

A Conversation with  
Brother Christopher  
An author of  
***DIVINE CANINE***  
***The Monks' Way to a Happy Obedient Dog***

By The Monks of New Skete

Published by Hyperion on September 18, 2007  
ISBN-13: 978-1-4013-0925-1

**Q: What's the most important thing to keep in mind when raising a dog?**

A: More important than any specific training technique is the underlying attitude that owners bring to their relationship with their dogs. Dogs are wondrous creatures, each with its own unique personality. In order for them to more easily flourish and reach their potential, they require our consistent care, knowledge and love.

**Q: How do you and your fellow monks of New Skete see training dogs as integral to your larger mission?**

A: One of the central values in our monastic life is a reverence for all creation. Caring for and training dogs puts us in touch with the mystery of God present in all life and gives us the opportunity to share this vision with those we meet.

**Q: New Skete monastery specializes in training German shepherds, but *Divine Canine* covers the learning experiences of several different breeds. Is there a reason that German shepherds are your specialty?**

A: When New Skete began in 1966, we had a German Shepherd named Kyr who was a pure delight and led us to fall in love with the breed. Sadly, he soon passed away, and the community so missed his presence that we decided to get two replacement Shepherds. Little did we then realize that they would be the foundation of a breeding program that has since grown to be both respected and well-known.

From the beginning we felt that it was wiser to concentrate on one breed rather than to dabble in numerous breeds. German Shepherds were our breed of choice. In training dogs of all breeds, the surprise has been that dogs are wonderfully varied and that working with them is never routine and boring. A trainer must always be attentive and flexible, willing to adapt to the needs of the individual dog.

**Q: What role should humans ideally play in their dogs' lives?**

**A:** Dogs are pack animals, social creatures that have adapted spectacularly to life with human beings. While dogs perform any number of important services for us, their value goes far beyond the purely utilitarian. What they most need most from us, what helps them reach their full potential, is our companionship and care. They need to be included in the mainstream of our lives.

**Q: What aspects of the human-dog relationship are most commonly misunderstood by dog owners?**

**A:** Dogs are a separate species with an uncanny capacity to relate with us. Be that as it may, they are not little human beings. Canines have their own way of being and behaving. Often human beings can project all sorts of human emotions and intentions onto their pets that are actually harmful and unfair. One of the most important gifts we can give our dogs is to respect them as they are: as canines, as dogs.

**Q: What advice would you offer to working professionals who want their dogs to be happy, but are rarely home?**

**A:** First, be honest with yourself. If you're going to have a dog make sure it receives the exercise and attention that is its due within the specific constraints of your life. Don't think of cutting corners and "minimal requirements." If necessary, hire a dog walker or enroll your dog in doggy day-care so that it receives more attention, and determine to spend extra time with it on the weekends and during vacation time.

**Q: What do you hope people take away from reading *Divine Canine*?**

**A:** We earnestly hope that people will be inspired to strive towards what is possible in their relationship with their dog. By pointing to the spiritual dimension present in a relationship with a dog as well as practical skills necessary to properly care for it, we hope that we're helping owners realize something they may have dreamed of but never really thought possible with their dogs.

**To request an interview with Brother Christopher, please contact:**

**Allison McGeehon**, Senior Publicist, Hyperion

[allison.mcgeehon@abc.com](mailto:allison.mcgeehon@abc.com) / 212-456-0173

[www.HyperionBooks.com](http://www.HyperionBooks.com)