

keep (*shamar*) it' (2:15). Following the description of the rivers of Eden (2:10–14), which associate it with Mesopotamia,⁴⁴ where the rivers themselves were not sufficient to make most of the land fertile, Adam's task is probably to irrigate the land in order to sustain the trees God has planted there.⁴⁵ Later he is sent to perform the same task outside Eden: 'to till the ground from which he was taken' (3:23).⁴⁶ The man from the soil must work the soil in order to live from the soil's produce.⁴⁷ We should also note that Noah, a sort of new Adam with whom creation is given a fresh start after the Flood, was also 'a man of the soil' (*'adamah*)' (Gen. 9:20).

Adam's task of tilling the soil is probably much the same as that intended by the command to 'subdue the land' in Genesis 1:28, but here there is a stronger sense of humanity's close relationship with the soil. It seems to be a reciprocal relationship: the soil needs Adam's work and he needs the soil's produce. There is also, in the word 'keep' or 'preserve', the implication that Adam takes care of the soil. He avoids exhausting it. (Several recent studies of the passage have proposed translating *'avad* as 'to serve', either as the sole meaning or as an additional overtones.⁴⁸ But, whereas this verb with a personal object means 'to serve', there is a consistent usage of the verb to mean 'to work' or 'to cultivate' when the object is inanimate (Gen. 3:23; 4:12; Deut. 28:39; Isa. 19:9; cf. Prov. 12:11; 28:19; Zech. 13:5). This is the obvious meaning in Genesis 2.)

Adam has the right to make a living from the soil, but also the duty to care for it. The aspect of stewardship, entailing responsibility as well as right to usufruct, emerges here more clearly than in Genesis 1:28.

UNDERSTANDING GENESIS 2: (3) HUMANS AND OTHER ANIMALS

It is tempting to see in Genesis 2:19–20, in which God brings the newly created animals to Adam for him to name them, another expression of the human dominion over other living creatures that is granted to humans in Genesis 1:26 and 28. But, although the passage has often been read that way, in fact there is no good reason

to see in Adam's naming of the animals an assertion of authority over them.⁴⁹ Rather, he is recognising them as fellow-creatures with whom he shares the world. He cannot, he finds, enjoy with them the very special relationship that is only possible with his fellow-human, 'flesh of his flesh', Eve. But in their own way, in Eden, they are companions of humans.⁵⁰

THE FLOOD AND THE COVENANT

While the Christian tradition has focused on Genesis 3 as recounting the 'fall' of humans from original innocence into sin and its consequences, the Genesis narrative itself appears to envisage something more like a gradual descent into sin, which begins in Genesis 3 and the expulsion from Eden, continues through the story of Cain and his descendants (Gen. 4), and reaches its nadir in the corruption of the Earth in the period preceding the Flood (Gen. 6:1–7 and 11–13). Whereas Genesis 3 roots the fall in the temptation to be like God, the subsequent narratives portray this original sin taking the form of violence (Gen. 4:8 and 23–24; 6:11–13). In fact, it seems that the violence includes the animals too, not only as victims of human violence but as perpetrators of violence against humans and other animals. This appears to be the best way to understand the statement that 'all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the Earth' (6:12), since 'all flesh' in subsequent verses (6:13 and 17; 9:11, 16 and 17) certainly refers to all living things.⁵¹ The account has to be read against the background of the way Genesis 1 portrays humans and animals as originally vegetarian. God gave them only plants for food (Gen. 1:29–30). In view of the change that is recognised after the Flood (Gen. 9:2–3, 5–6), we are probably to understand that the violence that led to the Flood included killing for food.

The harmonious relationships of Eden have broken down. Humans fail to exercise their role of responsible care for living creatures, beginning to kill them for food, and animals take to attacking humans and to predation of other animals. This is evidently envisaged as the consequence of humans filling the Earth (cf. 6:1: 'when people began to multiply ...'). The statement that

'the Earth is filled with violence' (Gen. 6:11) echoes, with a kind of irony, God's command to humans to 'fill the Earth and subdue it' (1:28). Their taking possession of the Earth has actually filled the Earth with violence. Instead of an appropriately limited use of the Earth's resources, humans have over-exploited the Earth, with the result that they engage in violent competition among themselves, they deprive the wild animals of their food, and both humans and animals resort to meat-eating.

