

## CREATION AND KENOSIS

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### **Introduction**

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution brought to full fruition, a tension between two views of the world. This tension first appeared in the pre-Socratic philosophers but has been especially acute since the advent of modern science. Morris Goldman describes these two viewpoints as follows:

The religious outlook is characterized by a view of man as a transcendental creature who has, inherently, duties and privileges that extend beyond what is applicable to the rest of nature. Furthermore . . . is the concept that there exists a God who . . . controls and directs the natural world . . . .

The secular view denies both these propositions. . . . [I]t sees man as one animal species among millions of others, with no inherently special privileges beyond what it makes for itself by virtue of its unique mental capabilities. There is no supernatural God."<sup>1</sup>

The theocentric half of this opposing pair of ideas has been a key principle in not only Christianity, but also in the Jewish and Moslem faiths. Thus, Kenneth Cragg notes that the underlying belief in Christian, Jewish, and the Moslem faiths, is the "concept of man as the

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<sup>1</sup>Morris Goldman, "Man's Place in Nature," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 10 (1968): 100.

proper imperialist, the dominion-holder in the earth.” Man is seen “as the vicegerent set over the things under God.”<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the relationship of man to nature in patristic Christian thought was significantly influenced by Greek philosophy, as exemplified by this quotation from Aristotle in his *Politics* (I:3). Aristotle asserts that it is nature’s order,

that the plants exist for the sake of animals and the other animals for the good of man, the domestic species both for his service and for his food, and . . . most of the wild ones for the sake of his food and of his supplies of other kinds, in order that they may furnish him both with clothing and with other appliances. If therefore nature makes nothing without purpose or in vain, it follows that nature has made all the animals for the sake of men.<sup>3</sup>

The patristic Fathers welded such statements to the idea of human dominion found in Gen 1:26, resulting in an informal imperialist theology of man’s relationship to nature.<sup>4</sup> Thus, from the early church fathers<sup>5</sup> onward past the Reformers,<sup>6</sup> there was a tendency to depict

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Cragg, *The Privilege of Man: A Theme in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity* (London: University of London/Athlone Press, 1968), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Aristotle, *Aristotle in Twenty Three Volumes: XXI, Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Gould, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 37. For further information on the influence of Greek philosophy on early Christian theology, see, Robert Reneham, “The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 85 (1981): 248-51; Robin Attfield, “Christian Attitudes to Nature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44.3 (1983): 371;

<sup>4</sup>For more on the church fathers and their theology of nature, see, Gillian Clark, “The Fathers and the Animals: The Rule of Reason?” in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press (Illini Books), 1998), 67-79.

<sup>5</sup>For a sampling of various early to medieval Christian thinkers on human dominion see: St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, trans. Henry Austin Wilson. (Manassas, VA: Eternal Word Television Network, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PATRISTIC/PII5-13.txt>, 1996), 1, 5-6; St. Basil, *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Sister Agnes Claire Way, The

human dominion over nature by employing domineering, sometimes exploitative rhetoric.<sup>7</sup>

While many promoted the idea that there were God-ordained limits to human dominion over

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Fathers of the Church, vol. 46 (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1963), 84, 118-119. See also Homily 9, p. 138, where again animals are inferior to man because they lack reason; St. Ambrose, *Seven Exegetical Works*, trans. Michael P. McHugh, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 65 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1971), 97; Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, vol. 2, trans. William Watts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912. Reprint 1988), 377-79, 435, 437; Idem., *St. Augustine The Literal Meaning of Genesis (De Genesi ad Litteram)*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, S.J., Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, vol 41, eds. Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, Thomas Comerford Lawler (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 192-93 (Section vi 12.); *Confessions*, 431; "On Free Will," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. John H. S. Burleigh, Library of Christian Classics, vol. VI (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1953), 138, 143. See also Editor's introduction and analysis on p.109; Idem., *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. George E McCracken, The Loeb Classical Library, vol 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 93; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols., trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1:375-376, (Internal referencing, I:76:3). See also Aquinas, 1:465,469 (I:91, 93:2), 1:486 (I:96:1), and 2:1466 (II-II:64:1).

