

'FILL THE EARTH AND SUBDUE IT' (GN 1:28):

Dominion to exploit and pollute?

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Abstract

Genesis 1:28 is used in some circles as divine sanction for both unrestrained population growth and for a capitalist approach to the world as a source of resources to be exploited and as something to be conquered for human benefit alone. In the light of a rapidly growing world population and consequent hunger, the growing threat of resource depletion and environmental damage due to both pollution and exploitation, these activities must be questioned, and therefore this approach to the texts reconsidered.

The time of origin of the texts was one of an affirmation of God's sovereignty but also of a realization of limitation and restraint. Moreover, the creation narrative must be looked upon as a unique situation, so that the command was of temporary validity only. Thirdly, the understanding of the theology of creation must itself include an awareness of limitation. The command cannot therefore be seen as one urging unrestrained growth, but rather self-limitation.

Recognition of God's sovereignty gave a distinctive approach to forces confronting Israel which led to its survival. A correct understanding of dominion and God's sovereignty will likewise lead to a distinctive approach to a necessary limitation.

1. Introduction

It is hardly necessary to detail the ecological problems of population growth, pollution and resource depletion that face the world today; these are well-known. It is often felt that humankind has a right over the material creation as well as plant and animal life. All can be used as desired for human benefit, both as a source of materials and energy and as a dumping ground for waste. This is basic to both a capitalist and to a socialist ideology, which both hold with a belief in constant progress (White 1967:1205), and reflects what Moltmann (1988:7) sees as the will to dominate inherent in the associated

technology. Cohen (1985:170) citing White, points out that technology also arises from a high view of humanity, which is too exalted to waste time in drudgery when nature can be persuaded to work instead.

Many see a solution in increased technology and control of the environment, but this will only at best postpone the problem, particularly as these are the very things that have caused the problem. It is clear that Western technology is causing resource depletion and pollution, albeit sometimes indirectly in the Third World. Attfield (1983:12) notes that most pollution is now due to new technology rather than increased consumption. Technology is also the cause of the population explosion due to improved health care (and, some would say, due to capitalism). Ironically the present world population can only exist by the continued exercise of the technology that enabled it, and now threatens its demise.

Perhaps not so pervasive is a belief in a right to procreate freely, although this is largely unquestioned in the Third World, and even in the first on an individual level. Some, however, e.g. Stanford (1972:190), argue that the world population is already too large. Others, e.g. Meadows (1972), even predict a rapid, even catastrophic decline in living standards due to an overload in the world system. Even rapid changes in population cause additional problems; for if growth is too rapid there is an excess of unproductive children, if too small, an excess of unproductive elderly.

Even if the West has successfully limited its population growth, it is arguably fuelling it elsewhere. Some argue (e.g. Meadows 1973:236) that the capitalist structure itself stimulates population growth, albeit in the poorer segments of society, while economic development, in particular greater equality, slows down the growth (also North-South 1980:106, Davis 1972:58). However, the fact of the limited resources of the earth means that affluence is not possible for all; the rich would have to reduce their living standards. It must also be pointed out that it is the rich minority which consumes most resources and causes most of the pollution (North-South 1980:162), especially by increasing technology (Moss 1982:19). Socialism however also fuels population growth by removing the economic incentive for population limitation on a personal level.

Lynn White's famous article urged that solutions to these problems cannot be just cosmetic but must deal with fundamental attitudes (White 1967:1204). Noting that the problem is essentially located in the 'Christian' developed world, it is traced to Christianity (and to some extent Judaism). Although it would seem folly to continue rapid exploitation and growth in the light of a limited earth and for the sake of future generations, some (e.g. Chilton 1985:115, 382) see this as not only permitted by God but positively commanded in texts such as Genesis 1:28. Genesis 1 is therefore viewed as the cause of an attitude to the environment and to population which can only lead to disaster. The need is rather for curtailment, not an attitude of continued expansion.

This attitude may be vividly contrasted with the harmony advocated by Eastern religions, although such an attitude is accused (e.g. Griffiths 1982:141) of destroying the essential ethos of capitalism and so generating poverty.