The Flood is a kind of de-creation, a reversion to chaos,⁵² though not a complete one. So extreme is the desecration of the Earth by violence that God makes virtually a fresh start. However, there is one man, Noah, who alone (with his family, we should probably presume) 'walked with God', like his great-grandfather Enoch, almost as though he were still in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 6:8–9; cf. 5:24). Because of Noah, God does not have to replace the original creation, but can make a fresh start that is still continuous with the original creation. Noah and his family will survive to populate a purified Earth, and with them they will ensure the survival of the other kinds of living creatures, so that they too may repopulate the Earth (8:17). What has rarely been observed is the relationship of this narrative to the human dominion over the animals. Noah is the epitome of the kind of responsible care for other creatures with which humans had been entrusted by God at creation. This is all the more striking when we realise that the state of violence that led to the Flood was the consequence of the abuse of the dominion by the rest of Noah's generation. While violence had come to dominate the relationships of other humans and animals, Noah, in his conservation of species (as we might call it), modelled the peaceable and caring relationship with animals that had been God's creative ideal.⁵³

The story of the Flood is somewhat disappointing because we expect a fresh start to creation that begins again from Genesis 1–2. Instead, we find a reformulation of God's original charge to humans (Gen. 9:1–7). Violence, it seems, is endemic and can only be limited, not eliminated. Humans will not live peaceably with animals, but will be safe from attack by animals only through

instilling fear into them.⁵⁴ They are permitted to eat meat, though with the proviso that they do not drink the blood of living creatures. Abstaining from the lifeblood is acknowledgement that all life is given and belongs to the Creator. Humans have no dominion over the life of living creatures.⁵⁵ They may not take life at will. Killing for food is a concession granted them by God, which may be exercised only with the recognition that they have no natural right to it. While it is true that the new concession falls below God's original ideal of a vegetarian – and so wholly non-violent – creation, when we see its function as a kind of remedy for the unrestrained violence of the time before the Flood, its function is not to promote but to restrain violence.⁵⁶

In canonical retrospect we can see that God's reformulation of the role of humans in Genesis 9 is a kind of holding operation, restraining violence until the time when something more radical would be done about it. God will not resort to another flood (Gen. 8:21; 9:11–15) because he has in view a better way of rescuing his creation from evil, one that, unlike the Flood, will really enable a realisation of God's original ideal for his creation. For the time being, the covenant he makes is with all living creatures (9:9–10 and 16–17), not just with humans, for it was only within this community of creatures that God had ever envisaged his human creatures living. God continues to care for all his creatures, having the salvation of all in ultimate view.

Robert Murray is right when he explains that, in Genesis 9, mutual relations between creatures here on Earth are now envisaged *as they are*, not as they were idealized in Gen. 1 and 2, or in any other vision of universal peace. The Bible contains, in fact, two models for thinking about humans and animals: one paradisaical, the other this-worldly and realistic.⁵⁷

Not only Genesis 2, but also Genesis 1, portrays an ecotopia,⁵⁸ and it is a serious mistake to relate the world within which we live to Genesis 1, without taking account of Genesis 9. That the Garden of Eden is a paradise lost (for the time being) is generally recognised, but that Genesis 1 also portrays the world not as it is, but as it

ideally should be, is less usually admitted. The fully harmonious whole that God pronounced 'very good' still awaits its realisation. Here and now we must reckon with a world that is much better than it could be (as the world after the Flood was much better than the unrestrictedly violent one before the Flood), but in which some concessions to violence have to be made. They are, as we have seen, strictly limited concessions. How much of our actual production and consumption of meat is really compatible with the carefully conditional concession of Genesis 9:3-4?

On the other hand, the original ideals of creation are not irrelevant, partly because, in the light of the whole biblical narrative, we know that God has not by any means abandoned them. In chapters 4 and 5 we shall discuss the ecotopias the Bible envisages for the future, when the promise of Genesis 1 and 2 will be fulfilled and even surpassed. Especially in the light of the salvation that is already ours in Jesus Christ, we should not opt simply for the realism of Genesis 9 rather than the idealism of Genesis 1—2. Here and now, both are relevant.

