

# Animals in Heaven?

Edward Quinn

“Fido is wagging his tail in heaven to-night”. According to Evelyn Waugh, this was the greeting sent out from Forest Lawn to the owners on the anniversaries of their pets buried in the cemetery. No one, of course, asked if the owners would also deserve a place in heaven if they had killed their dogs by overfeeding or whether the latter would have the joy of interrupting the heavenly choirs by their barking. But the false assumption behind this attitude was perhaps less the hope of reunion with animal friends than the idea of a heaven where we shall all congregate cosily with our pets and former neighbours. If some of us do not relish the prospect of an eternal menagerie, can we nevertheless in all charity welcome the company of human beings who never hurt us but often threaten to bore us to death?

Even from traditional theology we get the impression that we shall not be troubled with bores, but equally that our joy in the beatific vision will be solitary and even then frustrated by the delay in the restoration of the body or by a reunion with the soul to which it will be no more than a glorified appendage. We look for the restoration of the whole personality, redeemed in Christ and therefore in Christ’s company and in the company of those we have loved on earth. The lonely person in particular asks if the affection of his or her pet, expressed in an outstretched paw, in a purring response, is not somehow transfigured also and not forever extinguished.

The fact that there is a continuity between nature and grace has always been recognised in Catholic theology. Is not the continuity between the old and the new creation equally obvious? In the new creation the old is transfigured and not annihilated. And the whole of nature is now moving—not by any means smoothly and easily, but with absolute certainty—towards that transfiguration. This has nothing to do with scientific theories about the beginning and end of the world, the one big-bang or successive big-bangs, with one universe or successive universes, with any particular evolutionary theory, with the possibility even of new forms of intelligent life. It is in this universe in which we now live that the preparation takes place for the renewal of the creature. And here man is one with the rest of nature.

If the primrose by the river’s brim seems to him to be no more than a primrose, it has still made its impact. Wild nature transformed into strange and frightening shapes by natural upheavals forms a background to both animal and human life and can be tamed by the

instinctive action of animals and the deliberate choice of man. There is mutual interaction between men and animals. Androcles' lion is at least a symbol of a real kinship between the two. Children, more basically creatures of sense than adults, can do amazing things with their pets. Soon, however, the small boy displays his intellectual ability and recognizes an intruder into the nursery as a cat, in the light of a universal notion he has formed based on an earlier experience of cats. But the cat already established in the household recognizes only by instinct the newcomer of its own breed. And the boy has become aware of man's leadership in nature. Even in his solitary prayer man is the world's representative before God.

It is through man that nature is first touched by God's grace. God's grace as merely proffered or as actually accepted in man is the prelude to the glory of the new creation. In torment and agony, joyfully and serenely, mistakenly, sinfully, aptly and virtuously, aided or frustrated by other creatures, man gives new shapes to nature. Over all God rules: makes saints out of weak humans, but tolerates amazing cruelties; sometimes draws good out of evil, but seems mostly to leave the horror and evil in the world strangely untouched by his glory.

We are bewildered and hurt by the apparently unnecessary suffering of the innocent, by the torment inflicted on animals deliberately by man or simply by natural disasters, by natural beauty distorted by human violence or in an inevitable movement towards the end of all things. Some part of the whole process is constantly interrupted by death.

That is the point at which God becomes all in all, that is the real dawn of the new creation for those who have yielded to God's omnipotence, especially for those who have consciously shared to the end the helplessness of Christ. Can this heaven be for human beings only? Is it not the creation where God himself prevails, God's side of the whole mysterious universe? Pain ceases, because we are no longer left to the contingencies of nature or to the irresponsibility of unredeemed man. And God's light is shed on the world's mysteries, great and small. In her poem "To a Daisy" Alice Meynell aptly describes this transition from the love of half understood creatures in this world to the insight we shall gain from God's light in eternity:

Slight as thou art, thou art enough to hide  
Like all created things, secrets from me,  
And stand a barrier to eternity.  
And I, how can I praise thee well and wide  
From where I dwell—upon the hither side?  
Thou little veil for so great mystery,  
When shall I penetrate all things and thee,  
And then look back? For this I must abide,

Till thou shalt grow and fold and be unfurled  
Literally between me and the world.  
Then I shall drink from in beneath a spring,  
And from a poet's side shall read his book.  
O daisy mine, what will it be to look  
From God's side even of such a simple thing?

Shall we not understand even better the lovableness of the animals we have comforted in the present world and grasp the mystery of the wild glare in the eyes of those we could not tame? If we are to see the tiger's Creator, shall we not also penetrate the distant deeps and skies, the forests of the night, and face without fear the burning eyes of the creature now forever free?

## Küng's Case for God

### Fergus Kerr OP

People would like to have reasons for believing that God exists. With its appearance in attractive paperback format Hans Küng's *Does God Exist?* certainly looks like the most thorough and scholarly treatment of the subject<sup>1</sup>. For one thing, at seventeen ounces, clearly printed on decent paper, and sturdily enough bound to survive several readings, it is a fine example of modern book-production. The translation by Edward Quinn, is, needless to say, almost faultless. Some of the reviews which the hardback version received were very destructive—Alasdair MacIntyre's page-long diatribe in *The London Review of Books* (5—18 February, 1981) comes to mind: "Whenever in future I try to imagine what Purgatory will be like, the thought of having to read Dr. Küng's book will recur". Judgements in some of the theological periodicals were rather more respectful. To give only two examples: in *Theology* (September 1981), after some gently expressed but actually quite devastating criticisms, Brian Hebblethwaite concludes as follows: "So it can hardly be said that this is a great book. But as an attempt to set the scene for a serious engagement with atheism, it serves a very useful purpose". In *The Month* (March 1981), while describing Hans Küng as "a sort of Dale Carnegie of modern theology, building confidence, edifying in the best sense of the word", Paul Lakeland's judgment of the book runs

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