

DOMINIUM TERRAE

EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Should the idea of the human rule “over all the earth” (Gn 1,26)¹ be abandoned? Anthropogenic environmental catastrophes would seem to expose it as an error. Yet what if, as Augustine wrote, the “gentle face of the earth” is analogous to the “Mother of the Lord”²? Here it is argued that with the aid of the theological disciplines and with sensitivity to the concerns raised against the teaching of *dominium terrae* in recent history, it can be understood as an assignment for humanity to take responsibility in stewardship of the earth. It is proposed that God’s assignment for humanity to rule over the earth (*dominium terrae*, Gn 1,26-28) must be interpreted in a multilayered context of biblical and theological issues. First, רָדָה [radah] (“have dominion, rule”) is presented from the immediate narrative context of צֶלֶם [tselem] (Gr. εἰκών [eikon]; Lat. *imago*, “image”) and דְמוּת [demuth] (Gr. ὁμοίωσις [homoi-osis]; Lat. *similitudo*, “likeness”). This sets the assignment to rule in an analogical framework. The assignment is then presented in relation to the given *ordo creationis* (the order of creation). This concept must be developed with sensitivity to its abuse in the early 20th century. There is, however, something redeemable in this theology. Correctly understood, it can prevent human conceptions of absolute dominion. Finally, the assignment is presented on the horizon of the fulfillment or end of creation (*finis creationis*). In this account, the *dominium terrae* is expanded to include also the moral sense of the preservation and custody of the

1. Gn 1,26-28: “Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (ESV). E. ZENGER, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken: Untersuchung zu Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte*, Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983; B. JANOWSKI, *Tempel und Schöpfung: Schöpfungstheologische Aspekte der priesterschriftlichen Heiligtumskonzeption*, in ID., *Gottes Gegenwart in Israel*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1993, 214-246.

2. *Two Books Against the Manichaeans* 2.24.37. See A. LOUTH – T.C. ODEN (eds.), *Genesis 1–11* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, 1), Downers Grove, IL, IVP, 2001, p. 49 (hereafter: ACCS).

earth which calls for human action that is both responsible and humble in face of the task.

I. *DOMINIUM TERRAE* IN CONTEXT

For many, the long reception of Gn 1,26-28 ends with Lynn White's famous claim that this passage teaches that "it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends"³, or that it provides a "Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man"⁴. Yet it is important to keep the world of the ancient authors in view here. At that time, the danger of predators was a part of life, the human population was smaller and the reach of civilization limited. It was a very different world than that of the modern industrial world. The etymology of the term "to rule" in Gn 1,26 is nevertheless troubling. As Robert Alter suggests, if the term is taken in its lexical form – stripped from its literary context, and theological narrative – it is very disturbing. He notes that "the verb *radah* is not the normal Hebrew verb for 'rule' (the latter is reflected in dominion of verse 16), and in most of the contexts in which it occurs it seems to suggest an absolute or even fierce exercise of mastery"⁵. Similarly, Claus Westermann, following Wildeberger, writes that "the verb *rdh*, whose basic meaning is to 'tread down', is not the obvious expression for the dominion of humans over the animal world"⁶. When *isolated* from the narrative, *radah* becomes exceedingly problematic. In exploring the meaning of *radah*, it is therefore important to engage the term in its particular usage. The sun also "rules" (מְשַׁלָּחַ [memshalah]) the day in Gn 1,16; here as well, the concept of rule must be understood in its context⁷. As Walter Brueggemann claims, "the relation of creator and creation-creatures in Gn 1,1–2,4 is not one of coercion. It is, rather, one of free, gracious commitment and invitation"⁸. Benno Jacob holds: "In the dominion over the earth and the animals, man is the earthly representative of God as the stars are used to rule over day and night, but

3. L. WHITE, Jr., *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, in *Science* 155 (March 10, 1967), no. 3767, 1203-1207, p. 1205. The same argument was made in C. AMERY, *Das Ende der Vorsehung: Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1972.