STEWARDSHIP AND DOMINION IN ISRAEL'S

LAND LAW

In the Mosaic law we can see that the Torah as a whole does not endorse a simple option for the realism of Genesis 9 rather than the idealism of Genesis 1. Both are reflected. The way that Israel is to live in and from the holy land, by means of agriculture, models the way humans are to fill and to subdue the Earth according to Genesis 1. Very explicitly, Israel is a tenant and steward of the land that belongs to God, with the right to live from the land but also the responsibility to care for it.⁵⁹

This is a large topic, and we must be content with some particularly interesting examples. The laws authorise Israel's use and enhancement of the land, but they also impose strict limits, especially in the form of the sabbatical institutions: the weekly sabbath, the sabbatical year, every seven years, and the jubilee year (the sabbath of sabbaths), every fifty years. These laws are not just about good farming practice,⁶⁰ but about keeping the economic

drive in human life within its place and not letting it dominate the whole of life. They also give Israel occasion to remember that the land is God's, given to them in trust; not a commodity but a gift, and a gift given to the whole community, not to the acquisitive alone.

In Israel's land legislation, both the human right to subdue the Earth and the human dominion over other living creatures are exercised as much in restraint as in active use. Particularly striking is the concern for wild animals. In the sabbatical year, fields, vineyards and orchards are to be left to rest and lie fallow, 'so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat' (Exod. 23:11 NRSV; similarly Lev. 25:7). Thus, even within the cultivated part of the land, wild animals are expected to be able to live. This is an application of the principle we have seen implied in Genesis 1:29-30: that both humans and other land animals have a right to the produce of the Earth and humans, in their production and consumption of food, must recognise that they share the Earth with other species and have no exclusive right to its resources.

This provision for the wild animals to live even where Israelites farmed the land could be seen as a kind of symbol of respect for wilderness, reminding both ancient Israel and later readers of Scripture that dominion includes letting wild nature be itself. There is value that should be respected and preserved in the wild as well as in the humanly cultivated.

The time has come to attempt a synthesis of what we have learned about the human place in creation, according to Genesis 1 and its interpretation elsewhere in the Pentateuch, with a view to its contemporary significance for God's people today.

SYNTHESIS: (1) HUMAN SOLIDARITY WITH THE REST OF CREATION

While the Genesis creation narratives do distinguish humans from other creatures, giving them a unique place within creation, they also place humans unambiguously within creation. Humans are not demi-gods with creative power, set like God above creation,

but creatures among other creatures, dependent, like other creatures, on the material world of which they are part, and immersed in a web of reciprocal relationships with other creatures. The unique tasks and roles of humans, given them in Genesis 1:26 and 28, are bound to be misunderstood and abused unless the fundamental solidarity of humans with the rest of creation is recognised as their context.

SYNTHESIS: (2) RESPONSIBLE USE OF THE EARTH'S RESOURCES

All living creatures need to make use of other creatures, animate or inanimate, in order to live and to flourish. Humanity is different only in the extent, diversity and ingenuity of its use of other creatures. Since, properly speaking, all creation belongs to God its Creator and to God alone, creatures can make use of other creatures only by divine permission. The creation narrative in Genesis 1 makes this explicit when God declares that he has *given* every green plant for food to all the animals that live on land (1:30). The task of subduing the Earth that God grants humans is, primarily, the human equivalent. However, for humans, this task can be understood as stewardship in the sense of responsible care for the Earth that God himself still owns and has entrusted to humans for their sustenance and delight. Adam's farming of the Earth in Eden included preserving it, and Israel's use of the land was limited so that it would not be exhausted.

Contemporary, environmentally sensitive interpreters of Genesis tend to gloss over the human right to use the resources of creation. But this is a serious mistake. Human use of the Earth and its creatures is part of the fundamental interdependence of the whole creation. It is a necessary feature of human life and accounts for much human activity. Contemporary interpreters are rightly wary of justifying the unrestricted exploitation of the Earth and its creatures which has had such disastrous results in the twentieth century, and which was justified in the past by use of these texts in Genesis 1. But it is better to stress how the Bible limits human use of other creatures than to eliminate this theme from the text

altogether. God's original purpose for humanity does entitle us to make limited use of other creatures for human life and flourishing. As Stephen Clark puts it: 'we are allowed our modest use of parts of nature explicitly upon condition that we leave it at peace, that we not take all of it.'⁶¹

