

## **Ordained Animals: Retrieving Human Exceptionality in John Zizioulas's Ecological Anthropology**

This paper seeks to expand on the promise of Zizioulas's ecology by retrieving his understanding of human exceptionality in relation to nonhumans. Although Zizioulas's framing of humans as "priests of creation" is justly lauded as a powerful resource for ecological theology, his presentation tends to undermine his own efforts to distinguish anthropocentrism from anthropomonism by treating the human priestly role as set apart from, rather than within, the community of creation. The result is a vision that privileges humans over nonhumans, even if benignly intentioned, risking their subordination to human ends and loss of ontological otherness. Drawing on Zizioulas's relational understanding of ecclesial priesthood supported by Nicholas Afanasiev's account of the "royal priesthood," I argue that human ecological uniqueness can be understood as a priestly vocation within a cosmic ecclesial communion whose prototype is the divine-human organism of the Church. Within this communion, all beings participate in the one high priesthood of Christ by offering their own "sacrifice of praise," while humans receive a unique vocation as "ordained animals," enabled by their particular capacities within the evolutionary hierarchy. Taking up this ordination is Eucharistic, less in the sense of freely offering creation to God than in participating in the kenosis of Christ, which culminates in his becoming bread and wine in the Eucharist through the Spirit. By setting aside claims of self-existence, humans foster the conditions in which other beings may attain species-specific forms of flourishing and communion with their creator. Retrieved this way, Zizioulas's "priesthood of creation" can reorient ecological practice away from mastery and toward the kenotic service of life in all its forms.

Richard René