<sup>6</sup>For statements on man and nature by the Reformers, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis - Chapters 1-5*, 54 vols, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Edited by Helmut T. Lehman (Saint Luis, MO: Concordia, 1955), 1:56-57, 66-67; 2:58-59, 132-133; 9:248; 15:50. For statements of Calvin on man's relation to animals and nature see, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. John Allen (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 1:206, 208; Jean [John] Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, vol.1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 96; Jean [John] Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David*, vol. 1, trans. unnamed (Oxford: Printed by D. A. Talboys for Thomas Tegg, London: 1860), 71-75.

<sup>7</sup>D. S. Wallace-Hadril, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc. 1968), 75. Wallace-Hadril summarizes this influence, declaring that for most of the early church fathers, man's erect posture and rational ability allows him to transcend the material world and look to heaven. Rationality was viewed as a reflection or image of divinity

nature, the overall tenor touted the sovereignty of mankind in highly robust terms.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Influence of Francis Bacon**

It was shortly after the deaths of Luther and Calvin that three forces began to assert a powerful influence on Christian interpretations of man's dominion of nature: The new technological prowess of the Industrial Revolution, the mechanistic-secularized view of nature emerging from the Renaissance, and the rise of a capitalist economic system.<sup>9</sup> The newfound technological prowess meant that once empty rhetoric now had real-world force. This technological potency was united with a secularized view of the natural world, and this union diminished the sense of divine limitations on human dominion over nature.

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<sup>8</sup>For some Scholarly Discussion of this history, see: H. Paul Santmire, "St. Augustine's Theology of the Biophysical World," *Dialog* 19 (1980): 181; Linzey, "Introduction: Is Christianity Irredeemably Speciesist?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, Illini Books, 1998), xii-xiii; Ian McHarg, "The Place of Nature in the City of Man," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. 1973), 174-175; Dorothy Yamamoto, "Aquinas and Animals: Patrolling the Boundary?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press (Illini Books), 1998), 80, 85; William French, "Beast Machines and the Technocratic Reduction of Life: A Creation-Centered Perspective," in *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches for Animal Well-Being*, eds. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 38. The portions of Aquinas cited by French can be found in, Aquinas, 1:60, 325, 365; 370-72; Attfield, 379-80; Ickert, Scott, "Luther and Animals: Subject to Adam's Fall?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press (Illini Books), 1998), 90.

<sup>9</sup>David Livingstone, "The Historical Roots of our Eschatological Crisis: A Reassessment," *Fides Historia* 26 (1994): 43-45; Jeremy Cohen, "The Bible, Man, and Nature in the History of Western Thought: A Call for Reassessment," *Journal of Religion* 65 (1985): 156.

Francis Bacon distilled this cocktail of influences into a systematic philosophy of exploiting nature for human advancement. He associated his new, scientific approach to nature, not with scripture, but with the Greeks.<sup>10</sup> Being familiar with Scripture, however, he articulated the dominion lost through Adam's fall in terms of a Greek view of human imperialist power over nature. Bacon thus called for the use of science to help humanity to regain some of that lost dominion,<sup>11</sup> exhorting, “only let mankind regain their rights over nature, assigned to them by the gift of God, and obtain that power, whose exercise will be governed by right reason and true religion.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Theological Impact of Bacon**

Bacon’s work is recognized as the pivotal point where the secularized view of nature reached its critical mass in terms of becoming the dominant viewpoint.

