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**TOPIC: “IMAGO DEI” AND THE PROBLEM  
OF DOMINION**

**A Franciscan Approach to the Integrity of Creation**

Supervisor

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Bachelor of Arts in Theology

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## Dedication

*I dedicate this Thesis to Julius Nkabu Nkonge – through whom my understanding of dominion, stewardship and respect for all has been sharpened, elaborated and experienced in his practical way of day to day living. May God bless him.*

## Epigraph

*“For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of the beasts is the same: as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts.” Eccl. 3:19*

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I thank Ms. Constance Gikonyo for taking her time to go through the text and suggest the necessary corrections.

And to you all, who journeyed with me in various moments of my intellectual growth, thank you and may God bless you all.

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## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

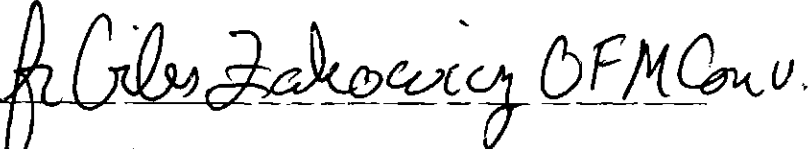
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay (thesis) is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full acknowledged.

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the College Supervisor

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## ABBREVIATIONS

*Scripture*

<i>Gen</i>	<i>Genesis</i>	<i>Lev</i>	<i>Leviticus</i>
<i>Wis</i>	<i>Wisdom</i>	<i>Sir</i>	<i>Sirach</i>
<i>Prov</i>	<i>Proverbs</i>	<i>Ps</i>	<i>Psalms</i>
<i>Mat</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Lk</i>	<i>Luke</i>
<i>Rom</i>	<i>Romans</i>		

*Franciscan Sources*

<i>AC</i>	<i>The Assisi Compilation</i>
<i>CIC</i>	<i>Canticle of Creatures</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>The Earlier Rule ( Regula non bullata)</i>
<i>LR</i>	<i>The Later Rule ( Regula bullata )</i>
<i>WSF</i>	<i>The Writings of St. Francis</i>
<i>1C</i>	<i>The First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano</i>
<i>2C</i>	<i>The Second life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano</i>
<i>1Lc</i>	<i>Exhortation to the Clergy (Letters to the Clergy) Earlier Edition</i>
<i>2Lc</i>	<i>Later Admonition and exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance</i>
<i>1MP</i>	<i>First Mirror of Perfection</i>
<i>2MP</i>	<i>Second Mirror of Perfection</i>

*Church Documents*

<i>RN</i>	<i>Rerum Novarum</i>
<i>QA</i>	<i>Quadragesimo Anno</i>
<i>MeM</i>	<i>Mater et Magistra</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Populorum Progressio</i>
<i>SRS</i>	<i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i>

*CCC* Catechism of the Catholic Church

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The future of mankind and of the planet Earth is in peril and despite warnings on this, the environmental situation continues ever more to deteriorate. Humanity should, therefore, be aware that it is suffering from a malaise caused by man's impaired relationship with the environment and by deteriorating social bonds.

There is a great need to understand that it is necessary to overcome resignation and fatalism and react by planning an alternative future which would be realizable and desirable. In order for this to be, there is an urgent need to change our present orientation regarding our dominion and exploitation of Mother Earth, (an orientation characterized by man's relationships with nature and that of men among themselves) and must be substituted by an attitude of sharing, respect and brotherhood among all creatures.

It is sad to note that the Judeo-Christian doctrine on the creation of the universe has been accused of creating the numerous problems we have experienced, especially regarding our understanding of the role of man as a care-taker of God's creation. Man is undoubtedly a superior creature among God's creation. The same Judeo-Christian doctrine emphasizes the idea of Man created in the image of God, "*imago dei*", a fact which gives him the power of "*dominion*" over other creatures.

This has become a problem throughout centuries as man fails to perceive that though he is created in the image of his creator, he nevertheless is a creature like all the other creatures.