4. WHITE, *Historical Roots* (n. 3), p. 1207.

5. R. ALTER, *Genesis*, New York, Norton, 1996, p. 5.

6. C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. J.J. Scullion, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 1994, p. 158.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

8. W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Genesis*, Atlanta, GA, John Knox, 1982, p. 27.

the boldness of the comparison is rendered harmless in that man is not named the image of God without mentioning that he was created and made by God”⁹. Hans-Jürgen Zobel writes that *radah* means not “a violent subjugation but more of making-subservient” and that it was a part of the divine blessing¹⁰. Rather than underwriting violence, as J. Richard Middleton remarks, Genesis 1 “signals the creator’s original intent for shalom and blessing at the outset of human history”¹¹. Even the early modern exegete Paul Fagius (1504-1549) recognized that the term “rule” is not “abusive” or “tyrannical” but to be carried out “with equity” and “with thanksgiving”¹². While the idealized, divine plan for rule in Genesis 1 is harmonious and peaceful, the post-fall situation entails the killing of animals and the “fear and dread” of man “upon every beast of the earth” (9,2). These glosses do not dismiss the troubling etymological origin of the word, but they do challenge an interpretation of the text that would contradict its specific narratological usage.

II. THE ANALOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE *DOMINIUM TERRAE*

Prudentius Clemens (348-post 405) records in his *Poems*: “God fashioned [man...] and gave to him the face of God”¹³. Rashi (1040-1105) claims that God consulted the angels, who were also similar to God, before creating man¹⁴. According to the *Glossa Ordinaria*, which was influential in the Middle Ages, the expression “let us make” (*faciamus*) refers to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the expression “image of God” refers to the unity of the Trinity (*Patrologia Latina* 113.80f.). While there are a few exceptions, the image of God in the history of

9. B. JACOB, *Das Buch Genesis*, Stuttgart, Calwer, 2000 [1st ed. 1934], p. 59.

10. H.-J. ZOBEL, *Radah*, in H.-J. FABRY – H. RINGGREN (eds.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. VII, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1993, 351-358, p. 356.

11. J.R. MIDDLETON, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos, 2005, p. 269.

12. P. FAGIUS, *Paraphrasin chald. pent. succ. ann. & Expositio quatuor pr. cap. Gen.*, in J. PEARSON, et al. (eds.), *Critici sacri, sive, Doctissimorum Virorum in SS. Biblia Annotationes & Tractatus*, 9 vols., London, 1660, vol. 1, col. 16: “significat qualem habet dominus in servum, non qua illo abutitur, sed qua illus opera ad suos usus, idque cum aequitate, utitur: sic quoque & omnibus aliis creaturis Dei, etiam brutis animantibus, idque cum gratiarum actione, homo ad necessarios usus suos uti, & illis non tyrannice abuti debet”.

13. *Poems*. See ACCS, vol. 1, p. 29.

14. Cf. D.R. BLUMENTHAL, *Reading Creation*, in G. BODENDORFER – M. MILLARD (eds.), *Bibel und Midrasch: Zur Bedeutung der rabbinischen Exegese für die Bibelwissenschaft*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1998, 117-166.

reception is usually associated with only the intellectual aspects of humanity. Augustine popularized a conception of the image as rationality (*ratio, mens, intelligentia*; cf. *De Genesi ad litteram*, esp. lib. 3, c. 20). This became one of the dominate glosses in the *Glossa Ordinaria*. Against this limited understanding, Paul Humbert writes that the *imago* implies “the same physique as the deity” and that it is “a concrete and plastic effigy, figured and external”¹⁵. Hermann Gunkel also holds that “this likeness is related in the first instance to the human body, when of course the intellectual aspect is not excluded”¹⁶. A strict isolation of the intellectual from the physical is foreign to the text. Gerhard von Rad holds: “The whole man is made in the image of God”¹⁷. The Hebrew vocabulary brings humanity and God into an analogical relationship¹⁸. In its great *Weltdeutung* (world interpretation), Genesis 1 speaks of God creating humanity in God’s image and then giving humanity the assignment to rule over the earth. These two concepts, the one speaking of humanity’s relative and analogous relationship to God and the other speaking of humanity’s task on the earth, address in brief the specific identity of humanity. As von Rad has argued: “The commission to rule [is not] the definition of God’s image; but it is its consequence”; humanity is “capable [to rule] because of it”¹⁹. In this regard, Douglas John Hall holds that “it would appear irresponsible exegetically to disassociate the *imago Dei* entirely from the concept of human dominion”²⁰. The link between the image and dominion is already emphasized by Augustine. The close connection between the two concepts, image and dominion, is seen in ancient cultures where earthly kings erected an image of themselves to establish their authority in an area where they were not physically present. In this conception, the statue has authority by virtue of the image on the statue²¹. One of the theological implications of this

15. P. HUMBERT, *Études sur le récit du paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse*, Neuchâtel, Sec. de l’Université, 1940, 153-175, p. 157.