Other religious traditions are more supportive of the idea of growth; from an African perspective which emphasizes the blessing of fertility and large families, Pobe (1985:20) points out that population is no problem in itself, but only if resources are not available. 'Subdue' and 'multiply' must keep in step and interrelate, each enabling the other. For the same thought in a non-African context, see Bauer (1981:43), who sees population growth as a form of prosperity, and as enabling prosperity. Just as the modern explosion in population really started with the Industrial Revolution (Hunger 1985:23), and is clearly a result of technical progress, only sustainable by technology, so technology is stimulated and enabled by a high population. However, this does not take cognizance of a limited earth.

It must be pointed out, by way of introduction, that opinion is by no means uniform that Christianity implies an expansive attitude to the environment. On the one hand, Hall (1986:22), among others (cf Monsma 1986:40) believes that the crisis in nature is a result of the goals of society, especially Christianity. (See also the literature survey in Cohen 1985:155f.) American Christianity in particular is triumphalistic, leading to a high self-image, and the presumed right over others and over nature. Barr (1972:17) notes the opinion that connects capitalism and exploitation with 'highly biblical' forms of religion. Some have even believed that the command of Genesis 1:28 implies a forbidding of birth control. Davis (1984:120) goes so far as to say that it is a positive duty for Christians to breed as much as possible, as a large number is better able to influence the world for good.

On the other hand, of course, whereas there are biblical passages (e.g. Ps 127:3f) which see large families as a blessing, there are also indications of the opposite attitude, such as in 1 Corinthians 7 and Jesus' apparent advocacy of not marrying (Mt 19:10). Interestingly the Wisdom literature, despite its creation theology, sometimes supports this (e.g. Eccles 16:1). David was punished for numbering the people (1 Chr 21).

Moreover, the direct connection between Christianity and exploitive technology is not proven. Humankind, not only Christianity, has always caused environmental problems (Elsdon 1981:13). Peacocke (1978:277) notes ecological damage well before Christ, and also in non-Christian cultures such as Japan; on the other hand, although Christianity is seen as the motivation for technology, this did not occur in the orthodox East, but did happen in non-Christian cultures such as China. Moreover, other Christian traditions, notably Francis, as White says, advocate harmony (also Loader 1987:11). It must also be asked why, if exploitation is inherent to Christianity, it has become a problem only recently? Here Loader (1987:10) makes the telling point that no-one traces the environmental problem to ancient Israel; it is

Christianity's reaction to the Enlightenment, or to Greek culture, that is at fault. Barr (1972:11) notes also the recent rise of science itself. He denies that Christianity as such can be directly connected with science, or, especially, with exploitation. Attfield (1973:43) likewise concurs that ecological problems are not due to Christianity, but to other factors in the modern world such as urbanization, although Christianity may have encouraged these factors. He denies (1973:67) that Christianity may be connected to the idea of perpetual growth found in both the modern East and West. Elsdon (1981:103) notes moreover that White does not criticize Genesis as such, but only an interpretation of it. However this would also mean that it is not inherent in Christianity.

Indeed, I believe that this attitude has arisen as a result not of Christianity, but of its decline. This is not to say that Christianity is guiltless:

Christianity in the West has to some degree accommodated to the new economic climate that superseded medieval life (Anderson 1975:28).

Elsewhere (1984:153) he cites Borowitz' opinion that although dominion is clearly a biblical idea, the modern application of dominion is an imposition on the biblical texts and really reflects a secularization.

This question has many angles to it, both secular and theological (such as eschatology), but my concern here is to examine whether these texts do justify such an approach, or if there is a better exegesis and hermeneutic. This is an urgent matter when Christianity is denigrated as justifying an economic approach which causes present and future problems, even if the real motivation is different, whether from nationalistic reasons, from a materialism which is really secular, or even, cynically speaking, out of fear of a diminution of living standards when the world does not hold enough to go round. An assessment already a bit dated is that it would take more minerals than the entire known world reserves to raise the standard of living of all to that of the United States (Ehrlich & Ehrlich 1972:144). Perhaps more importantly, to feed the world at American standards would require three times the available food (Borgstrom 1972:176). A commonly quoted figure is that America alone, with 6% of the world's population, consumes 40% of its resources.

