International Journal of Research in Interdisciplinary Studies
Volume 3, Issue 2, February 2025
https://www.ijris.com | ISSN (Online): 2584-1017

"Subdue" and "Have Dominion" Over The Earth: The Problem of Meaning

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Abstract— The field of eco-theology has largely shaped itself as a response to the accusations that Christianity and the Bible laid the foundations for the development of exploitative modes of science and technology. Based on Genesis 1:28 where God commands humanity to subdue the earth and have dominion over all living creatures, ecologists, nature writers, and environmentalists assert the ecological culpability of a biblically inspired attitude of dominion over nature and reject the Bible as a relevant resource in the development of a sound environmental ethic. Such reading of the Bible and our increasing ecological problems prompt the following questions: Is it possible that the Bible is not as anthropocentric as it is presumed? Could its seeming anthropocentric outlook be revealing of the limitations of a particular historical culture? What is the intended meaning of the command words, "subdue" and "have dominion," as used in the creation story in Genesis? This paper is an inquiry into the meaning of human dominion over the earth. Guided by the above questions, it explored biblical scholarship from the early Church Fathers and medieval theologians and reflected on the ethical concerns about planet Earth in *Laudato si*. The common persuasion running through these sources is that human dominion over the earth is not given for uncontrolled exploitation and destruction of nature. Beyond the literal interpretation of Genesis 1:28, there is a theology of human dependence in the creation account(s) that seems conveniently left out. Our ecological realities today require a more holistic approach to the study of scripture, towards promoting commitment to solidarity with humans and the earth's other-kind, and for an all-encompassing global common good.

***Index Terms*— Environmental Ethics, Ecology, Genesis 1:28, Subdue and Dominate, Anthropocentrism, Solidarity.**

1. Introduction

The document starts here. Copy and paste the content in the paragraphs. The field of eco-theology has largely shaped itself as a response to the accusations levelled at Christianity and the Bible[1] by ecologists, nature writers, and many other environmentalists. These accusations usually include, "the ecological culpability of a biblically inspired attitude of dominion over nature, the environmental impact of anthropocentrism, and the degree to which Christianity has laid the foundations for the development of exploitative modes of science and technology."[2] This perception is often backed by allusion to Genesis 1:28 where God commands humanity to *subdue* the earth and *have dominion* over all living creatures, a command often taken to mean that humans can treat all other creatures as they please. This interpretation and thus, the notion that the Bible has little else to say concerning human relation to the earth have led some scholars to reject the Bible as a relevant resource in the development of a sound environmental ethic.

This view of the Bible is largely influenced by Lynn White's often-cited article: "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis."[3] Although many scholars have exposed the flaws in White's position, elements of his argument still find relevance in discussions concerning the Bible and the environment. Alluding to verses in the creation accounts (Genesis 1-2), White argues they indicate that God intended the natural world and all it holds "explicitly for [human] benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve [human] purposes."[4] This biblical view of creation, White argued, was embraced by Christianity, thus promoting the attitude of human transcendence over, and exploitation of, the physical world. White claims that modern science and technology, which continue to threaten the environment, have been shaped and influenced by this attitude. Thus, he concludes that Christianity "bears a huge burden of guilt" for our environmental crisis.

Such reading of the Bible and our increasing ecological problems prompt us to ask questions: Is it possible that the Bible is not as anthropocentric as it is presumed? Could its seeming anthropocentric outlook be revealing of the limitations of a particular historical culture? Some scholars like Dianne Bergant hold that the anthropocentric point of view, rather than implied by the biblical author, might have been imposed by the reader. According to Bergant, "much of the interpretation that has shaped the way we understand the Bible today took place during the nineteenth century."[5] With the scientific discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the invention of

[1] All footnotes are cited in Chicago Manual of Style, and all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

[2] Matthew Riley, "Rethinking Lynn White: Christianity, Creatures, and Democracy." (June 6, 2012) http://fore.yale.edu/files/Matt_Riley.pdf

[3] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science*. 155 (1967): 1203-7. Retrieved from http://www.webofcreation.org/Articles/bunge.html

[4] White, "The Historical Roots," 1205.

[5] Dianne Bergant, "The Bible's Wisdom Tradition and Creation Theology," in *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Christian Response to the Environmental Crisis* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), pp. 35-48.

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modern technologies to manipulate and control the environment for human advantage, there was a sense of what Bergant calls "exaggerated anthropocentrism." Everything was judged from the perspective of its value to human progress, and this, for Bergant, influenced the reading of many Biblical texts.[6]

As plausible as Bergant's view is, it succeeds only in addressing one possibility – that the breakthroughs of science and technology, together with our desire to bring forth the "new creation," influenced our reading of the Bible from an anthropocentric perspective. However, there is a second possibility – that the Bible itself truly implies the anthropocentric attitudes we decry today. To examine this second possibility, the guiding question will be: What is the intended meaning of the command words, "subdue" and "have dominion," as used in the creation story in Genesis? Thus, this paper is an inquiry.

