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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