleshly creatures.

### ***Animals Make a Mess***

'But animals make a mess', it is objected. Whenever I hear that, I am reminded of the view of Albert Schweitzer, who likened the history of Western philosophy to that of a person who cleans the kitchen floor—only to find that the dog comes in and muddies it with paw prints.<sup>26</sup> Animals do make a mess of human-centred theology. Despite some organizational difficulties (usually very minor), the bringing of animals into church has a deep symbolic importance—one that is seldom lost on the human participants. It symbolizes the inclusion of the animal world in the very place where so much theology has excluded them. It also provides a practical glimpse of creation in praise.

And the noise? Well, what is a dirge to one person is birdsong to another. In fact, I am usually astonished at other creatures' sense of place, but when interactive barking does take place, I remind my hearers that if St Francis of Assisi could preach to the birds, Andrew Linzey can be heckled by dogs.<sup>27</sup>

**Andrew Linzey** is an Anglican priest and a member of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oxford. He holds the world's first post in Ethics, Theology and Animal Welfare—the Bede Jarrett Senior Research Fellowship at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford. He is Honorary Professor in Theology at the University of Birmingham and Special Professor at Saint Xavier University, Chicago. He has written or edited twenty books, including *Animal Theology* (London: SCM, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Civilisation and Ethics*, translated by C. T. Champion (London: Allen and Unwin, 1923), 119.

<sup>27</sup> This is a shortened version of an essay that will be appearing in Andrew Linzey, *Creatures of the Same God* (Winchester: Winchester UP, forthcoming).



dialogue between faith and reason

**WESTON JESUIT**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

MTE | MDiv | MA | THM | STL | STD

[www.wjst.edu](http://www.wjst.edu)  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS USA