Carolyn Merchant insightfully opines that Bacon, “whose science legitimized the domination of nature . . . fashioned a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature.”<sup>13</sup>

William Leis likewise concludes that:

Bacon’s great achievement was to formulate the concept of human mastery over nature much more clearly than had been done previously and to

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<sup>10</sup>Sir Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning; Novum Organum; New Atlantis*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Great Books of the Western World, vol 30 (Chicago, IL: William Benton, 1952), 117. This is from *Novum*, Aphorism 71.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 135 (*Novum*, Aphorism 129). Emphasis supplied.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 135 (*Novum*, Aphorism 129). Emphasis supplied.

<sup>13</sup>Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1980), 169-170.

assign it a prominent place among men's concerns. . . . [I]t was wedded to the predominant cultural force of the time, namely, Christianity.

In Bacon's view religion and science were engaged in a mutual effort to compensate for the damage incurred as a result of the expulsion from Paradise.<sup>14</sup>

Bacon's ideas appear to have entered into the mainstream Christian thinking of his era without critical evaluation or solid biblical study. Thus, an imperialist view of human dominion, now believed to be sanctioned by the Genesis text, became the cultural norm for the industrial revolution and onward.

This Baconian iteration of Christian thought, with its ensuing legacy, is the view that led to Lynn White, Jr.'s landmark article in 1967.<sup>15</sup> White charged that the ecological crisis

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<sup>14</sup>William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: George Braziller, 1972), 48-49. Emphasis supplied.

<sup>15</sup>Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967):1203-1207; reprint, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1973), 18-30. In a similar vein to Lynn White, Jr., animal theologian Andrew Linzey intensifies these charges saying that, "Mainstream Christianity still propagates a range of ideas about animals which are hugely detrimental to their status and welfare. Animals are "here for our use", indeed, "made for us." Animals have no immortal soul, no rationality, no intrinsic worth. Animals are subordinate to humankind, who have be given 'dominion' (commonly understood as despotism) over them. How far these ideas are distinctly and authentically Christian is beside the point; the fact is that the Christian tradition has propagated them – and still defends them.

"Indeed, those who wish to justify the exploitation of animals regard the Christian tradition as the last bastion of the anti-progressive sentiment. . . . Ethical sensitivity, it was supposed, constitutes nothing less than a rejection of Christian Values: It seems increasingly part of a *post-Christian* ethic, however to nourish the belief that animals possess dignity, personality and spirit that entitle their interests to be considered in the same fashion as the rest of us." See, Andrew Linzey, "Introduction: Is Christianity Irredeemably Speciesist?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press (Illini Books), 1998), xi-xii.

he saw in the 1960s was a result of the influence of Christianity. As Leonard Greenspoon notes, "among White's arsenal of assault weapons on the West was the Bible, in particular its dangerous misreading on the part of translators and interpreters."<sup>16</sup>

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson distills White's accusations against Christianity into four specific charges, of which we shall note two: First, that Genesis 1:28 "sets humanity apart from nature and directs humanity to conquer and exploit it." Thus humans are viewed as "divinely appointed . . . to place nature firmly under its subjugation." Second, "Christian values in the Middle Ages encouraged the development of modern technology, which flourished under a doctrine of humanity's transcendence over nature. These two new forces – science and technology – then merged together with the blessing of Christianity, giving humanity unprecedented and uncontrolled power over nature."<sup>17</sup>

While it is understandable how the imperialist interpretation of human dominion in Gen 1 arose, I would contend that if we read Genesis on its own terms, without imposing the ideas of Greek philosophy and secularist imperialism into the biblical text, that such an overbearing view of human dominion cannot be found in the biblical passage. Let us turn now to Genesis and briefly examine the text.

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<sup>16</sup>Leonard Greenspoon, "From Dominion to Stewardship? The Ecology of Biblical Translation." *Journal of Religion and Society*, Supplement Series 3, Religion and the Environment, ed. Ronald A. Simpkins, 2008, 159.

<sup>17</sup>Granberg-Michaelson, 30-32.