I have distinguished, in Genesis 1:26 and 28, the subduing of the Earth from the dominion over other living creatures. The latter would seem to be a matter of caring responsibility, rather than use. Are humans therefore not given by God the right to use other living creatures in any way? With regard to eating meat, there is clearly a change between the original mandate and its reformulation after the Flood (Gen. 9:3), although, as we have seen, the right to kill for food is a concession and one that has restrictive conditions attached to it. But animals were useful to humans in the Old Testament period in ways that do not entail killing: donkeys, camels and horses for transport, oxen for ploughing and grinding, sheep for wool, dogs as watch dogs, sea shells for ornament, the skins, horns and feathers of animals that die naturally for clothing, tools, and so forth. Genesis does portray at least some of such uses before the Flood (Gen. 4:2-4 and 20-21; cf. 3:21), and it is notable that in Genesis 1:24-25 domestic animals are already distinguished from wild animals at the time of their creation, as though the role of domestic animals in human society was God's intention from the beginning.⁶² Whether we see the human right to use other living creatures for their own life and flourishing as part of the task of subduing the Earth (does the agriculture envisaged in Genesis 1:28 include roles for domestic animals, such as oxen?) or as an aspect of the dominion over other living creatures, may not be very important. In some respects, the two categories converge. But we should bear in mind that Genesis does often distinguish animate from inanimate nature, and that distinction should surely be observed in the ways we make use of other creatures. We should recall also that the use of other living creatures is not itself something unique to humans; many other living creatures do it. The distinctively human task is to keep that use within a larger role of caring responsibility for other creatures.

SYNTHESIS: (3) IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

In Genesis 1, God marks out humanity from other living creatures by creating them in his own image and by granting them dominion over others. What it means to be made in the image of God has been much debated by exegetes and theologians.⁶³ Attempts to draw a hard distinction between human nature and animals have often been hung on this text, but scientific research makes it increasingly difficult to identify any absolute difference.⁶⁴ In the text itself the image of God is closely related to the dominion over other creatures, and this is the best clue to its meaning. The image must be whatever it is that gives us power unlike that of any other creatures. But the image must also be whatever it is about humans that makes it possible for us to exercise that power in a responsible and caring way. We do not need to say that we are the only creatures with moral values⁶⁵ or that we are the only creatures conscious of God.⁶⁶ The point is that we have that *kind* of awareness of God and that *kind* of moral sense that enable us to feel and to exercise responsibility in creation on such a large scale. It cannot be that other creatures in no way reflect their Creator, but that we have a particularly broad participation in God's governance of creation and need therefore also to reflect God's care for his whole creation on this Earth.

The close relationship between the image of God and the dominion means that the latter is an exercise of rule *on behalf of* God, not *instead of* God. Only humanity in relationship with God, knowing its own dependence on God, can exercise dominion as God's image.⁶⁷ Conversely, humanity's inveterate aspiration to replace God, to be gods, has been expressed, especially in the modern period, through domination of nature. By the project of total control of the natural world, modern humans have sought the means of making themselves gods, subject to none, supreme over all. Christians have been surprisingly slow to appreciate the connection between the modern world's rejection of God and the ecologically disastrous modern project of technological conquest of nature. That humans are made in the image of God, to exercise

dominion on God's behalf, not in God's stead, is one important theological antidote to this modern mistake.

SYNTHESIS: (4) RULING LIKE GOD

Many interpreters have rightly seen in Genesis 1:26 the implication that the human dominion is some sort of reflection of God's rule, and therefore that in some sense the Bible's portrayal of God's rule should be the model for humanity's.⁶⁸ Reflecting it must surely begin with learning to value it in the ways God does. Then we can appreciate that God rules for the good of all his creatures. It is his compassionate and salvific care for all creatures. For example, Psalm 145 recalls the classic biblical statement of the character of God (from Exod. 34:6) and uses it to characterise God's rule, not only over humanity, but over all creatures:

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made. (Ps. 145:8–9
NRSV)

This kind of rule is surely what the human dominion is intended by God to be: a form of caring responsibility for God's creatures.