## THE MOTIVATION AND AIM OF THE STUDY

In 1992, an Earth summit held in Rio de Janeiro brought into focus the reality of climate change, arguably the biggest challenge affecting the our world today. Years after this summit, an increased awareness of man's impact on our world's climate has been observed; but sadly enough, nothing much as been done to meaningfully address the problem. Man has not been able to grasp the fact that he is only a steward/manager on behalf of the landlord. God is the landlord and, therefore, no human being, no matter how clever or powerful has no right to exploit it

One may however claim that even though man's role is to be a steward/manager, he seems to have taken over the role of the landlord and even gone ahead to situate himself as much more superior to those whom he govern. Since some fingers are pointed at certain Judeo-Christian teaching as a possible source of much of this confusion, I decided to embark on a research to try and understand what the doctrine of the human person as "*imago dei*" really entails –whether it points to stewardship or to *dominion* and further to see what St. Francis of Assisi, Patron of the Environment, can teach us with respect to a proper approach to creation.

## APPLICATION OF THE STUDY TO AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN

African spirituality is rooted in the strong belief of the inter-dependency of all creation; in its origin, its existence and its final destiny. The Western world on the other

hand is now discovering the importance of taking care of creation as a constituent part of a new world spirituality.

We Africans have always been aware of the need to respect 'Mother Earth'. We have always paid attention to the 'spiritual' presence of ancestors. Some forests, trees, lakes, rivers, and mountains, as well as, some animals are considered 'sacred' which means they are not to be touched or abused. They are connected with prayer and cult, and also with human life.

Our-interconnectedness in our extended families, our clan and tribal affiliations are just but few pointers toward an African idea of respect for one another and our relationships with one another. Africans have a detailed and an experienced knowledge of our ecosystems and that the borders between the human world and the surrounding habitat are inter-changeable. However, the Western view of the world, a view that some would wish to impose on all, has already taken its toll through globalization and its effects, including the suffering of humanity (flood, desertification, storms, pollution, etc).

This world view has left a mark also on the traditional African spirituality of ecology. As modern African Christians, we need to learn again how to drink at the wells of our true beliefs. We need to reclaim our spiritual space in the dimension of our feelings through our intuition, our hearts and our rituals.

With this, an African will have fewer problems with his exercise of stewardship in creation and his understanding of the integrity of creation, since he will have a comparable approach in content to that of Western culture. This, then, can become a catalyst for the change in all humanity that needs to recover the awareness of being the responsible administrator of the earth; the responsible for the survival of all.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 Introduction

The concept of man as the *imago dei* is foundational for Christian anthropology. It informs the nature of humanity as human life and it defines the purpose of human beings both now and in the world to come as individuals and as corporate entities. Unfortunately, what it means to be the *imago dei* is often not clearly understood. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of the nature of the *imago dei* makes the nature, value and purpose of individual human beings and humanity in general much clearer.

The first and primary passage on the *imago dei* in the Old Testament (*Gen 1:26-28*) must be the starting point for any attempt at our Christian understanding of it. Rather than simply stating His intention and having it done, as was the case with His previous creative acts, God is portrayed as resolving this problem of the *imago dei* with foresight and planning the creation of human beings. His participation in this divine act is more personal and intimate. This announcement of a divine decree, (*Gen 1:26-28*) along with its placement at the end of the creation narrative, highlights the fact that humans are the apex, the climax, the goal of all creation.

The functional view of the *imago dei* makes humans the representatives of God as his viceroys. *Genesis 1:26* indicates that humans were given *dominion* over creation as a consequence of being created as the *imago*. They were to rule over all that God created, exercising God's authority through their own decisions. *Dominion* itself is not the

essence of being *imago* but a necessary result of the human person being the *imago*. In the ancient Near East the king was commonly accepted as the representative of the gods. He ruled by their authority and in their stead. It is likely that the same connotation applies here, except that it is humanity that is acting as God's representative rather than the king alone. The *imago dei* cannot be understood apart from this exercise of *dominion*. When God created the world, human beings were given a responsibility, to subdue the earth and have dominion over other living things. Going back to the original Hebrew, to "subdue" comes from the word *kavash*, which means to force someone into a subordinate position, as through a military conquest.<sup>1</sup> It seems that God was granting human beings power and control over the Earth. However, does this mean that humanity has the right to do whatever it want to God's creation, or does it mean we have the responsibility to take care of it? Dominion does not automatically mean harsh treatment of whatever we have control over. Nevertheless, for many unfortunate reasons, man has been accused of being the cause of untold woes that have befallen him mainly due to his misunderstanding of himself as "image of God" and having a correct understanding of "*dominion*".