### Dominion in Genesis

We start with Gen 1:26 and the phrase, "let them have dominion." In this verse, God uses a cohortative form of the verb  $\text{רָדָה}$  (*radah*) thus granting dominion or rulership over nature to man on the basis of divine volition. Additionally, in Gen 1:28, God uses a series of imperatives that define man's relation to the natural world. The first four command actions in relation to the earth: be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue ( $\text{כָּבַשׁ}$ -*kabāš*) it. The fifth imperative commands man to rule over ( $\text{רָדָה}$ -*radah*) the creatures in the sea, sky and earth. How should we understand these divine commissions?

Commenting on Gen 1:28, Greenspoon notes that "critical scholars have, for well over a century, divided the first chapters of Genesis into a Priestly account (Gen 1:1-2:4a), and a Yahwist account (Gen 2:4b-3:24). Among the demonstrable differences in these accounts could well be an emphasis on dominion here [Gen 1:28] 'versus' a more caring concern on the part of humans in Gen 2:15."<sup>18</sup> It appears to me that due to the presuppositions of higher criticism, the apparent differences between the stories are, to a great degree, understood as *de facto* contradictory, thus rendering looking for harmonious elements out of the question. With Gen 2:15 rendered irrelevant to understanding Gen 1, it becomes easier to read an imperialist view into Gen 1. Thus, Greenspoon asserts that "the verbs . . . subdue, have dominion, and rule over . . . would have been understood in the light of the absolute monarchs of antiquity."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Greenspoon, 162.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

By contrast, the Seventh-day Adventist church advocates the teaching of Peter and Paul that the Scriptures are inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16-17), and are a product of the Holy Spirit moving on human agents which produced a propositionally authoritative message (2 Pet 1:16-21). Those holding to Paul and Peter's view of Scriptural authority would also presume that the God who changes not (Mal 3:6), and who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8), would inspire consistent theological themes throughout the duration of His revelatory activity. Thus, we would expect to find a much higher degree of theological unity between Gen 1 and 2 than would the critical scholars. If we attempt to read the text on its own terms, without infusing a foreign philosophy into the text, what do we actually find?

### **Defining Dominion (רָדָה-*radah*) in Genesis 1**

Since Gen 1 provides little on the nature of human dominion, a simple survey of the uses of רָדָה-*radah* in the Old Testament is in order. Aside from the uses רָדָה-*radah* in Gen 1:26 and 28, the next uses of this term are found in Lev 25. Hebrew citizens who acquired fellow Hebrews as slaves were not to rule (רָדָה) harshly over these slaves but were to treat them as hired servants. What this shows is that רָדָה-*radah* does not automatically entail a domineering or tyrannical flavor. One can also rule (רָדָה-*radah*) without harshness, and here such is commanded, at least for a limited situation. Fellow Israelites, delivered from slavery in Egypt, were not to be treated as if they were still in Egyptian-style slavery. Since these Levitical uses of רָדָה-*radah* are the first occurrences after Gen 1 in the order of the canonical text, the reader might be tempted to see an echo of Gen 1 in Lev 25, thus implying that Adam and Eve, as fellow creations of God, were expected to exercise dominion in the

light of being fellow creatures instead of ruling as harsh and aloof overlords.

In addition to Lev 25, we find an interesting theology of rulership in Psa 72 which turns, in part, on the vocabulary of *רָדָה*-*radah*. This psalm is a prayer of Solomon asking for God's justice and blessing on his kingship as a "royal son." *רָדָה*-*radah* appears in verse 8: "May he have dominion (*רָדָה*-*radah*) from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!"<sup>20</sup> Notice, however, how this dominion is described in verses 12-14: "For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight." These verses reiterate what was said earlier in verses 2 and 4: "May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!" and, "May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!" Additionally, in verse 6 he prays, "May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!"