2. Origin of the texts

Responsible exegesis must commence with a consideration of the probable origin of the texts, and especially of the situation of the time. The key text is Genesis 1:28 with the two ideas of subduing the earth and multiplying. Genesis 8:17 and 9:1 repeat the ideas of multiplication, while Psalm 8:6 repeats the idea of dominion, using the same word as in Genesis 1.

Most (e.g. Von Rad 1961) put the Genesis texts in a 'P' source, so in a post-exilic situation. Many put Psalm 8 there as well (e.g. Kraus 1988:180 etc). Weiser (1962:94) therefore believes that the Davidic title need not mean his

own authorship, but rather a composition in his memory. B W Anderson (1983:153) indicates a setting for both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 in the Jerusalem Temple, as Stuhlmüller (1983:89) of Psalm 8, although most see the incorporation of earlier elements. Westermann (1984:141) also points out that outside P, the formula of blessing occurs only in three exilic passages. Certainly, however, these texts found a use and application in that situation.

This was a time when Judah experienced domination from external powers, firstly the Babylonians, then the Persians. At the same time, the experience of exile had produced an emphasis on the uniqueness of God. Any alternative, any idolatry, was rejected for fear of repeated, or even greater, disaster (cf Is 40:12f).

In such an experience of exile the picture of the image of God (Gen 1:26) was meaningful, as kings set up images in conquered provinces as a sign of their authority (Von Rad 1961:58, Curtis 1984:119). In contrast, Judah was forbidden by the Decalogue to set up any image (the word is different, but the same word as in Genesis is used elsewhere in that sense, e.g. Ez 16:17). Not only the worship of such was forbidden, but the very making of them was wrong, as they implied the authority of what was portrayed, rather than the authority of God. Rather the presence of a person indicates the authority and ownership of God, as he bears God's image. (Moreover of course, there is a reminder here that humankind belongs to God, as bearing his image, and so is not free to act arbitrarily.)

On the one hand, the exiles were aware of God's continued action in honour of his covenant, but on the other hand his uniqueness meant that God was clearly sovereign, so was responsible for their situation; he could do more, but then had clearly given dominion over Judah to other powers. God was limiting himself, even using other forces to punish Judah. Dominion and covenant may well mean self-limitation. (There is a modern application here to liberation theology, which tends to see God and man cooperating in the overcoming of evil oppression. Landes (1984:135) points out the frequent linkage of creation and liberation in both Testaments, e.g. Ps 124:8, but also points out that in the post-exilic situation, the prophets urged hope in the re-creative activity of God, not in human activity.)

It is also possible to see the texts as used by a circle which sought to resist foreign domination by claiming the authority of God over such powers. The prophets, on the other hand, rather urged that the will of God at that time was submission to oppressive powers, and trust in God for ultimate victory. Again the ideas of restraint and self-limitation are consistent with the rule of God.

It must also be of significance for the exiles that creation is depicted as limited in time. Thus if God's work was limited in time, so would be the period of judgement in exile. In both cases, work and authority carry with them the idea of limitation. For the exiles, if the blessing of ultimate victory is assured, and the timing of its manifestation is in the hands of God, this

means that for the time being, restraint and a non-enforcement of dominion is in order.

Blessing is an obvious feature of the relevant texts, especially Genesis 1:28. Westermann (1978:18) notes that in addition to fertility, blessing also included the idea of power over enemies. It must be noted that in the practice of war in that era, the attempt was not made to destroy the enemy, as is often the case today, but to capture and to exile by separating the conquered people from their homeland. In this way not only would the power of the people be broken, but their labour and also their resources could be used for the benefit of the victor. Blessing and dominion is therefore not so much in subjugation, but in using; not so much in destruction, but in establishing a harmony between conqueror and conquered.