However, because modern humanity has been so prone to forget this, we should add that human dominion is *unlike* God's rule in very significant other respects: it is restricted, it is exercised within rather than over creation, it may not aspire to divine omnipotence, and, perhaps above all, it is exercised in relation to fellow-creatures.

SYNTHESIS: (5) RULING FELLOW-CREATURES – HIERARCHY QUALIFIED BY COMMUNITY

As we have seen, our creatureliness is more fundamental than our distinctiveness among creatures. Our creation in the image of God and the unique dominion given to us do not abolish our fundamental community with other creatures. The vertical does not cancel the horizontal.

Indeed, the horizontal relationship with fellow-creatures is vital to the proper understanding of the vertical relationship of authority over others. Since Genesis 1 presents this authority as a kind of kingly rule, it is relevant to recall the only kind of human rule over other humans that the Old Testament approves. The book of Deuteronomy permits Israel to have a king, but interprets this kingship in a way designed to subvert all ordinary notions of rule (17:14–20). If Israel must have a king, then the king must be a brother. He is a brother set over his brothers and sisters, but still a brother, and forbidden any of the ways in which rulers exalt themselves over and entrench their power over their subjects. His rule becomes tyranny the moment he forgets that the horizontal relationship of brother/sisterhood is primary, kingship secondary.⁶⁹ Similarly, the human rule over other creatures will be tyrannous unless it is placed in the context of our more fundamental community with other creatures.

SYNTHESIS: (6) RULING WITHIN THE ORDER OF CREATION – SHARING THE EARTH

Genesis 1 presents a picture of a carefully ordered creation. The order is already established before the creation of humans. It does not need humans to put it in order. The human dominion is not granted so that humans may violate the already given order of creation and remake creation to their own design. It is taken for granted that the God-given order of the world must be respected by the human exercise of limited dominion within it.

We have observed how Genesis 1:29–30 implies that human use of the Earth is not to compete with its use by other living creatures. They also have a right of use. This is a massive restriction of human rights to the Earth's resources and chimes well with contemporary concerns. A similar point is made in Genesis 9:8–17, where God's covenant is made not only with Noah and his descendants but also with 'every living creature of all flesh' (v 15). It is for the sake of them all that God promises never again to destroy the Earth in a universal deluge. The Earth is home for them all and they all have a stake in that covenant. Even within the

sphere of human agriculture Israel's land laws recognise that some provision for wild creatures must be left.

SYNTHESIS: (7) PRESERVING CREATION

Ruling – understood as caring responsibility for – other creatures can include saving them from destruction. If biblical warrant for saving species from extinction is required, surely it is in the story of Noah and the Flood. But we should also note, with Rowan Williams, that 'the story is clearly about how the saving of the human future is inseparable from securing a future for *all* living things'.⁷⁰ That it was so important to save other living creatures along with humanity testifies to the interconnectedness and interdependence of the creation of which humans are a part.

SUMMARY

Does God's mandate to humans at creation encourage us to become controllers and managers of the whole of creation on this planet? No. It ascribes to God's gift the unique degree of power within creation that realistically our species has, and we should neither underestimate nor exaggerate that if we are to exercise it responsibly, as the mandate requires.

Granted our limited place within the God-given order of creation, the power we do have is to be exercised with loving care for the rest of creation. Our right to use the Earth's resources for human life and flourishing is strictly limited by the responsibility to conserve and by the rights of the other living creatures who share the Earth with us.

A role of caring responsibility for other living creatures, our 'dominion', is not a role that sets us above creation but a specific role that humans have within creation. It is rightly practised only when we recognise it to be dominion over fellow-creatures.

There are indications in the Torah that we should not consider the special human role within creation only in terms of intervention and change, but also in terms of restraint and letting be.

The human relationship to the rest of creation, as intended by God according to the biblical material we have studied in this

chapter, cannot be easily summed up by a single term such as stewardship. It includes, most fundamentally and profoundly, being one creature among others. It requires at every point respect for the God-given order of creation. It is differentiated – entailing a major difference in how humans relate to living creatures and to inanimate nature. It includes a limited right to use of the Earth's resources for human life and flourishing. It calls for a caring responsibility for other creatures that reflects but does not usurp God's own care for his creation.

