# THE ORDER OF THE BLESSING OF ANIMALS IN *COLLECTIO RITUUM:* CRITIQUING ITS THEOLOGY *VIS-À-VIS* ANIMAL ETHICS

*Archie R. Magarao, SchP*

## Introduction

The Rite of Animal Blessing in the *Collectio Rituum* published by St. Pauls Publications-Philippines raises important questions concerning its operative theology. Its operative theology points to how the Catholic Church understands animals vis-à-vis the salvific plan of God, which without question is significantly anthropocentric, and why it blesses animals. To identify the operative theology of the Rite of Animal Blessing, the paper further explores its positive and negative aspects. Moreover, it asks the question of whether the operative theology behind the rite adequately addresses the ethical concerns for animals.

## Brief Introduction of The Order of Blessing of Animals in *Collectio Rituum*

The *Collectio Rituum* is a book of rites used in the Philippines which serves as a manual and guide for the celebration of the sacraments and the sacramentals.[1] Its primary purpose is to aid priests and authorized ministers in the celebration of the sacraments and the sacramentals as reformed by Vatican II.[2] The celebrations stipulated in this handy manual are not meant to replace the liturgical celebrations found in the liturgical

1. Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission, *Collectio Rituum* (Manila: St. Pauls Publication, 2012), iv.

2. Ibid.

https://publications.lst.edu/

books.[3] In this *Collectio* is found the Rite of Blessing of Animals of which is the main concern of this paper.

## Exploring the Theological Foundations of the Order of Blessing of Animals in the *Collectio Rituum*

First, animal blessing is not counted as one of the Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church. This suggests that blessing animals, although a ritual practice, is not at the level of being a sacrament, so to speak. Nevertheless, it is given some space in the sacramental[4] life of the Church. Although it is not enough, it is admittedly a good start for animal welfare/concern. This section deals with the non-exhaustive discussion about the operative theology or understanding of animals within the Rite of Animal Blessing in the *Collectio Rituum* of the Catholic Church in the Philippines.

### On the Introductory Rites

Animal theology can be gleaned primarily from the words of the Introductory Rite of the Order of Blessing of Animals.[5] It is as follows: (1) the animals of God's creation inhabit the skies, the earth, and the sea; (2) they share in the fortunes of human existence; (3) they have a part in human life; (4) God

3. Ibid., v.

4. By *sacramental,* this paper refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*) 1667-1668 explication of the term as "sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church...: They are instituted for the sanctification of certain ministries of the Church, certain states of life... and the use of many things helpful to man." Furthermore, *CCC* 1677 says that "sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church. They prepare men to receive the fruit of the sacraments and to sanctify different circumstances of life." And, compared to the Sacraments, sacramentals are not instituted by Christ.

5. Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission, *Collectio Rituum*, 527-528. The enumerations that follow this footnoted sentence are from the Introductory Rites of the Order of the Blessing of Animals.

uses animals in terms of service and as symbolic reminders of the gifts of salvation; (5) animals are made part of the covenant, especially in the covenant with Noah; (6) animals share in Christ's redemption of the entire creation of God; (7) humans thank the Creator for setting them over other creatures of the earth. The following is the referred section of the Introductory Rites:

The animals of God's creation inhabit the skies, the earth, and the sea. They share in the fortunes of human existence and have a part in human life. God, who confers his gifts on all living things, has often used the service of animals or made them symbolic reminders of the gifts of salvation. Animals were saved from the flood and afterwards made a part of the covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:9-10). The paschal lamb brings to mind the Passover sacrifice and the deliverance from the bondage of Egypt (Exodus 12:3-14); a giant fish saved Jonah (Jonah 2:1-11); ravens brought bread to Elijah (1 Kings 17:6); animals were included in the repentance enjoined on humans (Jonah 3:7). And animals share in Christ's redemption of all of God's creation. We therefore invoke the divine blessing on these animals (through the intercession of Saint N.). As we do so, let us praise the Creator and thank him for setting us over other creatures of the earth. Let us also ask him that, remembering our human dignity, we may walk always in his law.