There is but the faintest echo of the idea of creation being a victory to be found in Genesis, although it is found in a number of Psalms (Westermann 1984:29), e.g. Psalm 104 (Anderson 1984:12). Although the Hebrew idea of creation does not involve mythology such as is found in other creation stories such as *Enūma Elish*, nevertheless the idea of creation as a victory, even if over impersonal chaos, is not an unreasonable one. (For a Christian, the idea of the atonement has been seen as a victory over sin and death, and indeed its result is portrayed by Paul as a 'new creation' (2 Cor 5:17).) For the Jews in exile, the idea of victory would be particularly relevant, both as in the area where such other ideas of creation were known, but also because of the very fact of exile and their own defeat. Their God is then seen as the victor, but victory was such as would become fully manifest later, a comforting thought in exile, giving confidence of its eventual end. (Such a thought is also Christian, where Christ is seen as having won a victory which will only be fully evident in the world in the future.) Of course, even without the idea of struggle which is present in the Mesopotamian creation story, there is still victory over chaos. Anderson (1984:158) adds the pertinent idea that chaos is however not eliminated, but is driven back, 'given bounds', just as the sea in Genesis 1 has its boundaries fixed.

The idea of separation which is such a feature of the Genesis narrative is thus also pertinent to exiled Judah. However, not only have they experienced the separation from their homeland, but their separation from their conquerors was their only means of survival. (Again, separation is a significant thought for Christians who see it as a result of sin, and experienced by Christ on the cross.) Genesis 1 establishes a distinction of humankind from the rest of creation, which again of course immediately implies boundaries and hence a limitation.

Genesis 1:28 is therefore a command which is most appropriate in this context, at a time when the nation had to be rebuilt, when the extreme destruction of war had to be repaired, and Judah had to seek to renew its place among the nations. It does not mean, however, that it can be simplistically applied to a later date such as the modern era.

3. Setting of the texts

Whatever the actual origin and use of the texts, the setting of the Genesis texts was one of extreme depopulation, whether at creation or at the time of Noah. It was also a time of the lack of the most basic equipment which is needed for human existence. There was no housing, no clothing, no basic tools, and without these, very existence was precarious. König (1988:159) notes that God made an 'incomplete' creation, one that had to be worked on and shaped for human habitation. Overcoming nature was essential for survival.

Population growth was also obviously needed. Westermann (1978:18) discusses the many facets of meaning of 'blessing', which lie, essentially, in fruitfulness and fertility. The idea behind this must be in the security for the future that fertility gives. As Westermann (1984:88) points out, the result of the blessing is seen in the genealogies, but this is especially significant to the priests, believed to be the authors of 'P', not just in numerical expansion but because it was their own genealogies which gave them security in their office.

It is evident in the modern situation, however, that in fact security is threatened by excessive human fertility, so that real blessing will lie in a curtailing of fertility. Whereas at the times of creation and of Noah, a population increase was in order, indeed was necessary if the earth was to be at all subdued, this can hardly be said to be the situation in the modern world. Indeed it might well be suggested that the subjugation of the earth is even hindered by an excessively large population. Here it is worth noting that the time after the exile was also one of depopulation and of loss of infrastructure through war, but it is significant that Psalm 8, not so directly connected to creation, although it includes dominion, does not repeat the idea of multiplication.

Moreover, although at that time basic technology was essential, it can hardly be said that an increase of gimmickry really enriches modern life, and is certainly not essential to it, particularly if it will result in a diminution of life elsewhere. Although having nothing prevents an existence which may be called in any way human, in the modern world the abundance of wealth and equipment may also be said to reduce humanity. Barr (1972:24) also notes that in contrast to other creation stories, Genesis shows little interest in the origin of technology. In this case dominion is unlikely to imply exploitive science.

Here it is also notable that the commands were to Adam and to Noah, each in the context of separation, whether from the rest of creation or the rest of humanity, and each in a state of righteousness. Anderson (1975:44) points out that the Genesis command was given in Eden, so in a state of harmony; dominion is thereby excluded. (The same thought would be applicable to a lesser extent to Noah.) Humankind cared for, not abused, Eden (Elsdon 1981:104, who also refers to such texts as Lv 25:1-5, Dt 22:6, 25:4).

The command to multiply was not of universal application, but for that situation, and particularly for those in the covenant with God. It is hard to envisage a Jew in the context of exile arguing that God's command was unrestrained growth and multiplication for all in the world. It would be restricted to those in the covenant. Likewise of course, the command to multiply found in Genesis 35:11 does not have a universal application, being directed to one specific family.

