

A Note on the “Prayer for Animals” Attributed to St. Basil

On pages 6-9 of *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation*,¹ I cite and explicate a short prayer that is widely attributed to St. Basil in a variety of books and online sources—so widely attributed, in fact, that I assumed it to be a part of the public domain and did not cite a source text.

It has recently come to my attention, thanks to an online article² by Philip Johnson, that the attribution of this prayer to St. Basil—widespread though it may be—is highly questionable. In a six part archival investigation, Johnson traces the origin and extent of what he claims is a misattribution to St. Basil of a prayer that was actually written by twentieth-century theologian Walter Rauschenbusch and first published in 1910.³ I am not in a position to verify Johnson’s thesis, but I found his case *prima facie* compelling enough to raise serious concern in my mind over the authenticity of the attribution to St. Basil. As a result, I have requested that this note be included with the link to the current online version of *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation*, and my plan is to correct this problem in any future online or print editions of the booklet. I am grateful to Philip Johnson for calling this problem to my attention, and I encourage interested readers to consult his article for further information.

The good news is that even if the attribution of the prayer to St. Basil is mistaken—which I now fear that it is—I continue to believe that the ensuing explication of the prayer is sound and that the insights I draw out of the prayer are illuminating of a traditional and ecumenical Christian perspective on the human/animal relation. I beg the reader’s pardon for the questionable attribution and I hope that the project as a whole remains edifying in spite of it.

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¹ Matthew C. Halteman, *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation*, Washington, D.C.: Humane Society of the United States Faith Outreach, 2008 (online), 2010 (print edition), 6-9.

² Philip Johnson, “St. Basil’s ‘Animal Prayers’ are a ‘Hoax’”, published on 5/1/12 at “Animals Matter to God: Animals in Theology, Ethics, History & Law: A Review”, as viewed on 7/23/12 at <http://animalsmattertogod.wordpress.com/2012/05/01/st-basils-animal-prayers-are-a-hoax-part-one>.

³ Walter Rauschenbusch, “For the World”, in Rauschenbusch, *Prayers of the Social Awakening*, Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1910, 47-48.