

Lastly, *'For Critics of Christendom: Secularization: A Catholic Response'* argues that liberal secularism has been introduced via communitarianism, and is distinguished by romantic expressiveness in the moral sphere. Secular liberalism requires a politics without memory – Nietzsche's living unhistorically – which does away with an English common narrative from which to derive a shared identity and a definition of the common good. Nichols calls for a re-confessionalisation culturally and doctrinally by returning to Scripture, the Fathers, and the spiritual doctors and teachers. Nichols' project is slightly monolithic without reference to the significant contribution of Irish Catholicism in England – particularly Irish spirituality, religious life, and ministry amongst the working classes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century – and more recently Eastern European and African Catholic migrants. Each of these in unique ways has contributed, and is contributing, to English Catholic culture.

This small volume lacks a concluding chapter to draw together the whole work. There is no index of names or topics, but considering the size of the book, it is hardly necessary. It is an engaging read, worth purchasing for its useful content and as a stimulus to further study.

DANIEL BLACKMAN

**THE SCHOOL OF COMPASSION: A ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF ANIMALS** by Deborah M. Jones, *Gracewing*, Leominster, 2009, pp. 328, £14.99

Deborah Jones plainly has a cause to promote. She is general secretary of the first Catholic society dedicated to animal welfare founded anywhere in the world – 'Catholic Concern for Animals', set up in 1935 in Britain when it was known as the 'Catholic Study Circle for Animal Welfare'. *The School of Compassion* must be one of the first full-length studies on animal welfare in Catholic theology. It is engaging, thoroughly informative, rigorous in its analysis of Church texts and imaginative in pushing forward the debate towards a proper theology of animals. This contrasts with much writing that merely highlights some aspects of human behaviour towards animals.

Jones is an idealist but also a practical realist – on the one hand she asks us to imagine the impact of one billion Catholics if the Church officially adopted a 'pro-animal' theology; on the other she recognizes the huge practical, economic and cultural impact this would have, a '*metanoia* on a grand scale', she says, 'perhaps more than the Church dares to risk'. These two qualities pervade the whole book: it remains thoroughly visionary while at the same time never straying far from the 'art of the possible'. Thus it remains possible to discuss the issues at a profound level without them being reduced to a polarized war between carnivores and vegetarians.

*The School of Compassion* is divided into three sections. First, she gives an overview of literature and comments about animals from an ethical, philosophical or theological perspective, from the ancient Greeks, through the early and medieval Church, to the present, and including more recent official church documents. This is of necessity rather a romp through two thousand years of history in 127 pages (including footnotes). Granted her commitment to animal welfare, it also proves a bit of a gallery of rogues and saints. But it is incredibly informative, with few stones left unturned. It also includes a brief overview of the British scene.

Her second section is devoted to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in particular to §§2415–18 of it. Here very word is thoroughly analysed, criticized and evaluated, positive things noted and contradictions exposed.

The third part covers modern theological developments regarding animals: the justice of human behaviour towards animals deriving from God's relationship

to animals and their relationship to God (called ‘theos-rights’) contrasted with the attitude to animals of crude anthropocentric utilitarianism; the role of human beings both as the image of creation in relation to God and as the image of God towards the rest of creation; and finally the demand placed on us by God of an ethic of kenotic charity and generosity towards the whole of creation, as a foretaste of, and a directing of creation towards, the whole of creation’s eschatological end and fulfillment.

*The School of Compassion* is a thoroughly satisfying book – like a good detective story. Having outlined the long history of Christian thinking about animals – some of it downright cruel, most of it tolerable but inadequate, and some, like the attitude of St Francis, outstanding – Jones finishes by drawing all the loose threads together in a simple but very effective manner: she proposes straightforward amendments to §§2415–18 of the Catechism. This is an amazing *coup théologique* since the contents of the Catechism, having been amended once, will surely be amended again, and particularly as the Catechism is now the fundamental teaching resource of the Catholic Church.

*The School of Compassion* concludes with a poem by Robert Murray SJ: in just a few words he conveys the spiritual, moral, and aesthetic transformation necessary if the Church is to become a ‘school of compassion’.

Jones draws on the riches of Catholic (and Orthodox) theology but she also chooses to stay on the whole within the limitations of its weaknesses. This serves her purposes well. Her book takes on traditional Catholic theology on its own terms. She therefore uses a methodology that tends to treat scriptural, historical, and modern texts almost as ‘proof texts’, without too much regard for the nuances of their larger historical and cultural contexts, apart from that of their ‘magisterial authoritativeness’.

This highlights the need for further research – for instance on the theology of creation in the Old Testament, bearing in mind that there are some nine or ten different versions of the ‘creation story’. Further work is needed also on the historical background of sayings regarding the relationships of humans with animals. It can be no accident, for example, that the Fathers (apart from the Desert Fathers) handled our relationship to animals so badly when the Constantinian Church failed to deal with the issue of slavery. It can also be no accident that the flowering of animal theology in the thirteenth century coincided precisely with a new vision of the Church, soon to be snuffed out by climate change, the Black Death, and a long period of social and ecclesiastical upheaval and revisionism. Neither can it be an accident that the resurgence of care and concern for animals coincided in the UK with writers such as William Blake and John Clare, artists such as Thomas Bewick and Constable, the Romantic movement, the growth of democracy, and events such as the abolition of the slave trade, the Reform Act, and prison reform.

Traditional Catholic teaching must now be reviewed in the light of our modern knowledge about the age and scale of the universe and its processes. Serious scientific study points out that during the 3.5 billion years in which life-forms have existed on our planet, biodiversity has suffered at least five mass extinctions, all brought on by terrestrial or cosmic cataclysms. We are currently in the midst of a sixth mass extinction, brought on, exceptionally, by human activity alone. The moral and theological implications of this are profound. While the Catholic Church’s attitude to the environment has improved considerably following the leadership of John Paul II, the task before us now remains unimaginably challenging. In *The School of Compassion*, Deborah Jones has given us a comprehensive and vital starting point.

PAUL HYPHER