The paper is organised into the following sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is an analysis of the Genesis texts on human authority or dominion over creation. Section three examines the early/medieval theologians' understanding of and teachings about the Genesis creation texts, especially on human rulership or dominion over non-human creatures. Section four highlights some ethical themes in Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* that address the question of what ought to be the appropriate relationship between humans and the non-human world, a question that has become necessary, given the realities of our growing ecological crisis. The last section (five) in the conclusion.

2. The Meaning of "Subdue" and "Have Dominion" in Genesis 1:28

And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

A. Lexical Analysis

The verb "subdue" in the above text is from the Hebrew - *kavash*, which describes an actual act of subjugation or of forcing another into a subordinate position.[7] It is used for armed conquest where it describes the devastation and occupation of subjugated land (Numbers 32:22, 29). The verb is also used to describe the people being forced into slavery by their king contrary to God's desires (Jeremiah 34:11, 16). Also, this verb is used for rape in the books of Esther 7:8 and Nehemiah 5:5. Thus, in the context of creation, *kavash* depicts a hierarchical relationship, one in which human beings are placed above the earth and bestowed with authority and control over it. In many of the cases in which it is used, one thing that is obvious is the abuse of power.[8]

A similar use is made of the second term "dominion," which is from the Hebrew verb *radah*.[9] Across the Old Testament, *radah* is used for the rule of the family head over the servants of the household (Leviticus 25:43). It is used in 1 Kings 5:16 to describe Solomon's supervisors who were given charge of his conscripted workforce. Concerning other nations, *radah* is used for the king's rule over the enemies of Israel (1 Kings 4:24), and to describe the rule of enemy nations over Israel (Leviticus 26:17). In all of these cases, *radah* indicates the power, control, and authority of one individual or group over another.[10] Thus, its use in the creation story suggests that humans are granted the right and charge to rule, to administer God's creation. It sets up some hierarchy or pyramid of power and authority at the apex of which humanity is positioned.

However, the verb *radah* doesn't clarify how, and to what extent, this dominion should be exercised. It does not define whether this dominion is to be exercised malevolently or benevolently. When the laws in Leviticus qualify *radah* with the adverb "harshly" (that servants of a household should not be "ruled" harshly [Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53]), what is implied is that *radah* may also have the quality of being *gentle* and *compassionate*. Still, frequently used concerning enemy nations, *radah,* in such instances, carries an antagonistic or hostile tinge, since it means the rule over enemies. It is used to describe military conquest and is usually paired with verbs such as "destroy," used in Numbers 24:19, and "strike down," used in Leviticus 26:17 and Isaiah. 14:6. When *radah* is used of kings in Israel, it is always about his exercise of dominion over the enemies of Israel and not over his Israelite subjects. Instead, when the reference is to the authority of the king over his people, the verb *malak*, meaning "reign," is usually used.[11]

The use of the two terms, *kavash and radah*, establishes a hierarchical structure in which the rest of nature is subordinated to humans who exercise authority and control over it. Furthermore, this conception seems to be supported by other details in the creation story of Genesis 1. Whereas all other life emanates from the earth in response to the command of God – "Let the earth put forth vegetation" (Genesis 1:11) or "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures" (Genesis 1:20), or "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind" (Genesis 1:24;), humans do not come to be in this way. God created the human being alone (Genesis 1:26). In addition, and more significantly, only humans are created in the image of God. Thus, it is safe to say that the general presentation of the human race in this creation story, especially in Genesis 1:28, is bestowed with power and authority. Humanity is placed at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of creation for its bearing the image of God and its divine mandate to rule over the earth and all its constituents.[12] Thus, it is obvious that Genesis 1:28 reflects an impressive theology of human dominion. However, the real question here is how this dominion theology was understood by the biblical society, and to gain insight into this, it is necessary to contextualize Genesis 1:28.

[6] Bergant, "The Bible's Wisdom Tradition," 36

[7] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1990), p. 139.

[8] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis,* 149.

[9] Ibid.

[10] David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 18.

[11] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis,* 149.

[12] Ibid.

B. Contextual Analysis of Genesis 1:28

Biblical scholarship offers helpful perspectives on the theology of dominion in Genesis 1:28 by which this verse can be examined in three contexts: the text within which it occurs, the text's social world, and its canonical setting in relation to the Bible as a whole.