It is interesting to note that none of the enumerated precepts above explicitly speaks of the intrinsic value and dignity of nonhuman animals. Perhaps, part of the reason is that the Order of Blessing of Animals came out before magisterial teachings recognizing the inherent value and dignity of animals became a prominent view concerning nonhuman animals. *Laudato Si'* renowned for its magisterium about ecology which includes the recognition of animals' intrinsic

value apart from humans[6] came out only in 2015. Therefore, the text cannot be criticized for such limitation. Yet, it proves that there is a need for a more developed animal theology that informs liturgy.

There are notable insights into animal theology within the text of the Introductory Rites. First, it understands that animals are created by God placed on the same earth as humans. Thus, animals should be respected because they are also willed by God just as humans are. Second, it recognizes that animals have some share in the goods that life can offer. Third, the text is cognizant of the fact that animals are part of human life. Most probably, it considers animals as food and companions to humans, an idea taken up by the *Intercessory* section of the Order of the Blessing of Animals. Fourth, it highlights that animals are God's symbolic reminders of his gift of redemption and that God uses them at his service. This segment reflects the Biblical accounts of animals attending to prophets, e.g. Jonah in the belly of the whale (Jonah 2:1-11) and Elijah being served by ravens with bread (1 Kings 17:6), to name a few. It can be said of the same thing of saints in the Catholic tradition being attended to by animals like St. Anthony of Egypt being assisted by lions and birds, the renowned St. Francis of Assisi who tamed a wolf, St. Anthony de Padua who preached to the birds, etc. This fourth precept speaks theologically of what Paul Tillich asserts regarding humanity's dependence upon the rest of creation that: "salvation of one without the other is unthinkable."[7] Fifth and sixth, it reminds us that animals are part of the covenant between God and humans. God's offer of salvation through the covenant is not exclusive to humans

6. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* no. 140.

7. Paul Tillich, "Redemption of Other Worlds," in *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings,* ed. Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, eds. (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 106.

https://publications.lst.edu/

but inclusive of nonhuman creatures. Hence, the redemption brought about by Christ embraces humans and nonhumans alike. This eschatological destiny of nonhuman animals should inform our treatment of them.[8] Last, though commendable for its gratitude to the Creator, it goes back again to the theology of dominion. It is assumed that dominion in this context relates to caring stewardship[9] of God's creation, and not the absolute dominion (produced by tyrannical anthropocentrism) Pope Francis is warning against.[10] If "setting over" other creatures is understood in this manner, nonhuman animals are in good hands.

## On the Readings

The Creation Narrative in the book of Genesis is the best start concerning animals, particularly Genesis 1:1, 20-28; 2:19-20a; 6:17-23 and Isaiah 11:6-10. These biblical texts are used in the Rite of Animal Blessing in the *Collectio Rituum.* Gen 1:1,20-28 is captioned by the ritual book as "have dominion over all living things that move on the earth" while 2:19-20a carries the subtitle "the man gave names to all the animals." These texts, especially Gen. 1:28, have encouraged, pointed out by Pope Francis, an "unbridled exploitation of nature."[11] Adding up to this is the further interpretation that animals are Godly creatures ordained to be ruled upon and named by humans.

8. Christopher Steck, *All God's Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animals* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University press, 2019), 5.

9. Stewardship is defined in this paper as humans possessing the God-given mandate to take responsibility of caring for the world and all its nonhuman creatures. It rests on the theology of the *Imago Dei* wherein humans, created after God's image, have the special role in creation: a role that sets humans apart from animals.

10. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* no. 68 & 83.

11. Ibid., no. 67.

The notion of dominion, however, has been corrected recently by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* wherein he teaches that dominion is not domination.[12] He has magisterially proposed that God's command in the Book of Genesis rather means tilling and keeping God's Garden, God's world.

