

In chapter 9, Davis continues past the proverbial “big four” to engage a lesser talked about moral issue; environmentalism. The way Davis engages the content and structures the chapter can be broken into, roughly, three sections. The first is an historical review of historical Christianity’s complicitness in condoning and advocating the destruction of the planet; a confession, if you will. His summary statement is as follows:

So when critics charge religion with being an instigator of the current ecological crisis, there is some validity to this charge. ‘Dominion theology’ has been taken as biblical license to see the earth as a storehouse of resources whose only value is their usefulness to us. Anthropocentric theology encourages believers to assume that God loves human beings more than the rest of creation, and that creation was put in place for nothing more than the satisfaction of human desires. When religion has encouraged antagonism between the human and the natural worlds, or between belief and science, this has only aggravated the destructive relationship we have with our ecosystem. Historically, it seems that religion has been largely to blame for the environmental crisis we now face.¹

Many of you have likely been exposed to these kinds of theologies, if even just tangentially and not directly, as for several decades they were casually woven into many theological discussions and pulpits. They were very much a part of the overriding theological ethos of 20th century Christianity in the United States. It is easy to see how an over-emphasis on human value, worth, and dignity as bearers of the *imago dei* without the constant reminder that, according to Genesis 1 God saw *all* that God had created was good could lead people to conclude that the earth was simply to be exploited for human gain and flourishing. This created a mentality that the earth had no inherent value or worth but had only value or worth insofar as it could be commodified.

The second part is about how a broad swath of religiously minded people are finally beginning to lend their religious theologies and voices to the growing ecological movement. Jews, Christians who are liberal, conservative, and Catholic, have seen substantial growth in their calls to increase awareness and care of creation. “Dominion” theology is being undone by “stewardship” theology. Anthropocentrism is being undone, admittedly at a much lower rate, by theology that expands God’s love for all of God’s creation and encourages human humility. Part of these various religious movements’ theological gains have been, and will continue to be, helping all of humanity to understand and believe in the inherent value of the earth thereby undoing the mentality of how can the earth be commodified for human profit and comfort. “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action” is a statement released in 2006 that does imply “the inherent value of the earth as a product of God’s creative love, independent of its ‘usefulness’ to us”².

The third section of the chapter is Davis’ reasoning on how bringing these religious perspectives to bear on our public discourse can be helpful and not hurtful. First, he acknowledges that, as indicated above in his first section, since religious perspectives helped us get into the environmental mess that we are in, it is religious perspectives responsibility to help get us out of it. Secondly, he argues that as religiously inclined folks currently have the ear of many in government, that influence can be leveraged to increase the presence and authority of the environmental movement. We will see if this particular argument will come to any kind of fruition. I hope Davis is not being naively optimistic. Third, he argues that religious language just might be the thing to tip the scale in favor of

¹ Davis, James Calvin. In Defense of Civility: How Religion Can Unite America on Seven Moral Issues That Divide Us. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; 2010. pp 134-135

² Ibid. p 140

more movement on the environmental front. “The poetic force of regard for nature as a reflection of God’s creative love may serve as an effective complement to pragmatic and consequentialist appeals that emphasize the effect of global warming on human society.”³ In other words, maybe science and religion working together for the good of all humanity will be just the thing to tip the scales in favor of climate action. Finally, Davis argues that “theological support for environmentalism promises to bring together otherwise disparate constituents, providing bridges necessary to get conservatives and progressives working with each other”⁴. Again, I hope that he is not being naively optimistic and say instead that, as far as this argument goes, we will hope and pray, and we will wait and see.

³ Davis, James Calvin. In Defense of Civility: How Religion Can Unite America on Seven Moral Issues That Divide Us. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; 2010. pp 134-135

⁴ Ibid. p142