Solomon's divinely-inspired vision of rulership over his kingdom seems less rooted in contemporary concepts of imperialist power. Rather, his vision of royal rule appears to be grounded in the concept of serving, nurturing and protecting his subjects, especially those who were weak and vulnerable to exploitation by those stronger than themselves. With this being the case, it hardly makes sense to assert that Solomon understood his rulership over Israel in terms of absolute, exploitative, dominionist power. This suggests that since God

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<sup>20</sup>All Bible quotations are from the "The Holy Bible, English Standard Version," Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001, unless noted otherwise..

related with Israel on the basis of propositional revelations in history, the nation of Israel saw the ideal for kingly power differently than the surrounding nations who had no such revelations of God. The fact that some kings did not pursue this policy does not invalidate this ideal was known and recognized in Israel. Solomon certainly knew of it.

That this ideal for leadership was well known in Israel is further evidenced by Ezekiel's rebuke of the shepherds of Israel who used their power to exploit the sheep, feeding themselves instead of feeding the sheep (Ezek 34:1-4). In fact, instead of feeding the sheep, the shepherds ate the sheep to feed themselves (vs 3)! The prophet indicts them, saying, "The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled (רָדָה-*radah*) them" (vs 4). Assumably, their rule (רָדָה-*radah*) should have been like that of the Psa 72 king but was, instead, the polar opposite, more akin to the egoistical views of kingly power found in the surrounding gentile nations. This idealized vision of rulership seen in Ezekiel and in the Psalms suggests an alternate option for understanding the nature of the dominion given to man in Gen 1:26 and 28, name one more akin to the ideal of rulership in Psa 72. In this light, Gen 2 suddenly seems far less contradictory to Gen 1 than many assume.

### **Man and Nature in Genesis 2**

Gen 2:15 states that God put man in the garden to serve (עָבַד-*abad*) and protect (שָׁמַר-*šamar*) it. I conducted a representative survey of the use of each word in the Old Testament and found no uses implying a role of dominance with either word. As Helmer Ringgren

notes, with personal objects, the verb עָבַד-*abad* connotes service, especially in the sense of serving a superior. With inanimate objects, it means to work on, develop, cultivate, especially in the context of farming. Thus, Ringgren notes that, "after Adam is no longer allowed to work (till; '*abad*) and keep (*šmr*) the garden (Gen 2:15) he must till the ground with great effort (3:23). The curse against Cain is that when he tills the ground, it will no longer yield its fruit to him (4:12). The expression '*obēd* <sup>n</sup>*dāmā* means farmer (4:2, the opposite of being a shepherd)."<sup>21</sup> Farmers cannot afford to exploit and deplete the ground. They must build it up with composts, fertilizers, minerals and the like to get a good crop. Far from exploiting and domineering it, they must serve and care for the ground they till.

שָׂמַר-*šamar* is even more emphatically non-domineering in meaning. A representative survey of the Old Testament shows this word is closely associated with guarding and protecting something of value. Angels are posted to guard the tree of life, preventing access to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:24). Cain exhibits great irony after murdering Abel by offering this retort to God's question concerning Abel's whereabouts: "Am I my brother's protector" (Gen 4:9)?<sup>22</sup> Shepherds protect or watch sheep (Gen 30:31; 1 Sam 17:20). In Jacob's dream with the heavenly ladder, God promises to guard Jacob, who makes a vow based on that promised protection (Gen 28:15, 20).

In a slightly different nuance, Abraham is called to keep (שָׂמַר-*šamar*) the covenant

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<sup>21</sup>Helmer Ringgren, "עָבַד," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol 10, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 381-384.

<sup>22</sup>My translation.

with God (Gen 17:9). The idea is that Abraham must watch carefully this most important relationship—being in covenant with God—and protect it from whatever might interfere with it or destroy it. שָׁמַר-*šamar* thus seems to connote the idea of carefully watching over and protecting something or someone of value. As F. Garcia Lopez notes, “In its literal sense, *šmr* denotes the guarding or watching of persons, animals, or objects. . . . one can often recognize in the usage of *šmr* the way of life and specific occupations of a particular society — in the goods or values that are to be guarded or watched. . . . Every organized society ultimately creates a defensive system to protect what it values.”<sup>23</sup> Thus Adam and Eve were to protect the Garden as something of value, hence needing protection, and not as some kind of disposable resource to be exploited.