16. Cf. H. GUNKEL, *Genesis*, Göttingen, Hubert, 1977, p. 112; cf. Gn 5,1-3; 9,6.

17. G. VON RAD, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis Kap. 1,1–11,29*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949, p. 45.

18. Cf. A. WAGNER, *Die Gottebenbildlichkeitsvorstellung der Priesterschrift zwischen Theomorphismus und Anthropomorphismus*, in J. LUCHSINGER (ed.), “... der seine Lust hat am Wort des Herrn!": Festschrift für Ernst Jenni zum 80. Geburtstag, Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 2007, 344-363.

19. G. VON RAD, *Genesis*, London, SCM, 1972, pp. 59-60; cf. B. VAWTER, *On Genesis*, London, Cassell and Collier Macmillan, 1977, p. 57.

20. D.J. HALL, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1986, p. 71; cf. VAWTER, *On Genesis* (n. 19), p. 57.

21. Cf. 1 Sm 6,5,11; 2 Kg 11,18; 2 Chr 23,17; C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis III*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1974, p. 146; cf. B. JANOWSKI, *Die Welt als*

analogical relationship seems to be the expectations regarding the nature of the dominion. It suggests that humanity is to carry out its activity in a way that is in accordance with its creator. In reflection on the Genesis narrative, Basil the Great (c. 330-379) wrote about how the works of creation attest to the beauty of God: “Let us glorify the Master Craftsman for all that has been done wisely and skillfully, and for the beauty of the visible things let us form an idea of him who is more than beautiful”²². Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) also emphasizes the doctrine of God here: “Now, let us make humankind in our image after our likeness; with a soul that is eternal, that is incorporeal, and that fills the body just as My Being is eternal, incorporeal, and fills the universe for I, the Creator, am Creator of all; indeed I am all”²³. Many early theologians held that the two words, “image” and “likeness,” represent two distinct matters. Origen (184/5-253/4) claimed that the image was given to man but “the perfection of God’s likeness was reserved for him at the consummation. The purpose of this was that man should acquire it for himself by his own earnest efforts to imitate God, so that while the possibility of attaining perfection was given to him in the beginning through the honor of the ‘image’, he should in the end through the accomplishment of these works obtain for himself the perfect ‘likeness’”²⁴. Diadochus of Photice wrote: “All men are made in God’s image; but to be in his likeness is granted only to those who through great love have brought their own freedom into subjection to God”²⁵. A.M. Dubarle has also claimed that “possession of the image of God is not a static property conferred once and for all.” Rather, it signals “a vocation to imitate” with one’s actions and thus a call to bear the likeness: “It is a call to religious life: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’”²⁶. In summary of Bede’s (673-735) commentary (*In principium Genesis*) on this passage, the *Glossa Ordinaria* also provides a call to become spiritual and like God: “He who does justice not by the

Schöpfung (Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments, 4), Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 2008, esp. pp. 140-171; *Die lebendige Statue Gottes: Zur Anthropologie der priesterlichen Urgeschichte*, in M. WITTE (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. FS Otto Kaiser* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 345), vol. 1, Berlin – New York, de Gruyter, 2004, 183-214. See also H.W. WOLFF, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, München, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1977, pp. 238f.

22. *Hexaemeron* 1.11. See ACCS, vol. 1, p. 25.

23. Cited in BLUMENTHAL, *Reading Creation* (n. 14), p. 154.

24. ORIGEN, *First Principles* 3.6.1. See ACCS, vol. 1, pp. 29f.

25. DIADOCHUS OF PHOTICE, *On Spiritual Perfection* 4. See ACCS, vol. 1, p. 30.

26. A.M. DUBARLE, *La conception de l’homme dans l’AT*, in J. COPPENS, et al. (eds.), *Sacra pagina: Miscellanea biblica Congressus internationalis catholici de re biblica* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 12-13), Gembloux, Duculot, 1959, 522-536, p. 528.