St. Francis of Assisi is one person from whom we can learn a more authentic meaning of dominion and of being the image of God. Because of his reverence for God's creation in all its aspects, Francis has been honored by the universal church as the patron of nature. One of Francis' most famous sermons is one he gave to a flock of birds. In the Franciscan Sources we read that, one day, while Francis and some friars were traveling along the road, Francis looked up and saw the trees full of birds. Francis "left his companions on the road and ran eagerly toward the birds" and "humbly begged them to listen to the word of God." One of the friars recorded the sermon, which overflows with

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. BARR, *The Image of God in the Book of Genesis*, 36

Francis's love for creation and its Creator: "My brothers, birds, you should praise your Creator very much and always love him; he gave you feathers to clothe you, wings so that you can fly, and whatever else was necessary for you. God made you noble among his creatures, and he gave you a home in the purity of the air; though you neither sow nor reap, he nevertheless protects and governs you without any solicitude on your part."<sup>2</sup> (AC 88) From this sermon, we can learn that *dominion* was never part of Francis' language. All creation was for him valuable and revelatory since all creatures mirrored the beauty and love of the one God. As a result of this, he left us a rich legacy of the doctrine of the 'Integrity of Creation', cosmic peace and reconciliation. Drawing support from the Holy Eucharist as he said, "I beseech all of you, by whatever charity I can, that you show reverence and all honor to the most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, because (in Him) all things, whether on earth or in heaven *have been pacified and reconciled* with Almighty God."<sup>3</sup> (1LtCl)

## 1.1 SETTING THE PROBLEM

In the priestly source in Genesis on the creation of human beings we read: "God said: let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves." (*Gen* 1:26) In *Genesis* 1:27 we further read, "God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." The pagan myths of antiquity often presented human beings as the playthings of the gods, made to serve at their whims and fancies, to be taken up with labor the gods were too lazy to do for themselves.<sup>4</sup> However, for the authors of *Genesis*, the human being has an incredible dignity, created in the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 193

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 194

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. MULCAHY, E., *Class Notes - Christian Anthropology Course*, 2008

image and likeness of God, not as a slave or a plaything but to have responsibility over the earth.<sup>5</sup> Human beings are not created to minister to the gods but to civilize the earth. They are, therefore, entrusted as viceroys, representatives of God since they are created in his own “*image and likeness*”.<sup>6</sup>

The essence of an image consists in the fact that it represents something. It always points to some reality beyond itself. Nature as an image has to do with the fact that it goes beyond itself and that it manifests something that it itself is not.<sup>7</sup> As ‘*imago dei*’ (God’s image - representative) the human person is called upon to continue to preserve and maintain the world and all that exists in it. By preserving and developing everything which God has brought forth as a well ordered totality the human person shares in Yahweh’s creative (life-giving), sustaining (life-nurturing) and directing (governing) “*dominion*” over creation. As God’s representative on earth, the human person is called to be God’s steward, administering things in a manner consistent with God’s own way of ruling.

The *dominion* entrusted to humanity, like God’s own exercise of *dominion*, involves respect, protection and care rather than mastery and manipulation. Human beings are commissioned by God to fulfill certain tasks for the maintenance and management of the cosmos. Being the summit of creation, the human person is delegated to the royal function of being lord of the universe, and as the image of God, he has received a delegation from God to represent him upon the earth. Having been put in the garden to till it and guard it, human beings are thus called to be responsible gardeners.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Class Notes - Christian Anthropology Course, 2008*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Class Notes - Christian Anthropology Course, 2008*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Class Notes - Christian Anthropology Course, 2008*

However, “man”<sup>8</sup> has not always been a good viceroy of God. Many ecological crises have been attributed to him and evidence mounts daily that the crisis is of daunting proportions.

