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ON THE NATURE AND SOULS OF ANIMALS

Quotes from Scripture, the Holy Fathers, and Orthodox Elders and Authors

From Holy Scripture

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that

creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Genesis 1:20-27

And God remembered Noah, and all the beasts, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark...

And behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you. Of all that go out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you.

Genesis 8:1, 9:10

For every beast of the field is mine, I know all the birds of the air and all that moves in the field is mine.

Psalms 50:7

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Job 12:7-10

At destruction and famine you shall laugh,
and shall not fear the beasts of the earth.
For you shall be in league with the stones of the field,
and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you.

Job 5: 22-23

The righteous one regards the life of his animal but the heart of the wicked is without mercy.

Proverbs 12:10

Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Mark 16:15

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!"

Rev. 5:13

From the Holy Fathers

Before his martyrdom in Rome's Circus Maximus, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote:

I write to the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless you hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Allow me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep, I may be no trouble to anyone.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*

Cattle and wild beasts pray, and bend their knees, and in coming forth from their stalls and lairs look up to heaven, their mouth not idle, making the spirit move in their own fashion. Moreover the birds taking flight lift themselves up to heaven and instead of hands spread out the cross of their wings, while saying something which may be supposed to be a prayer.

Tertullian

Abba Xanthios said, “A dog is better than I am, for he has love and he does not judge.”

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Because some people impiously dare to say that plants and vegetables have a soul, I will write briefly about this for the guidance of the simple. Plants have a natural life, but they do not have a soul. Man is called an intelligent animal because he has intellect and is capable of acquiring knowledge. The other animals and the birds can make sounds because they possess breath and soul. All things that are subject to growth and decline are alive; but the fact that they live and grow does not necessarily mean that they all have souls.

There are four categories of living beings. The first are immortal and have souls, such as angels. The second have intellect, soul and breath, such as men. The third have breath and soul, such as animals. The fourth have only life, such as plants. The life of plants is without soul, breath, intellect or immortality. These four attributes, on the other hand, presuppose the possession of life.

St. Anthony the Great, *The Philokalia*, Vol. I

Adam was placed as the Lord and king of all creatures.... But after his captivity, there was taken captive together with him the creation which served him and submitted to him, because through him death came to reign over every soul.

St. Marcarius the Great, *Homily 11*

Who among men knows even the names of all wild beasts? Or who can accurately discern the physiology of each? But if of the wild beasts we know not even the mere names, how shall we comprehend the Maker of them? God’s command was but one, which said, Let the earth bring forth wild beasts, and cattle, and creeping things, after their kinds (Gen. 1:24) and from one earth, by one command, have sprung diverse natures, the gentle sheep and the carnivorous lion, and various instincts of irrational animals, bearing resemblance to the various characters of men; the fox to manifest the craft that is in men, and the snake the venomous treachery of friends, and the neighing horse the wantonness of young men (Jer. 5:8), and the



laborious ant, to arouse the sluggish and the dull: for when a man passes his youth in idleness, then he is instructed by the irrational animals, being reproved by the divine Scripture saying, Go to the ant, thou sluggard, see and emulate her ways, and become wiser than she. For when you see her treasuring up her food in good season, imitate her, and treasure up for yourself fruits of good works for the world to come. And again, Go to the bee, and learn how industrious she is: how, hovering around all kinds of flowers, she collects her honey for your benefit...

Is not then the Artificer worthy to be glorified? For what? If you know not the nature of all things, do the things that have been made immediately become useless? Can you know the efficacy of all herbs? Or can you learn all the benefit which proceeds from every animal? Before now even from venomous adders have come antidotes for the preservation of men. But you will say to me, "The snake is terrible." Fear thou the Lord, and it shall not be able to hurt you. "A scorpion stings. Fear the Lord, and it shall not sting you. "A lion is bloodthirsty." Fear thou the Lord, and he shall lie down beside you, as by Daniel. But truly wonderful also is the action of the animals: how some, as the scorpion, have the sharpness in a sting; and others have their power in their teeth; and others do battle with their claws; while the basilisk's power is his gaze. So then from this varied workmanship understand the Creator's power.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture IX*

The soul of brute beasts did not emerge after having been hidden in the earth, but it was called into existence at the time of God's command.

St. Basil the Great, *The Hexaemeron*

God created animals with distinct natures and characteristics: the fox is crafty, the ox steadfast the deer timid, the lion fearless and courageous. God endowed each animal with what it needs for its well-being and survival.

St. Basil the Great, *Exegetic Homilies*

Without doubt the terrestrial animals are devoid of a human-like reason. At the same time how many affections of the soul each one of them expresses by

the voice of nature! They express by cries their joys and sadness, recognition of what is familiar to them, the need for food, regret at being separated from their companions, and numerous emotions.

St. Basil the Great, *The Hexaemeron*

Animals are said to be irrational, to lack reason. Whereas reason is man's logical faculty, which through observation and analysis leads to rational conclusions, animals have not been given that ability, because they do not have free will. Yet they have high instinctual reactions. The Creator has taught animals things which men can hardly appropriate in a lifetime and compensated the lack of reason in animals by endowing them with superior senses.

