

## Commentary on Clifford Cain's "Made in God's Image"

*Laurence Rohrer (Lincoln University)*

Dr. Cain makes an attractive appeal to an alternative way to understand the relationship between God and man in his presentation. Here he suggests that our role in regard to nature that of a pure steward, who is a "house sitter" for the rest of God's creation, in contrast to the seeing the rest of created nature, as mere resources solely possessing instrumental value for human ends, the power over which is ceded by God in Genesis vs. 26, 27, 28.

While I am a large supporter of the present movement among many religious thinkers, to emphasize good stewardship of the earth as a moral obligation incurred in virtue of our relationship with God, I am less critical of the traditional interpretation of Genesis, and in particular Dr. Cain's concern for understanding the notion of man being given dominion over the rest of nature. Dr. Cain interprets this passage as *sin qua non*, the license to rape the land or use other creatures callously and cruelly for own devices. While it may be true that absolute power, corrupts absolutely, at least for all creatures except God, it does not follow that man's dominion does so, for as a matter of fact, man is never wholly separate from nor has ever exercised absolute power over nature. In many ways, mankind has often felt nature an adversary, precisely because it poses a great deal of adversity and hardships that must be overcome to even secure the most basic of his needs. The temptation to over romanticize nature in light of our ecological blunders is great. But that human beings are first and foremost makers, who recreate nature as a form of life, as philosophers from Aristotle to Karl Marx have suggested, seems hard to deny.

In regard to the troubling aspects of the notions associated with dominion, and kingship, that Dr. Cain addresses throughout his paper, he noted that many scholars have traditionally "underscored" the "separateness and superiority of mankind." While to be sure, it has often been

the case that many scholars have interpreted passages such as Genesis 1:26 in this fashion, it does not follow that dominion or Lordship as Dr. Cain remarks, necessarily entails that man is separate from the rest of creation. Lordship only requires unique powers, prestige or advantage, but the moral quality of the exercise of that power is open. This can easily be understood as suggested by Genesis 1. Also, to have dominion over, does not entail separateness from. I would agree with Dr. Cain that those theologians that have argued in that manner are in error. I would hasten to remind them what history well teaches us, that mankind has always been keenly aware of its interdependence on the rest of nature. Clearly we have failed miserably and sinfully to act as good kings over the rest of the created world, but this implies no error on the part of God in ceding dominion to mankind, nor does it have any bearing on whether or not it is true that in fact, man is special and unique in regard to the rest of creation. Rather, it is our immense power in exercising our capacities from being made in God's image that is precisely why our moral and prudential errors are so devastating and why grace is necessary. Moreover, it seems rather clear that the purpose of the Bible is for mankind, it is not a book on Deep Ecology or a treatise on Ecological politics that is non-species centric extending a covenant relationship between God and the entirety of His created order.

Finally, I am in great sympathy with Dr. Cain's motivation for his presentation. Ecologically, human history is largely a story of folly. But I think that our focus ought to be on good kingship, in which the king is a sacrifice, a steward of his subjects. It is because of our dependence upon nature for the physical means of our service to God and to one another, that wise management of all of God's gifts is necessary. But an accurate picture of human nature cannot avoid the unique role and power that mankind has developed, the capacity for which was

always our potential. Thus, kingship is arguably a part of what it means to be made in God's image.