The gravity and scope of the ecological crisis at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century give unprecedented urgency to the task of rethinking the Christian doctrine of creation. Some critics like Polanyi of the Christian tradition argue that Christianity is a primary source of the ecological crisis<sup>9</sup>; and that Christianity is a major part of the problem rather than a possible part of the solution. They have pointed an accusing finger especially at the Judeo - Christian teaching that human beings alone are created in the image of God (*Gen 1:26a*) and that they are commanded to exercise “*dominion*” over all other creatures (*Gen1:26b*). Such teachings have been perceived to have given Western civilization religious justification for treating the natural environment in a ruthless manner; our wanton destruction of nature seemingly sanctioned in the name of fulfilling a divine command.

## 1.2 Creation of the Human Person

In every religion, what is sought with the help of the superhuman spiritual power revered by man is a solution to the contradiction in which man finds himself as both a part of the world of nature and a spiritual personality claiming the right and role dominate

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<sup>8</sup> The word “man” here is used as it has been for centuries in the English language to refer to the human race, male and female alike. No gender aspersions are meant by the word as I use it in many expressions in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. W. PANNENBERG, *Toward a Theology of Nature*, 24

nature.<sup>10</sup> This has led to the springing up of a variety of religions that expresses faith in superhuman spiritual power, through whose help, the power which man possesses of himself is, in some way, supplemented and elevated into a unity of its kind which (is a match) for the pressure of the natural world.<sup>11</sup> These kinds of ideas were brought forth and propagated by influential protestant theologians like Albert Ritschl, who saw nature as something that pressed upon man, something that man was called upon to dominate. The purpose of religion was, therefore, seen as to assist in achieving this dominance. However, this could be viewed as a separation of man from the rest of nature leading to a negative attitude toward nature.

The most fundamental impact of the idea of creation on the theory of man can therefore be simply formulated as "man is neither divine nor part of the divine".<sup>12</sup> The religious philosophies of the ancient world have given a unanimous verdict that man or at least a part of man shares essentially in the divine nature. This claim is negated by the doctrine of creation.

The priestly account of the book of Genesis in chapter 1 employs the Hebrew word *bāra*<sup>13</sup> to express the creative work of God. This word is used in the Hebrew Scriptures only for God's activity and it distinguishes His activity "as something unique and different from all creaturely activity. Only God is said to have "created," *bāra*".<sup>14</sup> A vision of a beautiful and an ordered world unfolds before us which is declared to be by God not only good but "very good". This gives us no trace of dualism, no false split

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. A. RITSCHL. *The Christian Doctrine of Doctrine and Justification and Reconciliation*, 199

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. COBB. *Is it Too Late?*, 83

<sup>12</sup> Cf. D. O'CONNOR, *Creation: The Impact of an Idea*, 107

<sup>13</sup> Cf. B. REY, "Man in Christ", in *A Christian Anthropology*, 11-30

<sup>14</sup> Cf. B. REY, "Man in Christ", in *A Christian Anthropology*, 11-30

between matter and spirit as may be the case in some cultures and in traditional Greek philosophies; rather there is harmony and wholeness expressed in matter and spirit.<sup>15</sup>

From the beginning, God seems to have marked out a unique destiny for human beings, because, unlike the rest of creation, man and woman are created in the *image and likeness of God*. This, of course, in no way means that “the image of God” refers only to the male. Contemporary exegesis convincingly argues that the function of the divine image applies equally to both the female and the male.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.3 Man: Image of God

What is the human being? This question is posed to every generation and to each human person, for in contrast to the animals the life of the human person is not simply determined and laid out in advance. We are created in the “*image and likeness*” of God. In ancient Hebrew, an “*image*” was a picture or statue which was an exact reproduction (image) of something. But are human beings an exact reproduction of God? Perhaps the author of the scripture found himself caught up with the realization that nothing can be exactly like God and, therefore, added “likeness” which can indicate mere similarity.<sup>17</sup>