'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.[13]

Pope Francis makes it clear that the command in Genesis ought not to be construed as humans having absolute and unlimited rights over other species. Only God has absolute dominion over creation (Lev 25:23), adds *Laudato Si'*.[14] Dominion, in this respect, should be appropriately interpreted as humans acting in God's place, as secondary agents, to take care of creation while benefiting from the mutual and fraternal response of nonhuman creatures to such act of stewardship. This goes to say that when God commanded humans to dominate and name animals, it was not about lordship, but stewardship—a stewardship that recognizes kinship with nonhuman creatures.

Genesis 6: 17-23 in *Collectio Rituum* is subtitled as "of all other living creatures you shall bring two into the ark to live there with you." This, besides what has been aforementioned, notes that nonhuman animals should live *with* humans. Palpable in this text is the divine mandate of kinship among living creatures of God. A similar injunction is observable in another

12. Ibid., no. 67.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

https://publications.lst.edu/

selected text of the readings in the *Collectio Rituum* from Isaiah 11:6-10 subtitled: "Animals will be tame and there shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain." Moreover, the text points out that the knowledge of the Lord guarantees peace among living creatures as stipulated by Isaiah, a knowledge about the eternal will of the Creator that harmony and peace shall reign throughout creation. This sounds like a universal appeal to the inclusive redemptive plan of God—a plan where no one is left behind and all live in everlasting peace. The text further denotes kinship among God's creatures over stewardship. More importantly, the text excludes suffering and pain among nonhuman animals.

The rite uses Psalm 8. Despite the introductory verses about praising God for his creation, the psalmist is noticeably anthropocentric (see verses 4-8). It again picks up the idea of the dominion of humans over God's works (verse 6) emphasizing that God has divinely sanctioned that all of God's nonhuman creatures are put under humanity's feet (verse 6b). It is quite alarming how this psalm can be used to legitimize the destruction of fauna and flora if it is not tampered with by the notion of stewardship or kinship. The optional psalms, namely Psalm 104:1-2a, 10-12,25,27-28 and Psalm 147:5-6,7-8,9-11, are significantly better at being non-anthropocentric as they concentrate on God's care and provision to creatures of their needs.

## On the Intercessions

As the intercessory prayer opens with the notion of stewardship, it refrains with the praising of the wonders of God's handiwork. However, the rest of the petitions are anthropocentric. The first petition blesses God for granting humans the ability to train animals to aid human toils. The second blesses

God for giving animals as food for humans. The third petition blesses the Creator for giving animals as companions in view of human comfort. The fourth petition blesses God for his providence because he takes care of the birds of the air. The fifth petition praises God for giving His son, the "Paschal Lamb", to call and make humanity God's children. The last petition praises the Creator for making the lowest creatures means of drawing humans to God's love. Despite some subtleties in the anthropocentrism of the petitions in the rite, the texts remain heavily human-centered. It also understands dominion in terms of nonhuman animals being expedient for human needs. It perceives nonhuman animals as "means" rather than ends in themselves *vis-à-vis* their God-given intrinsic value and dignity. Obviously, the texts do not promote the intrinsic value of nonhuman animals. It sees animals as valuable with respect only to human aid, food, comfort, care, adoption, and means. These all mark a strong anthropocentric theology at the risk of nonhuman animal exclusion and the risk of becoming utilitarian rather than Christian.

## On the Prayer of Blessing

The Prayer of Blessing is the highlight of this rite. It is, therefore, important to look closely at its operative theology. There are two options for the prayer. The first option indicates that animals are part of divine provision to humans for both needs and labor. It then invokes the intercession of a saint, most probably St. Francis of Assisi, the dubbed patron saint of animals, for God to grant availability for human use the things they need to maintain, as the prayer goes, decent human life.[15] On the other hand, the second option begins with praise to God for having created all things wisely and on whose goodness

15. *Collectio Rituum,* 535.

https://publications.lst.edu/

has made humans in the divine image to care over other living things,[16] noting the use of the word "over" in relation to caring for other living things. Care is tampered with the anthropocentric notion of dominion. Its succeeding words, again, return to the anthropocentric petition that animals may serve human needs in view of reaching eternal life.[17]

## On the Concluding Rite

Similar to the human-centered petitions within the rite, the concluding rite once again perceives nonhuman animals as created by God to help humans. It does not reflect any theological recognition of the intrinsic value of animals. The value it sees in nonhuman animals is always indexed to human needs. It further sees animals in a utilitarian way and nothing else.

