

Gone to the Dogs

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I first noticed the trend in the summer of 2010. In Toronto, Canada, a man named Duncan Keith was sitting on the steps of St Peter's Anglican Church on a Sunday morning, when police asked him to move elsewhere. He and his dog Trapper wandered inside where he was greeted by interim priest Marguerite Rea. She said that Trapper was welcome to stay, and invited Keith to partake of communion. When Keith went forward, he took the dog, and both were given communion.

Some time later, I saw an article in *USA Today* ("Pooches Take The Pulpit," 1-12-12) describing a new trend in some churches — "ministry dogs." At Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Mission, Texas, parish priest Roy Snipes uses as many as five pet dogs for a variety of activities, including mass, counseling sessions, and confessions. Other ministers across the nation are using dogs in similar ways. Some churches even have annual pet blessings.

It would appear that religion has gone to the dogs.

My problem is not with the animals. Obviously, we humans can learn valuable lessons from unlikely critters (Proverbs 30.24-31). God has periodically used animals to execute his will (Exodus 8, 10; Jonah 1.17). The Bible even uses animal imagery to encourage us (Isaiah 40.31; Jeremiah 12.5; Psalm 32.9).

My real problem is what these stories say about people. Humans occupy a special place in God's creation (Genesis 1.26-28). By God's design, mankind alone bears the image of the Creator. By God's decree, mankind has dominion over creation and rules it. Since mankind is in the image of God, he is a moral creature and is held morally accountable for his actions. But because of man's sin, he stands in need of redemption. Thus, for mankind alone did Jesus die (Hebrews 2.5-18).

How is it, then, that lofty man has come to exalt lowly dogs? Simple — he no longer exalts God. In Romans 1, Paul describes the condition of men who put aside the knowledge of God. When men will not acknowledge their Creator, their only alternative is to worship something less. In verses 22-23, Paul says, "Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

When people see fit to glorify dogs, it is only because they no longer see fit to glorify God.

The concept of "ministry dogs" is a sad commentary on the state of religion in our day. Our only recourse is to return to the God who created us. May we learn, as did the early Christians, to "turn to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1.9).