

A Dog With No Name

by [Robert Lyon](#) (October 2024)



Le chien Paul (Gustave Caillebotte, 1886)

A local Facebook post about a lost dog led me recently to pick up a collarless puppy who looked very much like the posted

photo, when I spotted him roaming the street outside a local coffee shop. But when I took him to the woman who had posted the notice, she said, "*No mi perro.*" It would have been unconscionable to dump him back on the street again, so I took him home. The bond was instant. He sticks to me like glue. I'm thinking he has separation anxiety from a previous dump. He spends the night snuggled up on top of the covers, so I'm constantly laundering doggy hair, but never mind that. I never had a dog when I was younger, so it was a bit of a revelation to discover how much and how quickly one could love this lamb-white love-bug who lies at my feet each night. Love-bug. Lamb-white. Lies beside me. Lyon lies down with the lamb. My apologies to Isaiah.

But maybe Isaiah was on to something that had never much registered with me. So as I lay there one night, Dog-with-no-name got me thinking about the nature of love. Bishop Robert Barron regularly cites Thomas Aquinas' view that "love is willing the good of the other." And I have no doubt that Aquinas was right. Certainly that's how I feel about Dog-with-no-name, and that's why I'm delighted that some heroic friends have found him the forever home in Canada that I can't provide and made the arrangements to get him there. Bishop Barron also says that the Holy Spirit is the love that unites the Father and the Son. Not sure I get that—Is he speaking in metaphor or metaphysics? In whatever way he means it, it certainly implies that love is the motive force at the heart of the universe—or as many popular songs have said, "Love makes the world go 'round." That fits well with St John's "God is love" and "If we love one another, God abides in us."

Then there's also that line from the Flood story, where the writer emphasizes the scope of the covenant that God gave to Noah. He says it's not just with Noah and his descendants but "with every living creature in his company, with any bird or beast or animal that leaves the ark, [and] with every beast of the earth" (Genesis 9). To the writer of Genesis, God's

covenant extends even to Dog-with-no-name lying peacefully at my feet. I used to think that the hymn "All things bright and beautiful" was hokey and had little relevance to the gospel. How wrong that was! God's covenant extends to "all creatures great and small" because he loves the world he made and that's why he chooses to redeem and renew it. Dog-with-no-name instinctively knows that. He craves the same things the rest of us need: to live, to belong, to be wanted and valued, to be safe. And that, to Dog-with-no-name, is the essence of love.

And being a dog, he thrives on predictability, order, and routine. As do most of us. In fact, we have a craving for order: change makes us antsy; predictability feels safe. Maybe that's why many ancient creation myths imagine the gods bringing order out of chaos. But the story in Genesis goes one better: it starts back even before the chaos and says that at the beginning everything was "tohu" and "vohu" – "without form and void. Both words mean empty, vacant, deserted, nothingness. God created an ordered universe out of nothing! "*Creatio ex nihilo.*" And he called that order "good." By contrast, and not surprisingly, the Greek word "diabolos," from which we get "devil," means one who scatters, throws things about, creates disorder. So we recognize that order is good and desirable, while disorder is bad and undesirable. Cancer is a disorder; healing is the restoration of order. So we love order, because our existence depends on it.

Since 1957 scientists have enhanced the idea of that order with the anthropic principle—from the Greek word "anthropos" = "man," "human." That's the idea that the conditions for life, and particularly intelligent life, are all ordered in our favor. According to the anthropic principle, we live in the best possible world for human survival. If things were hotter or colder, wetter or drier, bigger or smaller, farther or nearer, faster or slower, our survival would be challenged. It leads one to suspect that there is something more than just good luck at play here.

Of course, chaos does regularly intrude upon this order at all levels. How we might understand that is a topic for another essay. But until then, let it be said that God in love absorbs and redirects that chaos, as he did preeminently on that first Easter weekend. If that is so, then love is not just what I feel for you or you feel for me—though it is that, too—but it is (if I may be presumptuous in trying to describe God) the motive and integrative force in the heart of the universe. We live in a universe that was created in love, is sustained in love, was redeemed in love, and is being and will be renewed in love. Coutts-Hallmark used to have a slogan about “when you care to send the very best.” In creation, providence, and redemption, God has sent us his very best. And one part of God’s “best” was a stray dog with no name who helped me to see that with fresh eyes.

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