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## Book Review

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David L. Clough, *On Animals. Volume 1, Systematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2012), xxiv + 215 pp., \$120.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-0-567-13948-1.

This book is the preparatory volume for a proposed theological ethics of animals. Here David Clough, Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of Chester, UK, begins the work of laying a theological foundation for further research. As he puts it, 'If we are not sure where animals belong in God's works of creation, reconciliation and redemption, it seems to me, we can make little headway with a plausible account of what our responsibilities might be in relation to them' (p. x). Judging by the quality of this first volume, the second will also be a volume not to be missed.

*On Animals* is divided into three parts: creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Specific chapters deal with matters like the 'end of creation' (rather than simply its beginning), the placing of animals in the created order and their differences with respect to human animality, the meaning of teachings like the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the atonement he accomplishes in the presence of animals, the scope of redemption, and the shape of redeemed life together. Throughout, Clough, rather than trying to cherry-pick amenable quotes from various theologians from the past, builds a constructive theological case that demonstrates, by drawing out implications of previously unconnected doctrinal insights, what orthodox theological teaching stands to gain by putting animals on its agenda.

Clough is right to note that little systematic theological reflection on animals has been done to date, and so he positions his book not as the last word on the subject but as a stimulus to get other theologians to develop positions that are presently woefully underdeveloped. Work of this sort is important at this particular time for at least three reasons: (1) the relationship between humans and animals has undergone a rapid transformation (owing to the industrialization of meat production, the expansion of the human population, and new science on animals); (2) a theology of animals builds on the growing sense that theological reflection must take into account 'others' (racial and ethnic groups, women, people with disabilities) that have often been dissimulated or falsely represented; and (3) reflection on animals has the potential to challenge, illuminate, and deepen traditional areas of doctrine.

For a project like this to succeed, a history of Christian anthropocentrism needs to be faced head on. Clough does this clearly and admirably. As he puts it, 'God's graciousness does not end with this grace towards us' (p. xxiii). Reading scripture and then thinking rigorously about what is there demonstrates that several influential theologians have drawn uncritically on philosophical traditions (such as Philo, Stoicism, and Platonism) that clearly do position humans at the center of it all. Moving into modernity, theologians wedded anthropocentric commitments to a heady optimism in which people will, through science and technology, remake the world to our liking. This anthropocentric bias has certainly been supported on biblical grounds but Clough shows why this is a mistake. It is also bad theology, because as theologians

like Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth rightly observed, God rather than humanity is the center. Glorification of humanity is a perennial temptation that must constantly be named and resisted. When idolatry is permitted to go unchecked, i.e., when people think the meaning of the world and of creatures is decided by our own desires and ambition, the ruination of the world inevitably follows.

A reading of the Bible that is attentive to the presence of animals in it shows that God clearly loves all creatures and not just humans (the book of Job shows God loving wild and powerful creatures like Leviathan and Behemoth that can easily kill us!). Both God's law and covenant include animals, as do God's judgment and blessing. Animals are consistently addressed by God, and they praise God in return. Clough shows that the much-loved idea of a hierarchy or 'chain of being' in which some creatures are closer to God than others—with humans clearly above all others—is at odds with God's love of all creatures. As St. Basil observed, the astonishing diversity of creatures is both a testament to God's delight in creaturely variety and fecundity, and a statement of a fundamental equality among creatures.

Though numerous theologians have pointed to the idea of humans made in the 'image of God' as a decisive qualitative difference, Clough notes that this idea is 'radically underdetermined' in scripture. Drawing on recent scientific work, Clough also shows that various efforts to separate humans from other creatures because of some trait—reason, speech, humor, creativity, etc.—invariably fail as we discover signs of these abilities in other animals. The quest to define human uniqueness leads to dead ends. The appeal to taxonomies or classificatory schemes needs to be undertaken with great care lest we devise schemata that are clearly chosen because of their benefit to us. Of course, this is not to say that all creatures are the same. The theological task is not to look for uniqueness but rather to note differences and similarities among creatures, and then 'attend to the particularity of the lives they are called upon by their creator to live' (pp. 76-77).

Clough insists that Christian theology runs the risk of incoherence if it does not broaden the scope of reconciliation and redemption to include the whole of creation and all its creatures. Scripture shows that God's reconciling intent extends to every creature. Biblical prophets envision a future peaceable kingdom in which predation will be no more and violence will have come to an end. As the early church thought about Jesus Christ, they saw his work as cosmic, reconciling all things in heaven and on earth (Colossians 1.15-20). The idea that salvation is a purely human affair can no longer be supported.

Reading this book it is clear that there is considerable room for further exploration of difficult and vexing issues. Clough, for instance, argues that in God's peaceable kingdom predation will come to an end. This is a sensible position. Without it we run the risk of ontologizing violence. But further questions need to be asked, specifically whether the peaceable kingdom can admit eating of any kind at all. Though a lion may be said to eat straw in this future age, it would be naïve to think that vegetarian eating is without killing or death (indeed, the fertility of soil demands a vast and complex frenzy of organisms eating each other). Does this mean, then, eating must go the way of predation too? Similarly, what are we to make of animal wildness? What is the role of animal domestication theologically understood? How should we understand the long processes of evolutionary development and struggle that have made species diversity possible in the first place?

Clough's book enables us to see that these questions matter deeply. It also opens up possibilities for further reflection by laying out some of the alternatives we might pursue. Without claiming to be the definitive word, Clough has invited others to take up the conversation. *On Animals* will surely prove to be a foundational, clarifying, and congenial partner as this conversation develops.

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