1) Textual Context

Genesis 1:28 is part of a larger creation account to which many scholars have paid attention in their attempt to gain a better insight into the fuller import of dominion theology. In this textual context, some hints have been seen, suggesting that "dominion" meant a benevolent rule tinged by restraint. The most significant of such clues is God's image which, in this account, highlights the distinctiveness and authority of humans. If God's image suggests a privileged function or role, and if that role is to act as God's representative,[13] then human dominion cannot be without limits. Thus, it is to be exercised according to the intention and design of the God who delegated the authority.[14] And if God exercises authority with benevolence as God is depicted in Genesis 1 – creating all of life, seeing it as good, and establishing harmony in the ecosystem – then as God's representatives, humans ought to exercise the authority given to them for the same ends.

This element of the textual context of Genesis 1:28 has formed the basis for understanding the dominion theology from a stewardship perspective. Rather than see the human being as having independent authority over creation, the stewardship theology sees the human being as an agent or representative, vested with only delegated power, and who should exercise it in accordance to the life-giving designs of God.

2) Social Context

There are two observations to be made when looking at Genesis. 1:28 from its social context. First, the biblical society was agrarian, with an economy that was largely dependent on subsistence, pre-industrial agriculture, practiced on the rocky hills of biblical Israel. It was an agriculture on the hills that depended on variable and unpredictable rainfall.[15] Such an environment demanded extremely arduous work to wheedle crops out of the rocky soil each year. Thus, viewing the human-earth relationship in adversarial terms within this context is understandable. In this sense, the human efforts to produce food could be considered as conquering the intractable ground, or "subduing (*kavash*) the earth," as in Genesis 1:28. In this agrarian sense of viewing the human-earth relationship as adversarial, the verb *radah* (dominion) appropriately describes human rule over the earth, an adversary that had to be conquered or overpowered to survive.[16]

The second observation from the social context of Genesis 1:28 concerns the role of the priestly group usually considered to be responsible for the Genesis 1 account of creation.[17] According to the biblical record, priests held a respected position in Israelite society. They are closely linked with royal courts and authority (1 Kings 1:28-40), and as religious leaders in Israel, they are regarded as mediators of God's presence to the people (Lev. 8-9). This distinctive and preeminent role of the priests in ancient Israel may well have influenced their conception of the unique role of humans concerning the whole creation. Thus, in the priestly account of creation in Genesis 1, the first human is a kind of priestly figure representing God and mediating the rule of God.[18]

If this observation is plausible, then it can be argued that Genesis 1:28 has roots in the influential social role played by its priestly authors and that its conception of human authority or dominion over the world of nature echoes the influential authority of the priests in the cult and society of Israel. Based on this analysis, therefore, the notion of dominion in Gen. 1:28 can be considered as coming from the priestly author's position of power and authority.

3) The Canonical Context

This concerns the canonical setting of Genesis 1:28 in relation to the Bible as a whole. As soon as one reads into Genesis 2, what becomes clear immediately is that dominion theology is not the only theology there is about the position of humans in the world. There are other theologies. Genesis 2 contains what many biblical scholars regard as another creation story. In this tradition, the human being is made not in God's image, but from "dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). This highlights the connection between "human being" (*adam*) and "earth" or "ground" (*adamah*). Furthermore, the role given to humans in this account (Genesis 2:15; 3:23) is not to subdue (*kavash*) and rule (*radah*) over the earth, but to "serve" (*avad*).[19] The proper translation of the Hebrew term, "*avad,"* in these verses, is "till" (NRSV), clearly referring to the cultivation of plowable land. But *avad* is the ordinary verb "serve," and is used of slaves serving their masters, and of human beings serving God (Gen. 12:16; Exod. 4:23).[20]

Thus, the creation account in Genesis 2 presents a different theology from the dominion theology of Genesis 1. In Genesis 2, humans are not created with special honour and power. The language describing human role in the earth is not that of lordship but service. In this creation account, the theology of the place of humans in creation is a theology of dependence.[21] This theology is also echoed in other parts of Scripture, especially Psalm 104 and the Book of Job.

The solely anthropocentric interpretation of the creation story as laying the foundations for the development of exploitative modes of science and technology is fundamentally flawed when examined within context. Moreover, theological resources in Scriptural tradition for a fuller understanding of the dominion mandate in Genesis 1:28, present us with more than

[13] Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the books of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995), 322.

[14] Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 33.

[15] Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 55.

[16] Vawter, *On Genesis,* 57.

[17] Robert B. Coote and David R. Ord, *In the Beginning: Creation and the Priestly History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 21.

[18] Coote and Ord, *In the Beginning*, 22.

[19] Coote and Ord, *In the Beginning*, 23.

[20] Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundation for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf &Stock, 2006), 69.

