

INTRODUCTION

There are few topics in which the official teaching of the Church is so far away from the everyday practice of the faithful as in the perception of and dealing with animals. While these traditionally are not at all addressed in church dogmatics, they play a major role both in popular piety and in the everyday life of believers. Animal blessings are becoming increasingly popular. At Christmas, ox and donkey are naturally positioned at the manger. And in biblical texts, especially in the Psalms, animals are mentioned so often and, as a matter of course, said to belong to the ‘universal family’ of God.¹

Gradually, theology is also becoming aware of animals. Animal studies are taking on an increasingly important role not only in philosophy but also in theology in general and moral theology in particular. With his encyclical *Laudato si'*, in which he speaks of the ‘value proper to each creature’² and criticises an anthropocentric attitude³ that does not respect the fact that all creatures have ‘intrinsic value’,⁴ Pope Francis has provided an important impulse to deepen not only environmental but also animal ethical questions theologically and morally and to reflect anew on the human-animal relationship from the perspective of the Christian faith.

Inspired and motivated by the Pope, more and more Christian theologians deal with this subject and are perceived as important voices in

¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 89, available at www.vatican.va.

² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 16.

³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 115–136.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 118, 140.

scientific and socio-political debates on a responsible human-animal relationship. Nevertheless, these contributions have not yet found much institutional expression and anchorage in the breadth of the discipline of moral theology, indeed of theology as a whole. Therefore, the present issue of *AUC Theologica* is dedicated to the topic of animal ethics. It aims to provide initial orientations, present the current state of the debate and point out perspectives for future discourses. Finally, it would like to encourage theology to turn to animals as our fellow creatures and to understand them as an important source of knowledge.

The opening article is by Martin M. Lintner, Professor of Moral Theology at the Philosophical-Theological College of Bressanone, and bears the title ‘Just Good Enough to Eat? Animals in Theological Ethics Approaches’. Departing from the ambivalent way humans treat animals, Lintner states that the use of animals and coexistence with them has shaped people’s lives from the very beginning. However, theology has long misjudged the importance of a reflection on animals. Lintner then examines not only important theological approaches that take animals into account, above all, those that seek to give respect to the intrinsic value of animals. They require a profound change in the human-animal relationship in the light of the Christian faith and call for more humane treatment of animals. The article presents the most important approaches from the German-speaking region and attempts to show both common concerns and different figures of argumentation. The paper was originally published in German under the title ‘Einfach zum Fressen gern. Tiere in der theologischen Ethik’.⁵ For the English translation presented here, it has been expanded and actualised.

The second contribution comes from Jan Zámečník, Assistant Professor at the Department of Ethics of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University Prague. His text is called “‘And When He Saw Him, He Had Compassion’: Following Jesus and Relationship to Non-Human Creatures’. The article explores how the concept of following Jesus can be ethically applied in the sphere of the treatment of non-human creatures. It shows three possibilities of grasping the theme: accommodating Jesus to a preconceived idea, using the sayings and actions of Jesus that involve non-human creatures or nature, and adhering to a characteristic feature of his approach. The article points

⁵ ‘Einfach zum Fressen gern. Tiere in der theologischen Ethik,’ *Herder-Korrespondenz* 72 (2018): 28–31.

out the problematic character of the first two options and highlights the third – it proposes that the relationship to non-human creatures should be based on the criterion of compassion accompanied by care for the suffering. Thus, Zámečník coincides with Pope Francis, who in his encyclical encourages us ‘to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care’ (no. 210).

The third article was written by Lucie Kolářová, Assistant Professor at the Department of Theological Sciences of the University of South Bohemia České Budějovice. She contributes with the reflection ‘Animal as Creation: Suggestions from Christian Theology’. The article describes how Christian theology has reflected the status and significance of animals in historical development, which positions it has created or preferred in this matter, and how they have changed from biblical times until our post-modern present age. Kolářová shows that each period is conveyed in its basic features and presented through selected authors or texts of the given time. She also follows the principal question of the nature of the human–animal relation from a theological viewpoint to gain a basis for a morally justifiable relation of post-modern people to other living creatures.

Finally, we present an article by Michael Rosenberger, Professor of Moral Theology at the Catholic University Linz, under the title ‘Revival of ancient questions. Current Developments in Theological Animal Ethics’. Since the middle of the 19th century, animal husbandry has been industrialised and subdued to economic efficiency to an unsurpassable degree. Animals as living beings and fellow creatures have largely fallen by the wayside. Whereas philosophical ethics has reflected this situation critically since the 1970s, theological ethics entered the debate only with a notable delay in the 2010s and was enormously fostered by the encyclical *Laudato si’* in 2015. The article discusses different theological approaches to animal ethics and links them with the origins of Christian animal ethics in the patristic era. Finally, it focuses attention on the most debated controversy in animal ethics, namely meat consumption, and argues for postponing this question in favour of progress in animal welfare. The article is an English translation of ‘Allianzen für das Tierwohl. Gegenwärtige Entwicklungen der theologischen Tierethik’.⁶

⁶ First published in *Herder-Korrespondenz* 75, no. 10 (2021): 35–37.

Finally, let us frankly admit that we had hoped for more papers for this issue when we launched the Call for Papers in January 2022. The relatively low response underscores how long the way is we still have to go. All the more, with this issue, we hope to advance the debate, to set in motion a process of reflection, search and discussion, and to convey new perspectives on old topics. For the psalmist confesses: ‘Your righteousness is like the mountains of God, / Your judgments are deep as the primordial flood. You save men and animals, O Lord’ (Psalm 36:7).

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