McDonagh (1987:121) also comments pertinently when he observes that the Middle Eastern environment is particularly harsh, and that survival requires that this be dominated. Perhaps better, however, the type of environment requires particular care if it is to be lived in harmoniously.

It must be pointed out here, moreover, that even in the original setting, the commands to subdue and multiply are not unqualified. Genesis 1:22 gives a similar command to the fish and birds (which should perhaps also apply to the animals (Von Rad 1961:64), as indeed it is in Genesis 8:17), which is not consistent with unbridled human expansion. It is one of the tragedies of the modern world that human activity is daily causing the extinction of much of the richness of plant and animal life on the planet. Furthermore, the dominion command of Genesis 1:28 is immediately qualified by a restriction upon diet in the following verse. The suggestion has also been made that the very word 'fill' does not mean unrestrained growth, but implies a limit, as in Moss (1982:38) who notes the KJV rendering 'replenish'. Certainly the word is frequently used in the sense of progress up to a predetermined state, as for example in pregnancy (e.g. Gn 25:24). McPherson (1986:240) concurs in seeing a limit implied in Genesis 1:28. He sees death as part of the original created order (an inference from the second law of thermodynamics [unless, as seems unlikely, this is part of the fall]), and thus that reproduction must be necessary. However, seeing the necessity of reproduction does not mean that it is unrestrained. Incidentally, the second Law means that a really sustainable economy is impossible, but this does not mean that an inevitable end has to be hastened.

4. Theology of the texts

The command of Genesis 1:28 is clearly in the context of the deliberation of Genesis 1:26, where dominion is linked to the *imago Dei*. Von Rad (1961:57), commenting on Genesis 1:28, writes,

... the text speaks less of the nature of God's image than of its purpose ... This is then sketched most explicitly; domination in the world, especially over the animals. The commission to rule is not considered as belonging to the definition of God's image; but it is its consequence (Cf also Westermann 1984:155.)

It is therefore a common idea to see the existence of the material world as simply for human benefit (cf 1 Cor 9:10). Again, however, this is not a

unanimous opinion; for example Augustine believed that other creatures do not exist solely for humans but to glorify God (Santmire, in Christiansen 1990:72). Augustine, however, because he saw the next world as the real home of humanity, could not be really concerned for the good of this.

The connection with the *imago Dei* could imply that the blessing of Genesis 1:28 is only for humanity. However, the command in Genesis 8:17 indicates that the suggestion of Jacob (cited in Anderson 1984:163) is unlikely. He believes that the blessing on the animals is withheld as they would be a threat to humankind. Of course, in the situation portrayed after the flood there would be a similar danger to the one immediately after creation, even more so due to the warping of nature in the fall. (The last comment here must be treated with caution as most exegetes attribute the fall story to a different source from the creation and relevant parts of the flood story.) Westermann (1984:141) however, suggests that the blessing to animals is not excluded, but that it is included with that to humanity for stylistic reasons, as they were created on the same day.

The text indicates that acknowledging the sovereignty of God leads to the sovereignty of man. Moltmann (1988:8) comments that humans tried to become like God (a reflection of the fall narrative), by domination of nature, instead of by goodness and truth. This is exacerbated by an over-emphasis on the omnipotence of God since the Renaissance (Moltmann 1988:7), which may be particularly seen in Calvinism. It is then no accident that Max Weber associated this with capitalism although he saw the main effect in the drive to work that Calvinism produced, as prosperity would demonstrate election. An emphasis on almightiness or monotheism (White 1966:1205) tends at the same time to stress not only power over creation but a separation from it. As the world is godless, it may be used with impunity. A theology which sees spiritual forces in nature which have to be placated will not lightly abuse the material. Of course not only inanimate nature and non-human life may be used, but a doctrine of predestination has been known to result in the oppression of the supposed 'non-elect'. The world may therefore be owned, whether by individuals as in capitalism, or collectively as in socialism, and if owned, may be treated as desired.