[21] Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 59.

one theology. Apart from the theology of dominion in Genesis 1, Genesis 2 presents, in contrast, the *theology of dependence.* To be responsible to Scripture, especially in our time of environmental crisis, both theologies must be taken seriously. Part of the merits for preserving both theologies is that between them, the paradox of human existence is captured. Genesis 1 presents humans to be uniquely ingenious and powerful among all forms of life, a belief that propelled human activity in the twentieth century to discover the ability to control nature for good or for ill. Genesis 2 presents humans who are only a single species in a large and complex web of life they cannot entirely understand and fully control. What this reveals is that, although almost all the discussions concerning the Bible and the environment have focused on the dominion theology of Genesis 1:28 and how it can be best understood and most responsibly exercised, it is, at best, only half of the story of the biblical human-earth relationship. A holistic approach to the discussion of the Bible and the environment requires that particular attention be also given to the dependence theology of Genesis 2 in which human responsibility is conceived as that of service within God's creation.

3. The Early and Medieval Christian Theologians' Understanding of Human Dominion Over the Earth

Having gained some insight, from biblical scholarship, into the lexical and contextual meaning of "subdue" and "have dominion" used in Genesis 1:28, this second section explores the creation theology of the early and medieval Christian theologians. Before reaching any conclusions on how we come by the biblical interpretations said to be responsible for the present ecological crisis, it is worthwhile to consider what these theologians understood by and taught about human dominion over the earth. Being revered by the Church as "privileged witnesses" to the Catholic tradition, the early Church Fathers and their medieval counterparts were eminent theologians whose teachings have stood the test of time. According to Yves Congar, "these Christian theologians were inspired, raised up, enlightened, guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit" to contribute significantly to the "permanent form" of the Church's faith by continuing the traditions of the scriptures. They wielded "a decisive influence on the life of the people of God" at crucial times of the formation of the Church and are, therefore, "*theologians per excellence*" who hold "special value and historical importance" for the Church.[22] They were conditioned by the culture of their times, including the Neoplatonic influences that provided a framework for thinking about God in relation to the world and the nature of the human person, and they struggled to respond to the heresies of their times while remaining "absolutely theocentric in outlook and reasoning."[23]

When probed systematically, however, some of their notions about God's activity, humans and other species, and the natural environment appear incoherent in light of our current scientific understanding of the world. They reflected from the faith perspective that God created the world from nothing, determined the exact characteristics of all species, designed their relationship with one another, and ensured their harmonious functioning through laws established by God. These dimensions of their thinking were influenced by an enduring eclectic Platonism of the third to sixth centuries when theologians commented on the Genesis 1 creation story. It is against this background that we address the question: What was the understanding and teachings of these early and medieval Christian theologians about the relationship between human and non-human creatures?

It is good to note that a linear presentation of these teachings could be a daunting task. This is because much of the writings of these churchmen were in response to the heresies of their different times. For this work, however, we shall examine the works of one Church Father, Augustine of Hippo (354-430). And since much of Lynn White's accusations were directed at medieval Christianity, the creation theology and teachings of Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) will be examined.

Reflecting on the Genesis 1 creation story, these theologians all affirm that human beings are the highest corporeal users in the order of creation – humans are intended to use other creatures. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine stresses that the human being has dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over all cattle and wild beasts, and all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and that he does this by the power of reason in his mind by which he perceives "the things of the Spirit of God."[24] Augustine adds, however, that when humanity was put in this high office, it did not understand what was involved and thus was reduced to the level of the brute beasts, and made like them, referring here to the effect of the Fall. In the same vein, Thomas Aquinas asserts that "*God has sovereign dominion over all things: and He [God], according to His [God's] providence, directed certain things to the sustenance of human's body."*[25] Aquinas demonstrates here a basic appreciation of the uniqueness of human beings in creation and suggests that God intended humans to use natural resources for human benefit. This anthropocentric bias that permeated their works has prevailed from biblical times to the present. The human being is posited as the creature for whom God created all others for human use. This is the bias construed by White as non-contributory or harmful to theological discourse in our age of ecological degradation.

However, an examination of the teachings of these Christian writers suggests that such a critique of their anthropocentric viewpoints appears to have been accompanied by a lack of attention to their creation theologies. There are details in the teachings of theologians, like Aquinas' experiencing "traces" of the Trinity in all of creation and his regard for creatures as

[22] Yves M. J. Congar, OP, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (London: Burns and Oates, 1966), pp. 439-40.

[23] Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 450.

[24] Garry Wills, *Augustine*'s *Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 26.

[25] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: Christian classics, 1948), 2, 2.66.1-2

manifestations of divine goodness,[26] that firmly impose constraints on human dominion over the Earth and the human use of the Earth's constituents. Among other details, the three theologians being examined in this section taught that humans are to use all other created things (1) by using their human ability to reason rather than giving in to their irrational desires, and (2) by moderating and limiting their intake to the necessities of life.