## The Overall Theology of the Order of Blessing Animals

*Imago Dei* is the dominant theology operating in the rite for animal blessing. *Imago Dei is* understood as being granted power over other nonhuman creatures, a statement which is directly written in the rite itself. However, the theology of stewardship can also be glimpsed within the rite. To a certain extent, it can even be deduced that the rite has already an inkling of Pope Francis' teaching regarding the interconnectedness of creatures. However, it fails in the aspect of recognizing the intrinsic value of nonhuman creatures. Despite some thrust towards stewardship, the theology of *imago Dei*, which empowers the principle of human domination of nonhuman creatures, overshadows all attempts at a sound theology of

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

stewardship. To some extent, it even eclipses the theology of kinship with other creatures.

## Critiquing the Operative Theology of the Rite of Animal Blessing

First, the rite is heavily anthropocentric. Its anthropocentrism grounds itself in the *Imago Dei* which is understood as being created *as* God's image, the human "person is expected to function as God's representative (or steward), advancing the goals and desires of God within the created order."[18] In the rite is found an unfortunate reality that despite epistemic progress in animal concerns, the book of prayers is still caught up in the mire of dissonance concerning theology about animals.[19] The formulation of the rite itself cannot be blamed entirely on the Church's Thomistic framework regarding animal welfare. However, no matter how noble Thomism is, Aseneta has warned that Aquinas remains anthropocentric and his ethical sympathy for animals is deficient.[20] The same deficiency is apparent in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 2415-2418, which the rite adheres to as the go-to official teaching regarding animal welfare. In its human-centeredness, nonhuman animals are inferiorly indexed to humanity. Yet, on a more positive note, the *CCC* still espouses legitimate care for animals by highlighting God's love for them and the saints' kindness to them.[21] This implies further the rejection of the needless suffering and death of animals.

18. Christopher Steck, *All God's Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animal Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 66.

19. Ibid., 43-45.

20. Anatoly Angelo R. Aseneta, "*Laudato Si*' On Non-Human Animals," *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, 2 (June 2017): 231-232.

21. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* no. 2416.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Second, the rite's repeated notion of animals as aiding human toils; as food, companions, etc. are the perception of animals enshrined in the Catechism itself. These are so-called "legitimate use of animals" as stipulated in *CCC* 2417. However, the same precept grants that the legitimate use of animals must be within reasonable limits. Yet, questions such as what is acceptably "reasonable limits" beg for answers. What does the Church mean precisely by reasonable limits? Indeed, the *CCC* does not clearly define this, but somehow assumes its comprehensibility. What principles and values govern such reasonable limits? What measurement shall be used to guarantee that we are operating within reasonable limits vis-à-vis our use of nonhuman animals? It is again anthropocentric in its theology but a bridled one, no less. But it has to be noted, argues Andrew Linzey, that "the Bible nowhere says that animals are *just* made for human use."[22]

Third, the rite is impoverished of animal care. Andrew Linzey's observation regarding Christian worship is correct as evidenced by the rite critiqued in this paper alone.[23] God is worshipped as if nonhuman animals and plants are invisible.[24] The presider's prayer for the offertory gifts of the bread and wine as fruits of the earth and work of human hands and those sections of prayers in the Sacramentary that mention *all creation rightly gives you praise* have usually escaped liturgical consciousness. For a very long time, liturgy moves as if humans are the only creatures of God! There is an anthropocentric obsession with the self's own value/superiority. Thus, it is not surprising that the prayers, readings, and petitions within the rite for animals talk more about humans and are impoverished

22. Andrew Linzey, *Creatures of the Same God* (New York: Lantern Book, 2007), 103. Italicization is used for emphasis.

23. Ibid., 105.

24. Ibid.

with animal care and definitively deficient with theology on animals. For this reason, the Church still has a lot of things to work on regarding theology on animals and informing its worship with a nuanced and ethically sound theology that is not indexed to humanity's value.