However, even if the *imago Dei* does mean dominion, this need not mean that power should be employed just because it is possessed. Sovereignty is not simply an ability to do anything, but it is also a freedom to limit that ability. (If the *imago Dei* means freedom, this means that God's action is not such as to limit that freedom. Sin is therefore dealt with indirectly, by incarnation and atonement. I would therefore question the idea that events such as the emergence of AIDS is God's intervention to limit population (although it could be an act of judgement), but that it is rather a possibility inherent in the world that God made.)

Here it is significant that the text proceeds to the institution of self-limitation in the Sabbath (Bruggemann 1982:35), a restriction of exploitation of any

kind. And it is not without relevance that the Exile was interpreted as due to a neglect of the Sabbath (Lv 26:34-5).

Ironically, the way in which human dominion is exercised amounts to a form of self-limitation, although this is not intended. There is a tendency to feel that if something is technologically possible, then it should be done. Technology is of course limited in a variety of ways, but must limit itself for the good of humanity as a whole. McPherson (1986:240) points out that humankind has the power to destroy itself biologically, which would be either rapidly by warfare or slowly by the strangulation of pollution and unrestrained population growth. He writes that the misuse of this dominion is '... the self-contradiction of human *hybris*'.

Sovereignty expressed in self-limitation is of particular relevance to Christians, for Christ, *imago Dei* on person (Phlp 2:6, Col 1:15) limited himself, not grasping at power. It is significant that at least some early Christians saw dominion fulfilled in Christ, not in humankind as a whole (Psalm 8 is seen as fulfilled in Christ in Hebrews 2:6-8, cf Hall 1986:75f. Curtis 1984:14f, ably summarizes the early attitudes). If so, Christians would not have that mandate to exploit. Thus Ephesians 4:22-24 contrasts ungodly desire, the urge to exploit, with

... the new nature, created after the likeness of God

The image of God should not result in unrestrained power but in Christlike service even in suffering with the creation (Hall (1986:81) observes the context of Romans 8:29 here).

Although it is significant that pre-Rabbinic Judaism interpreted the *imago Dei* in the sense of dominion (Blocher 1984:80, who cites Ecclesiastes 17:3-5 and 4 Esdras 8:44), there are other understandings. Seeing it as referring to human spiritual nature is common, but an interpretation which locates it in the idea of relationship is of particular value to the role of man in the world. Thus Barth sees significance here in the plural 'Let us ...' and the creation of male and female in sexual relation (cf Hall 1986:76). With him, Moltmann (1988:9) naturally sees relationship in the Trinity as a key attribute of God, and therefore that creation, and especially humankind, should reflect not so much subjection but harmony. Likewise 'filling ...' is not merely a divine request that Adam and Eve have a lot of babies. The earth was also to be 'filled' by the broader patterns of their interactions with nature and with each other (Mouw, cited in Monsma 1986:39).

In this case, Blocher (1984:80) can point out that contrary to the common order of the day, the text forbids any elevation of particular men such as the king as especially in the image of God. Whereas Curtis (1984:80f) notes the frequent usage of the idea of 'image' in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, where it nearly always refers to the king, Westermann (1984:152f) discussing this issue, concludes that the biblical reference is to humans, not to the king. Anderson (1975:38, 42) agrees; he notes the absence of dominion over men

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in Psalm 8 (which he says includes the idea of 'image' by circumlocution), and that the plurals in Genesis 1 preclude this. Nevertheless, if the picture were connected to kingly rule, Attfield (1983:27) would be right in saying that this would be similar to the Hebrew concept of monarchy, not a despotic Egyptian or Mesopotamian one. Particularly as the Hebrew notion was of the king as God's vice-regent, such rule should be as God's, in love and care (Loader 1987:18). On this point, Elsdon (1981:104) cites Ps 72:8, 110:2, Is 11:1-4, Jr 33:15, etc. Significantly, at the time of exile, as at creation, there was no king. In this case, if the 'image' refers to the whole of humanity, there cannot be any elevation of one segment of humankind over any other segment in oppression.

It must be noted that Genesis 9:6, the third of only three references to the *imago Dei*, forbids murder because of human status and relation to God. It is surely not going too far to extend this to the non-violent (and even sometimes violent) acts of economic oppression?

