

Class: Our Climate. Our Faith. Our Future

Excerpts from “Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology” by Daniel L. Migliore

CHAPTER 4: The Good Creation

“An important first step in this process is to identify some of the deep-seated attitudes and practices that underlie the ecological crisis and to consider the searching questions they pose for Christian theology and the church.”

1. Anthropocentrism
2. Power as Domination
3. Denial of Interconnectedness
4. Assumption of Limitless Resources
5. Unchecked Consumerism

1. Anthropocentrism: “Anthropocentrism is a view of the world as existing primarily to serve the needs and desires of humankind. This doctrine has become a kind of motto of the modern attitude toward nature with devastating ecological consequences.”

- “Has Christian theology contributed to this view? The answer is sadly yes in part.”
 - “Many standard discussions of the doctrine of creation gave primary, if not exclusive, attention to the creation of human beings.”
 - “That there were other beings created by God was certainly acknowledged, but they were often treated more like stage props than like important participants in the drama of creation and salvation.”
 - “The life of animals and plants is preserved not for themselves but for man.” Thomas Aquinas, a theologian second to none in affirming that the goodness of God is displayed in the diversity of creatures.
- “*If Christian theology today is not unthinkingly to perpetuate such expressions of anthropocentrism in the tradition, must it not retrieve and draw out the implications of the radical theocentrism that is at the core of the biblical witness?*”

2. Power as Domination. “At the heart of the ecological crisis is the misuse of power.”
- Science and technology have acquired enormous power over forces of nature → use this for good or ill
 - Goal of science too often has been the subjection of nature to human will
 - Francis Bacon**:
 - knowledge is power, and the task of science is to force nature to give up its secrets
 - nature is related to humanity as slave to master
 - Christian theology has at least partly contributed to this understanding
 - God is viewed as overwhelming power
 - Humanity is seen as the image of God to exercise divinely given “dominion” over the earth
 - “But is the God of Christian faith rightly understood by this view of divine power, and is humanity rightly understood as the master of nature rather than its guardian and protector?”
3. Denial of Interconnectedness. *Anthropocentrism & Power as Domination feed denials of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all forms of life.*
- An ecological consciousness is a consciousness of the delicate web of life and a respect for the existence and value of other creatures.
 - Human Progress => destroy nonhuman forms of life ?
 - Respect for other, nonhuman forms of life does not require that we attribute personhood to them.
 - Do other forms of life have a value in and of themselves, not entirely dependent on human purposes?
 - Critics of the Christian tradition charge that the Christian tradition sees no intrinsic moral and religious significance in the world of nature, that its value is only the value it has for human beings.
 - “Is the denial of the connectedness of life and the reduction of the value of other forms of life to their usefulness to humanity really compatible with a responsible Christian doctrine of creation?”
4. Assumption of limitless resources: clean air, pure water and fertile fields are unlimited, or at least always renewable. This underlies much of the exploitation of the earth for human purposes

- we will never run out of the resources that are necessary to all life because they are supplied in inexhaustible abundance by the Earth
- even if our natural environment should run out of these necessary resources, modern science and technology will always be there to provide alternative sources
- by acting as though the resources are infinite we manifest a callous disdain for future generations and for the poor of the earth who have never had just access to the world's limited resources {*Steve Long addition* “*or the technologies to deal with resource scarcity*”}
- *has the Christian doctrine of creation been presented in a way that counters the ideas:*
 - *that natural resources are unlimited,*
 - *that they are there are solely for the purpose of humanity,*
 - *that they may be squandered by some while others have little or no access to them,*
 - *that the present generation may live in a manner that disregards the future of its children and its children's children?*

5. Unchecked Consumerism

- Moving to “I consume, therefore I am” instead of “I think, therefore I am”
- Not only things but even persons and relationships are turned into commodities
- Unchecked consumption in some societies is paralleled by widespread deprivation in others.
- “Does uncontrolled consumerism have any basis in biblical teaching or in Christian theology and ethics, or does it contrast sharply with the divine economy of creation and salvation, and economy of extravagant gift-giving that results not in scarcity but in abundance for all?”

** Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was one of the leading figures in natural philosophy and in the field of scientific methodology in the period of transition from the Renaissance to the early modern era.