A. The Use of the Earth's Constituents According to Reason

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was one of the Fathers who emphasized that humans use their reasoning faculty to determine how they use other creatures. For him, because the ability to reason and freedom of will to make informed judgments were considered unique characteristics of humans among other corporeal creatures,[27] using that ability to determine how to use God's creation is a natural capacity that is mandatory. In *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* Augustine teaches that heretics fail to recognize the goodness of certain creatures and their place in the splendid order of all things God created. Those who are distressed by fire, cold, wild animals and other aspects of the natural world that cause inconveniences fail to see how much these things benefit humans if they make "wise and appropriate use of them." When used wisely and appropriately, even poisons are "turned into wholesome medicines by their proper application," whereas food, drink and other things that give pleasure to humans are experienced as harmful when used without restraint and in improper ways.[28] The "great artificer" of all natural things wants humans to avoid indulging in "silly complaints" about the natural world and "to take pains" to inquire about the "useful purposes" of things.[29] Thus, Augustine wanted his flock to use their God-given abilities to reason about the appropriate use of God's creatures.

Another theologian committed to the full use of the ability to reason, Albertus Magnus (1139-1280), commenting on the role of humans in creation, taught that humans govern God's creation correctly only if they use their God-given rationality to control their bodies. According to God's design (Genesis 1), humans are not intended to be subject to the world; God intends them to govern it.[30] However, if they act irrationally, they shed the dignity of their humanity and assume the nature of other animals. "Such a human is likened to a pig because of his wanton behaviour, to a dog because of his snarling temper, to a lion because of his rapacity and similarly to other animals because of his sub-human actions."[31] When humans persevere in controlling their actions from "the throne of their minds," Albertus taught, they master both themselves and the physical world. Those who choose "to shackle" themselves to the bodily demands incur the "marks of corruption," because these "accidental qualities of the body wreck changes" in the human soul. When failing to exercise restraint over their bodies, they open "the door to rapid weakening and deterioration, especially through the imagination and passions" that "accelerate the process of bodily corruption."[32] Albertus also demonstrated how to put human reason into practice when identifying a variety of ways to improve the land and crops.[33]

Albertus Magnus' most famous student, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), when commenting on the Genesis 1 creation story, taught that humans have a natural dominion over other material creatures as executors of God's primary dominion over all.[34] They are supposed to use their capacity to reason when exercising their dominion,[35] and their use of creatures must show their reverence for God as their mutual creator and sustainer.[36] Thus, Aquinas teaches that when using other creatures, humans should conform their wills to God's will to ensure that the common good is sought. He insists that God apprehends and wills the good of the entire universe under the aspects of justice and the natural order, and humans know the way that God wills good universally. When they choose to seek the common good they are imitating God.[37] If humans use natural entities as ends in themselves, their rational power is disordered, and they have strayed from God's will.

These theologians, therefore, teach that those who believe in God as their creator and sustainer should employ their reasoning ability when using other creatures. Doing otherwise would be contrary to God's intention that they rely on their natural abilities as they relate to other creatures to maintain the goodness of the created order.

B. Use Moderately for the Necessities of Life

Exploring the works of the theologians under consideration, we find teachings encouraging Christians to use God's creation moderately to provide the necessities of life. Augustine reserved the term "use" of God's creation as a means of ensuring that the material needs of temporal life are met while the faithful aim ultimately toward enjoying eternal life. He urged restraint when using them,[38] and told his followers to use God's creation as if they were pilgrims in a foreign land.[39] Augustine taught the appropriate use of God's creation according to the nature of the creature used and argued that all things God created are good and serve useful purposes in the "universal commonwealth," though those purposes may not be obvious to all humans.[40] He taught his followers to value these entities intrinsically for their own positions "in the splendour of the providential order and the contribution they make by their

[26] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1, 47.1.

[27] Saint Augustine, "The Trinity*,"* in *Fathers of the Church,* Vol. 45, trans. Stephen Mckenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 11.5.8, 326-28.

[28] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 11.22. 453-54.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Albertus Magnus, *Man and the Beasts* (*De animalibus, Books 22-26*), trans. James J. Scanlan (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), 65.

[31] Albertus, *Man and the Beasts,* 65.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Albertus Magnus, *De vegitabilibus libri VII,* trans. Clarence J. Glacken (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 314-315.

[34] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 2, 2.66.1-2

[35] Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 3.128-29.

[36] Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 3.121.

[37] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1, 2.19.10.

[38] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God,* 11.22, 453.

[39] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God,* 19.17, 877.