HUMAN ENHANCEMENT OF CREATION

I have left this topic until the last section of this chapter because the necessary discussion arises less directly out of exegesis than other issues we have discussed in this chapter. Interpretations of the Genesis dominion have traditionally given much prominence to human culture – in the broad sense of what humans make out of nature by transforming it into something humanly made. The most obvious example within Genesis, which we have discussed, is agriculture. It is clear that when Adam tills the soil he is collaborating with nature to make out of it what it would not make of itself without him. Without Adam's irrigation the fruit trees in the Garden of Eden would not grow. This is a kind of human enhancement of creation, and it is evidently a role that God intended within the order of creation. Often it has been regarded as 'improvement' of wild nature,⁷¹ but, as we shall see, 'enhancement' is a better term.

Genesis 4:17–22 narrates the origins of other human cultural practices: building cities, making musical instruments, and forging metal tools, including weapons.⁷² These are celebrated, but at the same time ambiguous;⁷³ they occur among the descendants of Cain, not in the line of Seth, while the invention of metal weapons enables Lamech's excess of violent revenge (4:23–24). In view of the importance of the escalation of violence in the Genesis account of early humanity, we must take very seriously the fact that the story of the origins of culture ends on this note, but it does

not mean that culture itself is denigrated. Rather its potential for evil as well as good is highlighted. It is all too easily abused.

By 'enhancement' of creation I mean what humans do when they modify nature in ways that are not destructive but productive. This can be done in largely non-intrusive ways, as, for example, in art. In all kinds of art, humans make something different of nature from what it is purely in itself. We do not in the process replace nature in itself but add something else to it. A landscape painting does not replace the landscape itself, nor does it devalue the landscape itself, as though the landscape had no value until Constable painted it, but the painting does add something of fresh and different value. It is not a matter of benefiting other creatures, but it adds something to the created world. In that sense, it is an enhancement of creation. 'Improvement' would not be the right word, because it is not implied that the value of the landscape is increased by the painting. The painting is something, indebted to the landscape, that humans have added to the sum of value in creation.

A more, but still only gently intrusive example, with which most environmentalists have no problem, is gardening. A garden is a humanly modified version of nature. Few of us now feel, as the seventeenth-century pioneers of stewardship ideas did, that gardens are much preferable to wild nature. We value wild nature for itself, while also enjoying gardens as having different value. This is an example of a principle we can apply also to much more radically transforming things that humans do with nature: building homes and cities, crafting and manufacturing goods. Of course, the greater the extent to which the natural creation is transformed by these human creations the greater the danger that they will prove destructive of nature. Such remaking of nature without proper regard for the integrity and order of creation is not enhancement but loss.

The key is to add but not to replace. Humanly modified nature is not better, but different. We are not improving nature, but we are fashioning something with fresh value. Can wild nature not look after itself perfectly well without our intervention? Yes, of course,

it can. Is not our intervention destructive? Yes, very often, and especially in the modern period it has been. But can we not add value to wild nature? Yes, if we enhance while also letting be.

Chapter 2

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PUTTING US IN OUR PLACE

A major concern of this book is for us to recognise that there is much more to the Bible's understanding of the relation between humans and the rest of creation than the mandate of human dominion given us in Genesis 1. One reason it is important to seek out the other biblical perspectives on the matter is that, in the modern history of the West, the idea of human dominion has been the ideological justification of human domination and exploitation of nature. It has been associated with the dangerous modern human aspiration to godlike and creative power over the world. Under the banner of human dominion we have thought ourselves liberated from any given place within the order of God's creation. The modern culture of materialistic excess has developed in the context of a notion of dominion as an unrestricted right of masters and owners to exploit all the resources of creation.

To counter such hubris and excess, strong medicine is needed. Careful exposition of dominion as responsible stewardship may not be enough. We need to rediscover those biblical accounts of the human place in creation that are completely unconcerned with dominion and that do not set humans above other creatures. The point is not to replace an exclusive focus on Genesis 1 with an exclusive focus on these other passages, but to learn from the full range of biblical perspectives on the matter. To break the habit of gross misuse of the idea of dominion, we need the perspectives that counter-balance this idea with others. Before we can adequately reconceive the dominion as a distinctive role within the created order, we need to be put back within the created order. No part of Scripture does this more firmly and effectively than the