

QUESTION THREE (40 marks)

This source is extracted from a letter, written in the mid-9th century. The letter is written by Ratramnus, a widely respected monk from Corbie, a monastery and centre of learning in France. The letter is written to Rimbart, who was a missionary priest in a remote part of Scandinavia. This letter contains reflections upon a race of creatures that was thought to exist, referred to in the text as 'dog-headed ones' or 'dog-heads.' These beings were said to look much like humans, but had starkly canine faces. You do not need to know anything about monks in the 9th century to answer this question, nor should you draw on any information outside the source.

Ratramnus wishes everlasting well-being in the Lord to the venerable priest Rimbart.

I was very pleased that you remembered my request and wrote to me about what you were able to discover about the nature of the dog-headed ones. You should know that the reason I had not responded to your inquiry was not because of a lazy lack of interest, but rather the answer was delayed because no messenger was present. Now, however, with your young assistant Sarward coming here and staying with us awhile, I am able to put down some of my thoughts about your inquiry.

You asked what you ought to believe about the dog-headed ones, namely whether they possess the souls of humans or animals. If we are satisfied with the opinion of our learned churchmen, then these dog-heads should be set among the animals, since the heads of humans are on high and round so we can see the heavens, while those of dogs are long and drawn out in a snout so that they can look at the ground. And humans speak, while dogs bark.

But the letter you kindly sent to me, while it indicated very carefully the nature of them, has taught some things about dog-headed ones which seem to associate them more with humans than animals. You write that they are said to live together in villages and that they make a common collection of their crops. Where any law is kept, it is held together by common consent and for the regulation of morality. To cultivate fields, and to undertake sowing for agricultural gain, reveals a capacity to understand cause and effect. It is also a sign of modesty for the private parts to be covered, and this suggests that dog-heads are able to distinguish between the lewd and the decent.

Respected scholars have written about the variety of marvellous types of human beings. There are the pygmies, which are tiny in height, and the antipodes, which have backwards feet with eight toes. The hippopodes have human forms but horses' feet. The macrobii rise almost twice as high as normal human height. Concerning giants, there is almost no one who doubts that they are humans born from other humans, because this is set down in the authority of the Bible. And yet, in other accounts we can read of a calf or a snake that was born from a woman. But I would not easily agree from such reports that these creatures have rational human souls.

However, your writing bears witness that every kind of domestic beast kept in our lands is also kept by the dog-headed ones. I recognise from the Book of Genesis¹ that earthly animals have been subjected to humans by God. It has never been believed that animals can take care of other animals. But since the dog-headed ones are said to keep domestic animals, then they cannot be savage because they tame their beasts with gentleness.

Along these lines I would not believe that dog-headed ones consistently possess rational minds, even if they have their beginnings from humans, were I not persuaded by what you wrote about what is reported concerning them. Now, however, there seem to be such strong and numerous things said about them that it would be stubbornness rather than prudence to deny them or to disbelieve. If you encounter them upon your mission, you should speak to them of God's glory and the generosity of his love. These are the things that I think ought to be observed about the dog-headed ones.

I rejoice and pray that your blessedness remain strong in Christ and that you remember me.

What can this source tell us about Ratramnus's understanding of the world, and the means by which he acquired it?

¹ The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible, which begins with a description about the origins and order of earthly life.