Fourth, the rite is theologically commendable for its consideration that nonhuman animals are likewise part of the Christian sacramental[25] life. The rite in itself speaks of the recognition that nonhuman animals are beneficial in the Christians' journey towards the Creator. It also points out the theological and spiritual truth that nonhuman animals aid human redemption. This can be read in Option 2 of the Prayer of Blessing, where the petition speaks of animals who are serving human needs, being part of God's bountiful resources in earthly life, animals may aid to compel humans to seek eternal life.[26] Moreover, this affirms the covenant between God and Noah—a covenant that includes nonhuman animals—and the cosmic redemption brought about by Christ. For in His saving act, He did not just save humans but the entire creation.[27]

Fifth, the rite, especially in its introductory section, despite admitting that nonhuman animals, "share in Christ's redemption of all of God's creation,"[28] the application of this theological principle is nowhere found in the entire rite. Rather, dominion theology governs all throughout. Hence, it would be good to revise the text of the rite according to the theology of Christ's cosmic redemption: Christ redeemed not just humans but nonhumans as well.

---

25. See footnote 4 for the explanation of the terminological use.

26. *Collectio Rituum,* 535.

27. St. Irenaeus, "All Things in Christ," in Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, eds., *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007),

28. *Collectio Rituum,* 528.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Sixth, kinship should supplement the notion of stewardship of creation. While stewardship is laudable with its understanding that humans are God's representative in caring for the rest of creation, it presupposes still a certain amount of human superiority over animals. Meanwhile, kinship diminishes the superiority complex of humans over nonhumans by making them all *relative creatures* or kin to each other. With kinship, the sense of human superiority is replaced by utter respect for nonhumans' God-given intrinsic value and dignity. This view can likewise put an end to abuses toward animals. Peaceful coexistence between humans and animals is better achieved when kinship goes hand-in-hand with stewardship. Stephen Webb notes that "the use of the phrase 'all flesh' in Genesis joins together the human and the animal in a basic kinship of creatureliness under the shared providence of a merciful God."[29]

## Ethical Concerns *vis-à-vis* The Order of Blessing Animals

Primarily, one obvious ethical concern towards the rite is its non-signification of nonhuman animals. It is nowhere to be found in the petitions and prayers of the rite. The texts in the rite pay no particular attention to explicating the idea that nonhuman animals are significant in themselves. However, it can be argued that the importance given to animals is present but only in relation to humans. The rite is ethically deficient in recognizing the intrinsic value of nonhuman animals apart from their human use. The rite conveys the idea that the blessing of animals in itself is done out of human prioritization and as an address to human needs, not because nonhuman animals

29. Stephen Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

are valuable in themselves. It sees the animals' value as being dependent only on humans but not necessarily on God. The fact, however, is that nonhuman animals' value is indexed on God, not on humans! Hence, animals are significant whether they are valuable to humans or not. Moreover, nonhuman animals are included in the cosmic salvation of God. It can be recalled that the teaching of St. Paul in Ephesians 1:10, in this regard, Jesus Christ summed up all things in his redemptive work. Again, this stresses the point that animals' value is indexed on God and not on humans.

Secondly, the rite prays for God's blessing over useful animals to humans. This leaves the question about the fate of those nonhuman animals that are judged not useful to humans. Does the rite morally permit their misuse and abuse? Or are they simply left out into moral oblivion because following the "logic of the line," they are of less moral concern at the moment? Considering these questions can help refine the contents of the prayers within the rite.

Thirdly, the rite also does not care enough about the nonhuman participation in the eschaton. It shallowly recognizes the sharing of nonhumans in Christ's redemptive act to all of God's creation and ends there. The rite pays no more attention to nonhumans' participation in the final redemption brought about by Christ. No petitions or prayers within the rite after the Introductory Rites include the theology of nonhumans' participation in the eschaton. This is important because the present moral attitude toward nonhuman animals is significantly conditioned by the understanding of the eschaton. If, from the start, that the eschaton is understood as an exclusively human event, it will be no surprise that in the here-and-now nonhumans are excluded and that there will be no rendering of the respect they deserve as fellow creatures of the same God.