imitation of the holy [or, saints] but by looking to truth itself, in order to understand and follow the truth itself: this one receives power over all things, because whoever becomes spiritual, and similar to God, judges all things, and he himself is judged of no one”²⁷. This analogical framework also goes the other direction, into the realm of the visible. Humanity not only stands in relation to God but also in continual analogy to the animals. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386) held that one can learn to follow their examples – like the gentleness of the lamb – and also avoid some of their habits: “Different natures of animals sprang forth from the one earth at a single command – the gentle sheep and the carnivorous lion – and the various tendencies of irrational animals that display analogies to various human characteristics. Thus the fox typifies the craftiness of men, the snake the venomous treachery of friends and the neighing horse the wanton young man. There is the busy ant to rouse the indolent and sluggish; for when a man spends an idle youth, then he is instructed by the irrational creatures, being chided by the sacred Scripture, which says, ‘Go to the ant, O sluggard, and considering her ways, emulate her and become wiser than she’”²⁸. Rashi writes: “If humanity is worthy, they will rule but, if they are not worthy, they will sink lower than the animals and be ruled by them”²⁹. Humanity is given an assignment to look over the earth but only in analogical relationships which provide mankind with examples. Before the creation of Adam and Eve, however, God established the structure of reality and a basic order of things.

III. *DOMINIUM TERRAE AND THE ORDO CREATIONIS*

In the early 20th century among authoritarian theologians the idea of an “order of creation” was developed theologically to support an authoritarian society. This conception of the order of creation is a corruption of the teaching. The order of creation is a term used to describe the structured givenness of creation from a loving God of eternal wisdom and infinite beauty. The order of creation means that the earth is not and should not be treated as chaos but is and should be treated as creation. Genesis does not present the late antique *creatio ex nihilo* but rather *creatio contra nihilum* or *creatio ex chao* or *creatio ex tumulto*, the

27. *Patrologia Latina* 113.80. See also B. LIEBANENSIS (d. 798), *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* (4.6.) and ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *Sententiae* (2.11).

28. *Catechetical Lectures* 9.13. See ACCS, vol. 1, p. 26.

29. Cited in BLUMENTHAL, *Reading Creation* (n. 14), p. 149.

ordering and forming of a dormant תְּהוֹם [tehom] – a poetic term (related to, with significant differences, Tiamat in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*) that can be translated with the word “deep” or “sea” or “abyss” (Gn 1,2). It is not the account of creation (emanation) with Plotinus in the *Enneads*, but rather that of Plato in the *Timaeus* and his craftsman-God constructing and making a synthetic and harmonious whole. The providential activity of God throughout the Old Testament is therefore easily understood in the twin conceptions of *creatio* and *conservatio*³⁰. Creation was understood as an establishment and forming, a setting together and organizing of a good work, a “very good” (Gn 1,31) creation. This work of paradise, harmony and also wild excess was then handed over to humanity with instructions and warnings. As Middleton remarks, Genesis portrays God entrusting humanity “with power over the earth and animals and then stepping back, withdrawing, to allow humans to exercise this newly granted power, to see what develops”³¹. This takes place in the story only after the establishment of its divinely given order, chronologically following the divine creation. The second, arguably older, creation account of Genesis 2 claims that “there was not a man to till the ground” (2,5). The divinely ordered creation in this account required its own active partner to work and care for the divinely created order. There was needed someone “to dress it and to keep it” (2,15). The story teaches that there is a certain given order and harmony to things

30. In rejection of Thomas Aquinas’s (c. 1225-1274) understanding of divine providence, William of Ockham (c. 1285-1347) emphasized the divine will at the cost of secondary causes (*causae secundae*) and equalized *creatio* and *conservatio*. God creates the world anew every moment: “quia creatio et conservatio per nihil positivum differunt” (*Sent.* II, qu 3f.). Martin Luther (1483-1546) also carries the equalization: “We Christians know that with God to create and to preserve is the same” (“Nos Christiani scimus, quod apud Deum idem est creare et conservare”; WA 43.233f.). This theology is related to Luther’s claim in *On the Bondage of the Will* (*De servo arbitrio*), that *omnia quae fiunt* (“every thing which happens”) although it may seem contingent to humanity, actually happens, by view of the divine, *necessario et immutabiliter* (“by necessity and unchangeably”; WA 18.615). John Calvin (1509-1564) also attests to this sole-efficacy of God: “it is certain that not a drop of rain falls without the express command of God” (CALVIN, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H. Beveridge, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2001, bk. 1, ch. 16, p. 177). The theology of sole-divine efficacy in these forms minimizes human responsibility and creates problems in explaining evil. Thomas’s account of divine providence emphasizes the basic goodness of things and embraces teleological aspects of creation, a government or *gubernatio* with secondary causes, contingencies and the freedom of the will, in a conception of providence understood as a rational teleological process with differing degrees of divine imposition (cf. *S. th.* 1.22, esp. art. 3, and art. 4). One can take the best from Aquinas’s account of providence and also emphasize, with the Reformers, the freedom of God, and thus the divine gratuity (*sola gratia*) of salvation by faith (*sola fide*) in Christ (*solus Christus*) in a Biblical theology (*sola Scriptura*).