Image and likeness of God would thus mean that “human beings are entirely apart from the rest of visible creation”. That which distinguishes human beings from these other creatures is shared with God, that humanity’s dignity is their Godlikeness. Yet, human beings “exist”; and to exist is to have ‘openness’, which is perhaps the best clue to the affinity between God and humanity.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. D. O’CONNOR, *Creation: The Impact of an Idea*, 108-110

<sup>16</sup> Cf. B. REY, “*Man in Christ*”, in *A Christian Anthropology*, 11-30

<sup>17</sup> Cf. D. O’CONNOR, *Creation: The Impact of an Idea*, 125

The Scriptures reserve exclusively to God the verb 'bāra'; only God is the subject of it. Originally, the verb meant 'to show something new,'<sup>18</sup> that which is proper to God. This is to cut short the old cosmogonic accounts that portrayed creation as a struggle of the gods with already existing monsters.<sup>19</sup> In Genesis 1:27, *bāra* appears twice, to draw our attention to the beauty and special importance of God's creation

*Selem* (image) refers to a concrete, external form of representation, like a carved statue. It has a background in the practice of Egyptian Pharaohs, who erected statues of themselves, throughout their kingdom to show that they were actually present in these statues. Against this background, perhaps, we could take Genesis 1:26 to mean that although only an image of God and not the divinity itself, humanity has been established as God's representative on earth in a unique way. *Demut* (likeness) refers more specifically to an internal relationship and similarity. Human beings are radically different from God but uniquely and intimately related to God, capable of personal relationship with God. This is the foundation of the inviolable dignity of human life. Care must be taken not to see in this resemblance a similarity in the physical order; this is because the Hebrew mentality was not accustomed to distinguishing between body and spirit. This resemblance or likeness means that man is like God and is the only one among earth's creatures, a person, to whom God speaks and who answers him.

The view that the term "image" means that humanity is endowed with a soul, and that the soul is the image of God, is far from the intention of the priestly author. This is because the view of the human person as composed of a body and a soul is purely a Greek idea. For Egyptians on the other hand, an image was to be the representative of

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. B. REY, "Man in Christ", in *A Christian Anthropology*, 11-30

<sup>19</sup>Cf. B. REY, "Man in Christ", in *A Christian Anthropology*, 11-30

the king in an area. If we apply the Egyptian notion of image to Genesis, then to be created in the image of God is to be God's representative on earth. This is underscored in *Gen 1:26*, in which humanity is given dominion over the earth. As God is ruler of the heavenly realm so humanity, as God's representative, is ruler of the earthly realm.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3.1 Male and Female

In the priestly source *Gen 1:26* we read, "God said: let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves", and *Gen 1:27* says, "God created man in the image of himself, male and female he created them." Equality is suggested by the fact that both man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God. Both man and woman mirror the almighty God. In *Gen 1:26-27*, the term man is mentioned twice here and refers inclusively to both man and woman. This is indicated in the first place by the Hebrew word for "man" (*Adamah*), which can be translated as humankind, humanity.<sup>21</sup> Let us make mankind in our own image (*Gen 1:26*). The second indication is the plural "them", which points to man as being a plurality consisting of both man and woman. The fact that *Gen 1:26-27* moves back and forth three times between the singular man and the plural clearly indicates that the term man is used collectively to mean both man and woman. The equal pairing of both male and female in parallel with Adam (man) in verse 27 shows that there is no hint of ontological or functional superiority - inferiority or

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. SACHS, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology*, 16

<sup>21</sup> Cf. B. JAMES, *The Image of God in the Book of Genesis*, 37

headship - submission between male and female. Both participated equally in the image and likeness of God.<sup>22</sup>

Here, we come to understand that both male and female mirror the Almighty. They are both created by God and neither is superior nor inferior to the other. They both “compliment the other in their bodies and their psychology”.<sup>23</sup> They each discover their being in relation to God who created them; each in the image and likeness of God, they are called to become like God. Such is their fundamental ultimate goal in the universe.<sup>24</sup> Hence both man and woman are called to be like God who has a vital active understanding and love. Because of that likeness, both man and woman must respond with all their thoughts, words and gestures; with their whole being. Both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God’s image. This image and likeness of God, which is essential for the human being is passed on by the man and woman as spouses and parents, to their descendants: “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” (*Gen 1:28*) Although all living things are somehow the image of God, because of the dynamic reality that is there, male and female are a more perfect approximation. They bear the bulk of the dynamic life and activity among creatures. He endows human persons with a strength of his own, and with power over all things else on earth (*Sir 17:3*). Thus, only male and female alone are gifted with a heart of understanding and love similar to God. Male and female are entirely a part from the rest of visible creation but their dignity lies in their Godlikeness.