We see then, that the usage of both עָבַד-*abad* and שָׁמַר-*šamar* do not give any basis for arguing that Gen 2:15 is supportive of an imperialist, domineering rule over nature by mankind. In this aspect, the higher critics are right: Gen 2:15 indeed envisions man as the nurturer and protector of nature. As such, Gen 2:15 harmonizes well with the ideal of rulership found in Psa 72 and Ezek 34.

This theological unity should not be surprising to one who accepts the inspiration of Scripture. Thus, the fact we find regal dominion harmoniously united with serving, nurturing leadership in Psa 72 and Ezek 34, suggests that we should expect to find an equally analogous view in Gen 1 and 2 as all these texts were inspired by the same, unchanging God.

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<sup>23</sup>F. Garcia Lopez, "שָׁמַר," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol 15, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 288.

Gen 2 thus informs the reader about the nature of the dominion God intended mankind to exercise just as Psa 72:12-14 explains, in part the regal dominion of verse 8. It would make sense, then, that in Gen 1, part of being made in God's image would be to implement a style of leadership reflecting the divine ideal. This ideal for exercising dominion was demonstrated by God in the Kenosis of Christ.

### **Kenotic Dominion**

For Paul, the divine example is most poignantly and potently revealed in the incarnation, as expressed in his famous hymn of *Kenosis*: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8, ESV). It is common knowledge that there are many scholars who agree that this grand text opens with a statement of the full deity of Christ, declaring him to be in very nature God. As one who was fully God, the pre-incarnate Christ had all the rights, privileges and prerogatives of sovereign deity. We note that Paul opens the hymn with a statement of Christ's regal dominion and power. But what follows?

Michael J. Gorman asserts that we should understand Paul's kenotic passage as follows: "Although the messiah Jesus was in the form of God, a status people assume means the exercise of power, he acted *in* character — in a shockingly ungodlike manner according to normal but misguided human perceptions of divinity, contrary to what we would expect, but,

in fact, in accord with true divinity— when he emptied and humbled himself. In this reading, Christ *exercised* his deity. . . . That is, although Christ was in the form of God, which leads us to certain expectations, he subverted and deconstructed those expectations when he emptied and humbled himself, which is did *because* he was the *true* form of God."<sup>24</sup> We thus find Paul presenting regal power first, followed by expounding the use of that power in terms of self-sacrificial loving service.

Gorman's exposition of Phil 2 and the Kenosis thus raises a question: If the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) uses his power in this self-emptying, self-sacrificial, salvific manner, instead of in an exploitative and imperialist fashion, would it not be natural to expect that Adam and Eve as image of God should reflect those same character traits in their lordship over nature? I would thus propose that Gen 1 and 2 reflect the same complementary view of dominion and self-sacrificial service as recorded in Phil 2. Just as Paul's hymn opens with a description of Christ's divine rights and is followed by describing Christ's kenotic use of that power, so Gen 1 first depicts the high and sovereign characteristics of human dominion and then is followed by Gen 2 which depicts the traits of self-sacrificial service which were to characterized the dominion depicted in Gen 1. This would imply, then, that humanity never was intended to treat nature with an egocentric,

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<sup>24</sup>Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative of Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 27. Emphasis in original. Gorman argues that Paul applied this same logic – Christ emptied himself because he is God – to his own ministry in 1 Cor 9. It is because Paul is an apostle of the self-emptying Christ that he follows Christ's example by not enforcing his legal and moral right to be paid by the Corinthians for his ministry there. See p. 23-24.

exploitative consumption of nature. As God's caretakers, we should treat the environment as something of value, taking appropriate steps to nurture and protect it.