Moreover, although capitalism can speak glibly of wealth creation, bringing something from nothing is an attribute of God that is not transferred to humanity. There can only be a measure of re-forming and distribution which is a way of producing more harmony between the material, animal and human creations. Likewise, healing is not something within human ability. The most that can be done is to relieve symptoms and to produce a situation where healing is more likely. Thus the healing of the earth is not within human ability but must have a spiritual cause. All that can be done is to arrange people, animal life and material in a way which will be harmonious. Overpopulation, which can only lead to friction, and pollution, which must be offensive, must be contrary to a harmonious rule of the earth, while use of resources should be not for one segment only but for all, and with an eye upon unborn generations.

Dominion is not a matter of brute force but is expressed, for example, in the naming of the animals (Blocher 1984:91), even though naming demonstrates authority. That a rule in harmony rather than in domination is implied in the creation narrative may be illustrated by other Old Testament references to creation such as Psalm 104, where dominion is absent but dependence and harmony is emphasized (cf Anderson 1984:12). Westermann (1984:159) points out that the command to rule must be read in the context of the ruling of sun and moon in Genesis 1:16, which means control and order, not exploitation or using at whim. Similarly of Genesis 1:29, he points out that no dominion is in fact given over the inanimate creation, but only over living things, and that even this cannot be exploitation as it does not involve death. This sees dominion not so much as absolute but stewardship on behalf of God (also Monsma 1986:46). From this perspective the story of the fall (although usually considered from a different source), can be seen as from a desire to avoid God's control and so limitation. Excess is inherent in the nature of sin.

Combining the ideas of dominion and of relation, it is possible to see the key idea of Genesis 1:28 as one of human stewardship over the created order. Many (e.g. Hall 1986), thus see God's rights over the world maintained by means of human stewardship. Such would be in keeping with the idea of the image as giving the authority of an absent king, so fits a context of Judah's subjection to foreign powers. Of course such a giving of stewardship indicates a self-limitation of God's own rule, but the qualification of the next verses indicates that this is no total abdication of authority. God is not leaving the earth, becoming totally transcendent. Humankind is being given real power over the earth; Von Rad (1961:58) comments that the words of Genesis 1:28 are very strong; but this power is used on behalf of God, not simply for human benefit. Barr (1972:21) notes the strength of the words, but doubts whether the full force is meant here. He sees rather a peaceful control.

Birch and Rasmussen (1978:113) comment:

Except for Genesis 1 this theme of human domination is found in the Old Testament only in Psalm 8. In both instances exercise of dominion is accountable to God; it is not license for human indulgence.

It is for this reason that 'rebellion' is such an apt picture of human sin, for rebellion is the appropriation of the authority of the overlord. The authority to subdue of Genesis 1:28 (*radah*) is usurped into rebellion (*marad*).

The *imago Dei* thus means that nature's welfare is dependent on humankind, just as it (which includes humanity) is obviously dependent upon God. It cannot mean a geocentricity of pantheistic harmony, or an anthropocentricity which sees all for the benefit of humankind, but a theocentricity which sees the existence of all in the world for the glory of God, and the duty of humanity such as to so deal with the world as to increase that glory.

5. Conclusion

It is only from a fundamentalist perspective which sees a text as valid for any person at any time rather than as having direct authority only to the original hearers, that Genesis 1:28 can be seen as a command to abuse the earth. A later reader can see the text as valid but in a derived way, and conditioned by an awareness of the original situation and of theological considerations. Treated in this way, although the text makes sense in the original setting and finds an application particularly in the post-exilic situation in Judah, it cannot in the present world be regarded as divine sanction for the poverty-producing practices which are common in the modern world. Rather it is a call for restraint in the rule over material and animate creation, for self-limitation, and for harmony both with fellow human beings and the rest of the world.

Such an attitude will be unpopular as so different from the way of life advocated particularly by the 'Christian' West. However, at the time of the exile, Judah survived by advocating its distinctiveness, especially the self-restraint of the Sabbath. In the same way there is a distinctive Christian

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approach to ecological problems such as excessive growth in population. Although Christianity may have been used as an excuse for the attitudes which have generated such enormous modern problems, it is not really the cause of them, but rather, especially in the light of the failure of secular economics to deal with the problems, it may provide the means of a solution to them.

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