Fourthly, the Order of Blessing of Animals lacks the zeal for respecting all forms of life. It is too human-centered that it has diminished the value of animals. It has reduced their value to mere utility. It sees them as expendables. Moreover, it has made humanity the reference point in assessing the value of nonhuman creatures, which is tantamount to the refusal of recognizing the Creator's value for nonhuman creatures at the beginning of the creation of the world. On this note, the story of Balaam's ass, who after beatings pleaded for respect and fair treatment, is a strong reminder that animals ought to be respected as well.[30]

Fifthly, if some pedagogical or educative matters regarding animal welfare is sought, it is better to look elsewhere. The rite does not teach ~~so~~ much about holistically caring for nonhuman animals as God's beloved and gifted with intrinsic value. It is roughly anthropocentric that anything it teaches about animals is indexed to the superiority and special value of humanity in the scale of creation. Once *imago Dei* (which is understood as the guarantor of human supremacy over nonhuman animals) notion is removed from the rite, everything else about nonhuman animals crumbles.

Sixthly, the rite needs revision to tone down its anthropocentrism. Its primary focus on animals as serving human needs, companions, food, or aids in labor raises concerns about the treatment of animals as mere tools or resources for human benefit, rather than recognizing their God-given intrinsic value and dignity. Biblically speaking, with regard to animals as food or resources, they were not intended in the first place as food.[31] God has given plants as food for humans and nowhere did he permit them to have animals as food (see

30. Ibid., 23.

31. Ibid.

Gen 1:29). This also applies to outsourcing animals for clothing and labor. Killing animals was not even granted.[32] The Sabbath law itself includes giving respite to animals who aid human toils (see Exodus 20:10).

The revision should include the direct recognition of the intrinsic value and dignity of animals. Perhaps, doing so reduces its penchant for utilitarianism regarding the treatment of animals and its fondness for the "logic of the line." Yes, human concerns should be attended to, but at least not at the expense of excluding within moral obligations the welfare of those other than human. Humans ought to learn how to "expand compassion." This means that humans should not feel compassion only for other humans but for other nonhumans as well. Compassion must be inclusive and comprehensive, so to speak. If compassion is not inclusive at all of everything that God has created, then this compassion is suspect of being fake and insincere. And the effort to expand compassion should be evidenced by tamed anthropocentrism. This then invites to discern the balance between loving animals and loving humans. An invitation no less that challenges how far can discipleship to Christ—the lover of *all*—make humans expand the capacity to love. It is the nature of love to be expansive and inclusive to the point of being taxing and painful. For it is not unconditional love or Christian love at all if does not hurt. And Jesus made it clear to us with his Paschal Mystery: humans cannot love without getting hurt. Yet the hurt that tags along with *truly* loving is in itself the road to redemption.

Lastly, in the Order of Blessing of Animals, despite the recognition of animals within the rite, there is a notable absence of emphasis on animal welfare or the ethical treatment of animals. Thus, the appropriate moral concerns for

32. Ibid.

https://publications.lst.edu/

animal well-being and suffering are left untouched. This has to be attended by the revision of the rite itself.

## Conclusion: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*

While the Rite of Animal Blessing acknowledges the presence of nonhuman animals in the Christian life—a commendable action nonetheless—it significantly falls short of fully recognizing their intrinsic value and dignity. There is therefore need for a liturgy and Rite of Animal Blessing informed by a more nuanced and ethically sound animal ethics and theology. It proves that efforts to rectify deficient animal ethics and theology are not just lip service.