There are, however, two ditches we can fall into in caring for sinful creation. One is that since Christ is coming soon, we have no need to care for the earth as it is perishing and will be destroyed anyway. The opposite ditch is treat the world as a sacred object of veneration and quasi-worship. Let me offer an illustration on finding an appropriate balance.

My car is something of value to me. Even though I know my car will eventually wear out and need replacing, I take appropriate care of my car to extend its life as much as possible. At the same time, I do not purchase chrome wheels, spoilers, performance enhancing computer chips, fancy interior items, etc., because such expenditures would not actually extend its service life, and thus would waste precious financial resources. I have a sense of what constitutes an appropriate investment in the vehicle commensurate to its age and condition.

As biblical Christians we ought to appropriately value nature, even in its aged, sin-warped condition and take appropriate maintenance steps to support the health of our planet's environment until Jesus comes. We should also recognize that we cannot ultimately save this world and thus avoid faddish environmental extremes. In addition, we understand the natural world as someone else's property, namely God's. Should we not respect his ownership by taking responsible care of it?

### **Implications for Leadership**

Another question arises: If we are to treat the natural world with respect and care,

would not our fellow-man, created in the image of God with us, constitute a portion of God's created order for which we should care? Like the Kenosis, a proper reading of Gen 1 and 2 has something to say about how we treat each other, especially when we are in positions of leadership. I would suggest that the vision of leadership found in Gen 1-2 provides the seminal concept for kenotic leadership found in the rest of Scripture, specifically seen in passages such as Psa 72 and Phil 2. Thus, the incarnation was not introducing something new. Rather, it reiterates a concept of leadership introduced during the creation itself. It is this vision of leadership that Christ calls his church to practice.

When the disciples argued about which of them would be the greatest in the eschatological kingdom (Mark 9:34), Christ responded by saying, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (vs 35). A bit later, James and John tried to secure the two highest positions in the future kingdom, sitting on the right and left of Jesus (10:35-40). The other 10 disciples reacted with indignance (10:41), thus showing the dispute over power and position in the new kingdom was still simmering. Jesus' response to this quest for power and position in the forthcoming kingdom reflects the kenotic view of leadership power found in Genesis 1-2. "And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. *But it shall not be so among you.* But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all'" (Mark 10:42-44).

In contrast to the leadership style of Creation and Kenosis, the false shepherds of Ezek

34 were living according to the principles of naturalistic evolution, in which the strong benefit by preying upon the weak instead of protecting them. Their leadership paradigm was one where lions eat lambs instead of Isaiah's vision of a restored creation in which lions lie down with lambs as their protectors. The operational principles of naturalistic evolution are fundamentally at odds with the theology of leadership and personal power found in the Creation and in the Kenosis.

It seems to me that we in the Seventh-day Adventist church may have forgotten God's design for personal power in leadership, as seen in the Creation and in the Kenosis. This may be especially evident in our current debate over ordination. What I have observed is that for many, though not all, this debate has become an argument over who is entitled to have power in the church, much as the disciples disputed nearly two thousand years ago. I would further contend that this "many"—representing both sides of the question—have a Gentile view of power and authority. "It shall not be so among you!"

We humans have a long history of imposing foreign philosophies onto the biblical text and thus corrupting our view of personal and leadership power. Such impositions have not only led to asserting an unbiblical imperialist power of humankind over nature, but also to an unbiblical view a husband having imperialist authority over his wife, and to power abuses in other areas of human life. By contrast, Paul depicts the submission between wife and husband in terms of the husband's self-sacrificial, nurturing love (Eph 5:22-26) and her voluntary submission as an equal. He does not cast this marital dynamic in terms of an imperialist dominion on the part of the husband. Power-hungry people tend to read their

Gentile view of power into the biblical text.

By contrast, Jesus says, "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Perhaps it is time to follow Jesus in caring for each other the way we say we should care for creation. Let us stop imposing the foreign philosophy of Gentile views of power into the text, and into our leadership discussions, and let us follow Jesus in adopting his vision of leadership power exemplified in the Creation and in the Kenosis.