31. MIDDLETON, *The Liberating Image* (n. 11), p. 294.

which is of such an order that it requires humanity to maintain it and care for it. The order of creation is thus not one of humanity's absence but rather an order which requires volition, action and participation by the sentient beings who could converse with God in the eve of the day (3,8). The *dominium terrae* teaching was given in the context of God's blessing upon humanity and before the allowance, in Genesis 9, for the killing of animals. In the *status originalis*, a world which God originally intended for man, the animals were not thought to have been afraid of man, indeed they were named by the first parents. There is a certain intrinsic dignity of creation that humanity is called to watch over. Chrysostom (c. 347-407) writes: "It wasn't simply for our use that he produced all these things; it was also for our benefit in the sense that we might see the overflowing abundance of his creatures and be overwhelmed at the Creator's power, and be in a position to know that all these things were produced by a certain wisdom and ineffable love out of regard for the human being that was destined to come into being"³². The creation story is both a challenge to careless exploitation of nature (as if it had no intrinsic order and worth), and a challenge to a human-estranging naturalism (which holds that only in humanity's absence is nature to be found in its given order). It entails a high view of man and human responsibility; Chrysostom provides: "See the Lord's loving kindness ... he makes them share in this control and bestows on them the blessing ...; so no longer entertain casual impressions of this rational being [sc. man] but rather realize the extent of the esteem and the Lord's magnanimity toward it and be amazed at his love beyond all telling"³³. A Jewish commentator wrote that there was a special love expressed in God's creating man in his image; in *Pirke Avot* (3.14) it is recorded: "Beloved is man since he was created in God's image; but it was by a special love that it was made known to him that he was created in God's image"³⁴. So also it is claimed in the Mishna that man was created alone for the sake of peace between mankind: "so that one man should not say to his fellow: My father was greater than yours!"³⁵ Having learned much from his older sister Macrina, the ethical sense is captured in Gregory of Nyssa's (c. 335-post 394) remarks *On the Origin of Man*: "'You will rule over savage beasts.' How though, you may ask, since I have a beast within? ... the same one who provides the power to rule over all living things provides power for us to

32. *Homilies on Genesis* 7.13. See ACCS, vol. 1, p. 25.

33. *Homilies on Genesis* 10.9. See ACCS, vol. 1, p. 40.

34. N. LEIBOWITZ, *Studies in Bereshit (Genesis) in the Context of Ancient and Modern Jewish Bible Commentary*, trans. A. Newman, Jerusalem, WZO, 1981, p. 4.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

rule over ourselves”³⁶. The story of the beginnings calls one to consider their ways and look to God’s love and concern for all of humanity and to reflect this love in caring for all that God has entrusted to mankind. As Augustine compels: “The gentle face of the earth, that is, the dignity of the earth, may be correctly viewed as the mother of the Lord, the Virgin Mary, who was watered by the Holy Spirit, who is signified in the Gospels by the term *water*”³⁷. This is not to fall prey to what John Milbank cautions as the potential “crypto-fascism” of ecotheology. For Milbank, this despotism calls us to the “counter-terror of sacrifice” to “submit ourselves” to the “self-maintaining totality” of the earth, that is, “the law of fatality”, the “natural law of competition”. This naïve acceptance of “ecological mechanisms” fails in acquiescence to the “notion that there is such a ‘readable’ fatality, such a manifest possibility of knowing what ‘the whole’ requires”³⁸. A Biblical account could not suppose that this order is easily “readable”, nor could it argue that it is a “self-maintaining totality”³⁹. An account of some kind of *ordo creationis* comes with the belief in the “Maker of heaven and earth”⁴⁰. Furthermore, such confessions are always coupled with the acknowledgment that now we know “in part” (1 Cor 13,12). The Christian articulation of creation has always held that all of creation is contingent. Rowan Williams remarks: “Creation affirms that to be here at all, to be a part of this natural order and to be the sort of thing capable of being named – or of having a role – is ‘of God’; it *is* because God wants it so”⁴¹. Williams also writes that “the overcoming of nature as a proper goal for spirituality is highly problematic: we need a very careful theory of how nature is distorted or obscured before this language is remotely possible; an account, in effect, of how we mistake the unnatural for the natural”⁴². It seems that one must maintain an openness to discover errors in the perception of the natural given orders of creation, mistaking the natural for the unnatural, or as Williams states, mistaking “the unnatural for the natural”. We are also challenged to live with the orders which we do not fully understand, such as tsunamis, earthquakes and other dangerous aspects of creation,

36. Cf. ACCS, vol. 1, p. 40.

37. *Two Books Against the Manichaeans* 2.24.37. See ACCS, vol. 1, p. 49.