[40] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God,* 11.22, 453.

own special beauty to the whole material scheme of the cosmos."[41] Convinced about the goodness of creation, he warned that anyone who wrongly uses these temporal goods "shall not receive the blessings of eternal life."[42]

In the same vein, Albertus insists that the exercise of restraint over the human body guides the human use of God's creation. He says: "And here no other situation for the cause of the irrational impulse seems more likely than misuse, contrary to the law of God, of the natural goods, which is a characteristic feature of the perverted and unruly desire of the free will, which uses the good in the wrong way."[43] Albert taught that humans use the natural good moderately to avoid excesses of any kind and to fast.[44]

Systematically approaching the use of natural goods by humans, Aquinas stressed that other living and non-living creatures serve humans as sustenance for their bodily lives. However, the prescription that humans are intended to use only what is needed to sustain their lives and not what is desired beyond the necessities of life resounds throughout his works.[45] The necessities of life are things humans need to support their bodies such as "food," "clothing," "transportation," and those things without which they cannot carry on their lives in appropriate ways as they seek eternal happiness with God.[46] Aquinas proscribed the exorbitant use of God's other creatures, describing it as inordinate and wasteful,[47] immoderate,[48] disordered, and vicious.[49]

Thus, when viewed together, these Churchmen urged their followers to use the goods of Earth for the necessities of life, to avoid using them excessively, to use them appropriately according to their natures, and to be conscious of other's needs.

C. Evaluation

It is difficult to deny the fact that in the works of the Patristic and medieval theologians, there are details about the uniqueness of the human being as God's creature placed above all others, and the extent of human authority over other creatures as a sign of God's love for humanity. However, the anthropocentric perspectives in their works that are criticized by present-day theologians and philosophers have not been explored sufficiently from several perspectives, including the contexts of the times in which they lived when compared to our time of ecological degradation. Nor do these criticisms take into consideration the constraint that these early teachings imposed on the human use of Earth's constituents and their teachings about the faithful's responsibility to their neighbours and to God for how they regard and use other creatures.

An examination of the early and medieval writers' creation theology suggests a pattern of behaviour that points to several ways of using God's creation. The faithful will acknowledge the Earth with its diverse constituents as blessings from God. They will reason carefully about how to use God's creation appropriately according to their natures. They will use God's blessings for the necessities of life and share them with others, so they also can meet their needs. In these uses, the faithful will be thankful to God for the many species of land, water, and air that God empowers forth from the cosmological-biological evolutionary process and calls to completion.

The instructions many of the early Fathers gave for using God's blessings transcend time and culture. Their teachings present serious challenges to how too many humans are over-using, over-consuming, and wasting the goods of the Earth today. Thus, listening to the early/medieval Christian theologians, one cannot eagerly accept, as White argues, that Christianity fosters the attitude that human beings transcend the natural world and may exploit it.

4. The Appropriate Relationship Between Humans and The Earth

Taking a holistic view of the Biblical account(s) of creation and guided by the teachings of the early and medieval Christian theologians about the nature, the exercise, and the extent of human authority over God's creation, this concluding section advocates a theology with "liveableness,"[50] given our current ecological crisis. Today climate change due largely to centuries of industrialization often driven by short-sighted greed has damaged and, if unchecked, will continue to destroy earth's ecosystems, threaten global water supplies, and lessen biodiversity as desertification, erosion and waste pollution continue to grow. The accelerated extinction of plant and animal species and the growth in human malnutrition and disease, especially in poorer nations of the world, make theological (and ethical) reflection on nature a necessity. We have an urgent need, like the prophet Jeremiah, for an ecological lament: "Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains, and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, and the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the animals have fled and are gone" (Jeremiah 9:10).

Prompted by this urgent need, some prominent leaders of the world religions have encouraged scholars to examine promising teachings from their traditions. Presenting his 1990 Message on the World Day of Peace entitled "Peace with God, the Creator, Peace with All of Creation," Pope John Paul II underscored the need to recognize the ecological crisis as a moral responsibility. Stressing the urgent need for solidarity, he stated, "No peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity of creation."[51] Many Catholic Bishops' conferences responded,[52]including the United States

[41] Ibid.
[42] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, 19.13, 872.
[43] Albertus Magnus, *Man and the Beasts,* p. 66.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, 2, 2.141.6; 2, 2.64.1, 83.6; see also Summa Contra Gentiles,* 3.22, 121, 129, 131.
[46] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1,2.4.7.
[47] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2, 2.83.6
[48] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2, 2.169.1
[49] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* 4.83.
[50] Cf. Karl Rahner, "A Theology We Can Live With," in *Theological Investigations,* trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 21:100.
[51] John Paul II, "Peace with God, the Creator, Peace with All of Creation," World Day of Peace, 1990, para. 7. https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html.
[52] A composite of statements by the Catholic Bishops developed by Heather R. Whittington is accessible from www.marquette.edu/theology/interfacing.

