

**Birch, C & Vischer, L 1997 – Living with the animals: The community of God's creatures (Risk book Series 77)**

Geneva: WCC Publications. 94 Pages. Price: US\$8.50

**Reviewer: Prof P M Venter (University of Pretoria)**

This book deals with the relationship between human beings and animals. Technological progress made man less dependent on animals, but simultaneously endangered the survival of animals by disturbing their habitat. This problem is investigated and some recommendations are made on how to live with animals on this earth.

In the first part Lukas Vischer advances the Biblical vision that animals were created in indissoluble community with humankind to praise God. Because of sin this balance was disturbed and human beings started dominating the animals and exploiting the earth for their own gain. What is needed is a new relation with the animals where human beings live in restraint and harmony with them.

In part two Charles Birch uses scientific research to reject the degrading viewpoint that animals are irrational beings. They do not have instrumental value only, but also intrinsic value. They have rights and are to be treated with respect. A shift should take place away from an anthropocentric and towards a biocentric or lifecentred ethic.

This first part of the book can be criticised for its uncontextual and thematic use of Scripture. The second part, however, can be recommended for presenting the issue in a balanced way, not avoiding critical questions addressed to this new viewpoint. In general the present society is criticised for its human centredness and a shift is propagated towards greater harmony between the inhabitants of the earth.

Although this is a short document, it will probably have quite a large influence on its readers and the community. It is highly recommended for lay people as well as theologians who want to be informed on the Christian viewpoint on ecological matters.