Rectifying and informing the liturgy about animal ethics and theology is definitively a form of *expanding compassion.* Compassion given exclusively to humans is no compassion at all. If humans are truly God's images in creation, humans ought to be like the Creator who loves all. More than valorizing a privileged position in creation as *Imago Dei*, humans should rather use it as a means to love all of creation. Humans must be compassionate to all. This is the true human calling: to have a heart that is compassionate to all. Humans must not just content themselves with sympathies towards nonhumans. Better than sympathy is compassion for compassion compels humans to act alongside thinking about others' well-being. Jesus is the best measure on this. He did not just show sympathy but *acted* compassionately. May humans also do likewise. And doing likewise can start with our animal theology and should end with liturgy.[33]

33. The assumption here is that liturgy includes morality. This means that ritual actions are not cut off from morality. Just as much as theology deals with moral actions and principles, so must be the liturgy. It cannot be rightly called liturgy if it is devoid of morality and theology. They all go together.

Since the rite is heavily anthropocentric—anthropocentrism that determines how nonhuman animals are viewed in its liturgy (a perception that is uninformed, if not ignorant)—it thus needs some corrections. Its anthropocentrism has to be informed by current papal teachings on nonhuman creatures alongside sound animal ethics and theology. In this regard, a new edition of the rite is highly commendable. This paper would not burden itself on this matter since it is not its primary concern. Its concern is to critique the rite, not to make an alternative liturgy in its place. The writer believes that this matter can be best addressed by liturgists who have the canonical right and expertise to perform such a task. Nevertheless, the paper appends at the end a suggested alternative *Prayer of Blessing* animals based on the current edition.

No matter how influential Thomism[34] is in our Church magisterium, its relevance should be properly assessed concerning procuring magisterial teaching that involves animals. It has to be updated and refined, if not diminished, by recent theologies and ethical theories. It has to be noted that Thomistic teachings belong to their own time which is not necessarily the same as today. Thomism should not be the one-time big-time solution of the Church about teachings concerning nonhuman creatures. This is not to say, however, that Thomism is the sole culprit of the Church's deficient moral theology on nonhuman animals for indeed it goes back to the Old Testament: in Genesis 1:26-28 where humans were given "dominion" over all animals, in Genesis 9:2 ("The fear and dread of you shall rest on every

34. Christopher Steck, SJ *All God's Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animals* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 9-15. Steck argued that Thomism is a key starting point regarding the view that animals will not participate in the eschaton because their souls are not immortal, a view that ramified into a diminished valuation of nonhuman animals and was adopted by later teachings on nonhuman animals.

https://publications.lst.edu/

animal of the earth and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered"), and in Psalm 8:6-7 (You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field").[35] On this note, Roderick Nash comments that this image of a conqueror exerting absolute domination has allowed the Christian understanding that God has granted humanity the power to conquer nature and enslave it leading thus to the exploitation of nature.[36]

Kinship with all creatures and stewardship should inform the liturgy. This should be both the Church's *rule of prayer* and *rule of faith.* Sticking to dominion theology does not improve any concern for nonhuman animals. Although it acknowledges responsibility toward them, it interprets its responsibility as dominion rather than kinship or stewardship. Rendering animals their God-given dignity and intrinsic value will be difficult if humans keep holding onto dominion theology, which has a penchant for utilitarianism.

Humans ought to remind themselves that the rite is representative of the contents of the faith, attitudes, and conception of God in relation to nonhuman animals. Gratitude to God for companion animals, for example, falls suspect of hypocrisy if it remains oblivious of the intrinsic value of all creatures, a value that is independent of human utility. Their intrinsic value conveys the fact that they also reveal God's presence in the world. Manifesting God's image is not the exclusive turf of humans. As all are created lovingly by God, so all technically

35. Ibid., 19.

36. See Robert Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 90, as quoted in Christopher Steck, *All God's Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animals* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 19.

are capable of revealing God. He so charged the world with His presence that from the macrocosm down to the microcosm, God can actually be found.

## Appendix

### Prayer for the Blessing of Animals

O God, the author and giver of every gift,

We thank You for giving us animals as companions

and fellow creatures of this earth.

In Your goodness, You have given us stewardship of
all that You lovingly created.

In Your wisdom, You taught us kinship with animals.

Grant, we pray, that You bless this(ese) animal(s).

Make them the enduring presence of
Your abiding grace among us.

And may they aid us in our journey towards
eternal life with You.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.