Conference of Catholic Bishops, which specifically called upon theologians, biblical experts, and ethicists "to help explore, deepen and advance the insight of the Catholic tradition and its relation to the environment."[53]

Following his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the environment as "God's gift" with accompanying responsibility. In his *Caritas in Veritate,* Benedict emphasized that nature is a God-given gift with an inbuilt order, which we must honour. This requires commitment to decisions aimed at strengthening the "covenant between human beings and the environment."[54] Also, in his 2010 World Day of Peace message entitled, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," Benedict gives attention to the earth's ecological problem.[55]

The most extensive Vatican document to date on the environment, ethics, and the Christian faith is Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si.* This document gives a worldwide wake-up call to help humanity understand the destruction that it is rendering to the environment and fellow humans. While addressing the environment directly, its scope is broader in many ways as it looks at not only humanity's effect on the environment, but also the many philosophical, theological, and cultural causes that threaten the relationships of humans to nature. Thus, for a more focused reflection, we proceed to draw upon some ethically significant themes from *Laudato si'* in answer to the question: What ought to be the appropriate relationship between humans and the Earth?

A. Laudato si': An Overview

Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* ("Praised Be") is a message on the environment and ethics meant for all peoples, not just for Catholics or Christians. Although it argues from theological convictions, these are then presented in a common philosophical language more accessible to the intended global audience. *Laudato Si* covers a wide intellectual scope and varied themes in its 40,000 words. Various categories of ethical reasoning are used: natural law, character, human rights, justice, and consequences. Throughout the document, the principles of the common good and the dignity of the human person form the foundation of ethical analysis. However, one of its outstanding ethical features is its focus on the intrinsic value and rights of non-human creatures and ecosystems. Another feature of the document's ethical content is the extent to which it amplifies the notion of the common good. It emphasizes continually that every creature, human and non-human, is connected, and that humanity's moral failure in its engagement with the physical world occurs when this interconnectedness of all creatures is not seen or ignored or forgotten. Arid utilitarianism is a moral reasoning particularly criticized in the encyclical for its association with a technological and economic logic isolated from broader ethical concerns. The following themes from the encyclical are of particular ethical significance: (1) the relationship of science, religion, and ethics, (2) the dangers of the technocratic paradigm, (3) the integral ecology of humankind and the environment, (4) the call to ecological conversion, and (5) the importance of dialogue with business.

1) The Relationship of Science, Religion, and Ethics

Given our current ecological crises and the question of how science, religion, and ethics relate to one another, Francis says: "Any technical solution which science claims to offer will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well."[56] Granted that science can tell what is true from experiment and observation, it cannot tell the significance of that truth, or how such truth determines our response, and why. For instance, science says that the climate of the Earth is warming and that this warming is caused by humans through their production of greenhouse gases (GHG) such as carbon dioxide (CO2). Beyond this discovery, science cannot determine or tell us the moral implications of this warming. To determine its moral value as either good or bad, we need to do a moral evaluation of the meaning of such scientific data, and religion, being a source of morals and a way of discerning the world, can be of help. Also, religion motivates moral action on scientific data. Religion teaches that we are instructed by God to "till and keep" the garden (the Earth), and thus gives us a very strong drive to preserve and utilize the Earth's resources sustainably. Acknowledging this manner of interrelationship between religion, ethics, and science is necessary for entering into dialogue to develop comprehensive solutions to our environmental crisis.[57]

2) The Dangers of the Technocratic Paradigm

The technocratic paradigm today tends to see the totality of reality as a problem to be solved by the application of scientific and technological skills, thus deceiving us into thinking that we can become wise and powerful enough to address all problems.[58] This paradigm tends to take the material world only as raw material (instruments) waiting to be used by humans, rather than a reality with its own intrinsic value and therefore deserves our respect. *Laudato si*' rails against this paradigm for its propensity to distort our view of reality and thus lead us to make both technical and moral mistakes as we interact with the world. Such a paradigm which makes the relationship between human beings and material objects "confrontational"[59] and "dominate economic and political life… with a view to profit"[60] alone should not be confused with science and technology themselves. Rather, it is an abuse or a misuse of science and technology to apply them beyond their appropriate domains,

[53] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington DC: USCCB Publications, 1991), no. 13.

[54] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (On Integral Human Development), June 29, 2009, no. 50.

[55] Benedict XVI, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," World Day of Peace, January 1, 2010. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html.

[56] Francis, *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home), May 24, 2015, no. 200.

[57] Francis, *Laudato Si,' no. 60.*

[58] Francis, *Laudato Si',* no. 105

[59] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 106.

[60] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 109.

making them the totalizing worldview without room for other schools of thought.