38. J. MILBANK, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, pp. 261f.

39. Cf. O. O'DONOVAN, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1994, pp. 19f.

40. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 31f.

41. R. WILLIAMS, *On Christian Theology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, p. 69. Cf. Col 1,17.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

in learning to avoid their destructive power by arranging for better buildings, warning systems and careful forethought regarding the location for settlement and the consequences of human pollution and anthropogenic climate change. The moments of chaos in creation attest to an abiding disorder of a fallen world that is in need of an ultimate redemption but simultaneously “very good”.

IV. *DOMINIUM TERRAE AND THE FINIS CREATIONIS*

If humanity’s role in watching over the earth should be understood in the many analogical relationships and with concern for the given order of things, it should also be understood with a view towards its consummation. Future expectations influence actions in the present. It seems appropriate to briefly address what happened in the Genesis narrative after humanity was given the opportunity to rule over the earth. As Erhard Blum has emphasized, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil (3,5), the awareness of sexuality (3,7) and the conflict with sin (4,7.13) point to the human ability of world-orientation and world-formation. From this man becomes “like a god” (3,5; 3,22, cf. 2 Sam 14,17.20; 19,28) with the consequence of death⁴³. There is also a string of violence that follows, first with Cain brutally murdering Abel then Lamech killing a “young man” (4,23); “the wickedness of man” (6,5) reaches a climax when God repents that he had “made man on the earth” (6,6). The sobering reminder is that humanity did not rule as God had intended. In contrast to the violence, the hope of the narrative is Noah. Middleton claims that Noah exhibits “a beautiful example of the loving exercise of power”⁴⁴; he is “the one righteous person in the antediluvian period [who] exercises rule over the animals by taking them on the ark and thus preserving their life in a time of threat”⁴⁵. One part of the story of the fall has to do with Adam and Eve becoming like gods themselves (3,5). It seems that this was a kind of failure on two different levels. It corrupted the upward, analogous and relativizing quality of humanity’s relation to God, and also the downward creatureliness in its innocence and self-orientation as creature, analogous to the

43. E. BLUM, *Von Gottesunmittelbarkeit zu Gottähnlichkeit*, in G. EBERHARDT – K. LIESS (eds.), *Gottes Nähe im Alten Testament*, Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004, 9-29; ID., *Urgeschichte*, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 34 (2002) 436-446. Cf. O.H. STECK, *Die Paradieserzählung: Eine Auslegung von Genesis 2,4b–3,24*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1970.

44. MIDDLETON, *The Liberating Image* (n. 11), p. 295.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

animals. It seems to have gone against the mysterious essence of humanity, the “earthling” (אָדָם [adam]) which was formed from the dust of the “ground” (אֲדָמָה [adamah] [2,7]), the mixture of earth and life (אָדָם [adam] “Adam” and חַוְוָה [chavvah] Eve, the “mother of all living” [3,20]). Nachmanides (Ramban, 1194-1270) talks about this essence: “To show the importance of humanity, God thoughtfully willed that God and the earth, with its power to generate beings which have souls which move continuously, should cause humanity to pass from potentiality into existence. Humanity would be like the earth in its corporeal manifestation and in its having a soul which allows movement, and it would be like God in form, that is, in the capacity for thought, wisdom, and action”⁴⁶. The end of this displacement in the new heaven and new earth was prefigured in the death of an animal who gave its covering to the first parents (3,21). The death of the animal neither heroized sacrifice nor ended humanity’s self-estrangement. It did show, however, that mankind’s actions brought suffering into the world. The *finis creationis*, the end of creation, was prefigured in God’s attempt to return Adam and Eve to their innocence as creatures in harmony with the rest of creation and God. In the sacrificial humility of an unnamed animal, humanity was reminded of its failure but its shame was also covered. This sense of humility is also brought forth by the psalmist in his famous gloss on the passage: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (Psalm 8,4; cf. v. 6).

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46. Cited in BLUMENTHAL, *Reading Creation* (n. 14), p. 126.