

Claire Hoy ? We shouldn't pretend they're human

There's a joke currently doing the rounds on the Internet showing two southern U.S. churches ? one Presbyterian, the other Roman Catholic ? engaged in an outdoor sign war about pets.

The sign outside Our Lady of Martyrs Catholic Church reads: ?ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN.? Across the road, at the Beulah Cumberland Presbyterian Church, their sign reads: ?ONLY HUMANS GO TO HEAVEN.?

And it goes on from there, back and forth about the ultimate place in the universe for our four-legged friends.

As it turns out, the sign war isn't real, but is the product of some hacker's imagination. But, given the value so many people place on their precious pets these days, it certainly could be real.

Any journalist knows that if you want to guarantee high readership and/or widespread outrage, all you need is a story about animal abuse of any kind. Not that we shouldn't be upset about animal abuse, it's just that there seems to be more of a public hue and cry about that than there is, say, stories about human abuse, particularly if that abuse doesn't involve children.

People organize in front of animal pounds and get outraged because the pounds tend to euthanize dogs and cats that nobody wants. But few people even bother to think about the fact that, in Canada alone, some 100,000 unborn babies are aborted each year. It's a question of balance, surely.

Indeed, in her recent lovelorn advice column, the Toronto Star's Ellie published a letter from a reader identified as ?Grieving in Chicago.? Six months ago, she lost her ?best friend? ? a three-year-old dog, to a pit bull attack (which also says something about those people who, incredibly, continue to insist that pit bulls are sweet and kind. The hell they are.)

Anyway, she said her friends and family are helpful ?but no one totally understands my grief.? She's tried counseling, prayer, group meetings, Internet searches. ?What else can I do to ease my pain?

In her response, Ellie says ?all grief is personal and arouses anxieties,? then goes on to write, ?The fact that it's a pet is for you no different than a child, because you felt the dog was in your care and your responsibility.?

Oh please. ?No different than a child?? Come on. There's no comparison between losing a dog and losing a child and it's incredibly offensive to argue they are equivalents.

That being said, I'm sure there are many readers out there who agree with Ellie and see humans and pets as equals in the scheme of things. They need to get a life.

A former journalistic friend of mine ? who has since left the business and gone to her true calling, working at a veterinarian's office ? used to sputter at me that I was a ?speciesist.? If that means that I think humans are further up the food chain than dogs or rabbits or a pet pig, then she's right, I am indeed a speciesist.

I actually knew a couple who, because their dog got car sick on long trips to their cottage, actually had the dog riding in the front seat with the wife sitting in the back. Not in my world.

Another friend is so compulsive about her cats ? which actually aren't even her cats, they were left at home by their children as, one by one, they left the nest ? that she will board them when they go off to their cottage, a six-hour drive from home, but insist on driving back home every three or four days just to check and make sure they are all right.

Then there are the legions of animal wingnuts who are out in force the moment anybody suggests we do something to control the population of Canada Geese ? is there a dirtier animal in the entire world? ? or raccoons. Years ago, when Toronto City Council suggested oiling goose eggs to stop them from hatching, they were out in force and the politicians ? naturally ? backed off. Yet there are parks, particularly down near the lake, which can't be used by kids because of all the goose poop. Makes no sense to me.

And Toronto Star columnist Bob Hepburn recently suggested that the city do something to cull the raccoon population, only to be flooded by virtual hate mail from readers, many of whom called him things that obviously can't be published in a family newspaper. And so it goes.

I like pets too. I grew up with dogs and cats. But that's what they are ? dogs and cats.

They're not human. We shouldn't pretend that they are.