3) The Integral Ecology of Humankind and the Environment

Does ethics pertain only to the way we ought to treat human beings, both individually and in groups or institutions? Do we also have duties of justice to the earth itself? Pope Francis accentuates the interrelatedness of all creatures throughout the encyclical letter. Science validates this interrelatedness A theological doctrine of creation (theology of dependence [Genesis 2]) sees a sign of the Creator's wisdom in such interconnectedness. Ethics governs it. The encyclical uses its concept of "integral ecology"[61] to emphasize this interconnectedness, a concept which requires that human beings reflect on the duties of justice in line with three relations: justice to God; justice to human beings (and especially the vulnerable); and justice to the earth itself. There are still other ways the document links ethics and interconnectedness. For example, it tells of the inherent value of all non-human creatures and the ecosystems.[62] It says that the proper understanding of the "environment" never considers it as something apart but is seen always in terms of a relationship between society and nature.[63] It notes that those who are worst hit by the effects of environmental degradation are the poor.[64] Thus, Francis recommends the paradigm of integral ecology as a counter to the technocratic paradigm. His integral ecology is an all-inclusive view of reality seeking to promote not human flourishing alone, but also the thriving of our natural world. Humans are therefore obliged not only to use the goods of the earth responsibly but are also challenged to recognize that [all other creatures] have a value of their own in God's eyes.[65]

4) The Call to Ecological Conversion

It is the basic understanding of *Laudato si'* that our world is threatened by the crisis of climate change. It, therefore, advocates more coordinated global actions to save our planet. It calls for action from successful international negotiations on climate change and courageous policies at all levels of government. But its idea of action goes beyond matters of law and policy alone. The action it advocates starts from the roots, addressing matters of motive (why bother about nature and climate change?) and the capacity to face the current challenges. Thus, Pope Francis calls for new ways of education that would encourage the necessary changes in the most fundamental expectations we all have about what good character means.[66] Too often, Francis says, education on ecology fails to promote a sense of wonder; the possibility of hope; and a conversion in feeling and habit such that we not only "feel the desertification of soil almost as a physical ailment" but also feel the need to commit to healing the wounded earth.[67]

5) The Importance of Dialogue with Business

How is business to be in dialogue with ecological ethics? How is profit maximization to relate with the totality of ecological values that should inform the conduct of business? *Laudato si'* is explicit: "We need a conversation which includes everyone"[68] and business must be one of the principal participants, for no business today can claim to be untouched by the global challenge of climate change. One special challenge is placed before business by the encyclical. On the one hand, Francis unequivocally says that business is, in itself, a "noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world."[69] On the other hand, what gives business nobility and its true sense of value is the blend of the skill to run a business with a genuine commitment to the common good. For Francis, any attempt to respond to the challenge of climate change with market-based solutions alone will fail. Nor will appeal alone to an economic logic that either never or only occasionally integrates the values of ecological ethics.[70] The reality of climate change is a challenge to the common good, and thus, every sector of human activity must be part of the urgently needed dialogue.

In summary, *Laudato si'* amplifies, through the analysis of its various ethical themes, the call for a global commitment to human responsibility for nature. "If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and…our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power."[71] *Laudato si'* is a call to an examination of conscience not only on how one has related with God, with others and with oneself but also about how one has lived in communion with all creatures and with nature.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the meaning of human dominion over the earth from the points of view of biblical scholarship and the early Church Fathers and medieval theologians and reflected on the ethical concerns about planet Earth in *Laudato si.* The common persuasion running through the sections of this study is that human dominion over the earth is not given for uncontrolled exploitation and destruction of nature. Moreover, the literal interpretation of the anthropocentric detail in Genesis 1:28 as the basis for dominion theology is only half the story of the human-earth relationship, leaving out the "theology of dependence" seen in the creation account(s). Our ecological realities today require a more holistic approach to scripture. A theology of creation that the earth can live with calls for commitment to solidarity with humans and the earth's other-kind and to an all-encompassing global common good. For such theology to express a living faith in the Creator requires an asceticism of self-imposed moderation and willingness to sacrifice for the good of all accompanied by moral responsibility for a loving ecojustice. For Albert Einstein, "Our

[61] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 137.
[62] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 84.
[63] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 139.
[64] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 51.
[65] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 69.
[66] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 213.
[67] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 89.
[68] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 14.
[69] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 129.
[70] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 128.
[71] Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 78.

task must be to free ourselves from this prison [of self-interest] by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."[72] To become this free requires surrendering an anthropocentric view of the world and being open to the God of the future, who breathes life into the life-bearing creation. In other words, since one of the main sources of our predicament is simple human greed, a renewed commitment to humility, simplicity and gratitude is a critical path to accepting the natural world as God's gift and treating it accordingly. We need an effective shift in mentality which can lead to adopting *new* lifestyles.

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