...In the first level, the soul is the life-force of the body, which keeps it unified and harmonious. This life-force maintains nourishment, growth and reproduction. This level is seen in man, animals, and plants. On the second level, the soul seeks whatever suits the nature of the body, and the soul has memory, remembering what it has experienced through the senses and what it has learned through habit. This level is seen in men and animals. On the third level, the soul learns through observation and not only habit. This is the level of reason and logical thought, poetry, music, and rhetoric. This level bears the mark of greatness and only humans are on this level. [There are also four higher levels of purification and coming close to the apprehension of God.]

Paraphrased from Saint Augustine of Hippo, *The Magnitude of the Soul*
(Chapter 33)

The humble person approaches beasts of prey, and as soon as their gaze alights upon him, their wildness is tamed and they approach him and attach themselves to him as their master, wagging their tails and licking his hands and feet. For they smell from him the scent which wafted from Adam before his transgression, when the beasts gathered to him and he gave the names in Paradise—the scent which was taken from us and given back to us anew by Christ through His advent, for it is He who has made the smell of the human race sweet.

St. Isaac the Syrian



What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals... and for all that exists. By the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person's heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in any in creation. For this reason, such a person offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm her or him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner such a person prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in a heart that is in the likeness of God.

St. Isaac the Syrian

God knows all things, God only, Who is in all things, even in the unborn offspring of the animals.

St. Barsanuphius the Great.

Nothing is without order and purpose in the animal kingdom; each animal bears the wisdom of the Creator and testifies of Him. God granted man and animals many natural attributes such as compassion, love, feelings... for even dumb animals bewail the loss of one of their own.

St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

The soul has three powers: first, the power of nourishment and growth; second that of imagination and instinct; third, that of intelligence and intellect. Plants share only in the first of these powers, animals share in the first and second only, and men share in all three. The first two powers are perishable; the third is clearly imperishable and immortal.”

St. Maximos the Confessor, *The Third Century on Love*

Just as our bodies, although they dissolve for a time, do not pass away forever, but will be renewed again at the resurrection, so, too, will heaven and

earth and all that is within them — that is, all of creation — be made anew and liberated from the bondage of corruption. The elements themselves will share with us in that incandescence from above, and in the same way that we shall be tried by fire, so, according to the Apostle, shall all creation be renewed through fire.

St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourse*

Modern Orthodox Writers and Elders

The animals enjoy being with man and look at him as their king. In Paradise, Adam called the animals one by one and gave them each a name according to its kind. Animals recognized man's superiority and were happy in his presence. After the fall, however, this relationship was destroyed. Man looked at the beasts with the intention of killing them, and the animals became wild. Nevertheless, the wild animals are still more sincere than man is. If you approach them with love, they return to that pristine state.

St. Paisios the New, *The Gurus, the Young Man, and the Elder Paisios*

... [In my childhood] working animals were taken care of when they grew old and were no longer able to work; they even had a good old age. Back then people didn't have the means that are available today. Grain used for animal feed was ground manually into a fine consistency to enable the old and feeble oxen to eat it.

St. Paisios the New, *Family Life*

The time will come soon when you will not find true spiritual fathers to hear your confession, then you will go into the woods and confess to the trees and birds!

Elder Cleopas of Sihastria

Love all of God's creation, love the whole, and love each grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love animals, love plants, love every kind of thing. If you love every kind of thing, then everywhere God's mystery will

reveal itself to you. Once this has been revealed to you, you will begin to understand it ever more deeply with each passing day. And finally, you will be able to love the whole world with an all-encompassing universal love...

Love animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and joy untroubled. Do not trouble their joy, don't harass them, don't deprive them of their happiness, don't work against God's intent. Man, do not pride yourself on superiority to animals; they are without sin, and you, with your greatness, defile the earth...

...My friends, pray to God for gladness. Be glad as children, as the birds of heaven. And let not the sin of men confound you in your doings. Fear not that it will wear away your work and hinder its being accomplished. Do not say, "Sin is mighty, wickedness is mighty, evil environment is mighty, and we are lonely and helpless, and evil environment is wearing us away and hindering our good work from being done." Fly from that dejection, children!

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

"All things are near to God," says the Russian proverb. Truly everything is near: all spiritual, and sentient creatures, the angels, the souls of the departed, all living men, all animals, all material worlds. The Spirit of God passes through all things, a reasoning pure, most refined Spirit, dwelling in every believing, pious soul. "The wild beasts of the field are in my sight (Psalm 1:11)," says He. "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20)." As an infinite Spirit, to God nothing is far away, but all things are in Him. All things live and exist in Him."

St. John of Kronstadt

Freedom, the capacity to make moral decisions consciously, with a sense of full responsibility before God, is what most of all distinguishes the human from the other animals.

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware

Animals were with Adam and Eve in Paradise, so why on earth wouldn't they also be in Heaven?

Met. Kallistos Ware in a discussion on *The Philokalia*

“A new heaven and a new earth”: man is not saved from his body but in it; not saved from the material world but with it. Because man is microcosm and mediator of the creation, his own salvation involves also the reconciliation and transfiguration of the whole animate and inanimate creation around him—its deliverance ‘from the bondage of corruption’ and entry ‘into the glorious liberty of the children of God’. In the ‘new earth’ of the Age to come there is surely a place not only for man but for the animals: in and through man, they too will share in immortality, and so will rocks, trees and plants, fire and water.

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware ✝