Male and female have a specific dimension or area of likeness with God. This specific dimension or area is the “*ruah*” or spirit. T. Mouren claims “man is taken from

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. B. JAMES, *The Image of God in the Book of Genesis*, 38

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. VANIER, *Man and Woman He Maae :hem*, 49

<sup>24</sup> Cf. T. MOUIREN, *The Creation*, 30

the earth, as are the animals, but he is entirely different from them since he is animated as they are not, by the breath of God.”<sup>25</sup> It is through God’s spirit that both male and female participate in the supernatural order, and are open to the life and work of the spirit of God within them. Both male and female are the summit of all goodness God has poured on his creation.

The image of God is the whole human being, and it is in this image that both male and female encounters God.<sup>26</sup> The image grows correspondently closer and more freely and more responsibly as the spirit of both male and female respond to their maker. Of all creatures on earth, male and female alone are allowed this holy rapport with God since they ‘both the male and female’ originate from God’s agency.<sup>27</sup>

#### 1.4 The Priestly Stewardship

Many commentators view the verse, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it” (*Gen1:28*) as God’s command of commission to Adam and Eve and also as a text which shapes the human - earth relationship in the scriptures. In itself, “creation is seen as bringing order out of chaos,”<sup>28</sup> by “pushing back the wilderness and creating a garden and God himself taking delight in the garden.” (*Gen. 3:8*) While the harsh environment from which the Bible emerged left its mark in a preference for a tamed environment in which the human being was more closely bonded with the Divine than the natural world, this does not mean that the “injunction in Genesis can be interpreted as a license for the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. T. MUIREN, *The Creation*, 39

<sup>26</sup> Cf. S. GRENZ, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 88

<sup>27</sup> Cf. S. GRENZ, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 88

<sup>28</sup> Cf. S. MCDONAGH, *To Care for the Earth A Call to a New Theology*, 121

human being to do what they like with the Earth.”<sup>29</sup> The commission is best understood as an invitation to human beings to act as the viceroys of God. Ted F. Peters argues that this is the meaning of the Hebrew word *Rithdah* used in the text. Like the viceroy of the king, the human being is expected to be just and honest (be stewards) and not to exploit the Earth which God himself experienced as ‘very good.’<sup>30</sup>

This stewardship pictures human beings in harmony with nature, standing before God and ultimately responsible to God for their management of human affairs and of creation. Although the human being is separated from the rest of creation by being created in God’s own image, human dependence on the natural world, and the interdependence of the elements within the natural order itself, is not overlooked. Stewardship is a call to responsibility. “Responsibility is not something that can be taken lightly because, ultimately, the call to stewardship is a privilege bestowed on humankind by God.”<sup>31</sup> And as with all privileges, human beings will be held accountable for their stewardship. If they are caring and cultivate harmony in all their dealings with each other and the earth, then they grow in the image and likeness of God.

For the people of Israel, the demands of stewardship are very clear with regard to the land they occupied. They held the land in “common” which was given to them in “response to their fidelity.”<sup>32</sup> What is given is not outright ownership of the land to use or abuse as one pleases, but rather the right of tenancy. This is because Yahweh is portrayed as the true landlord, who decrees that ‘the land must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land belongs to me and you are only strangers and guests’ (Lev 25:23).

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. S. MCDONAGH, *To Care for the Earth - A Call to a New Theology*, 122

<sup>30</sup> Cf. T. PETERS, *Cry of the Environment*, 415-416

<sup>31</sup> Cf. S. MCDONAGH, *To Care for the Earth - A Call to a New Theology*, 123

<sup>32</sup> Cf. S. MCDONAGH, *To Care for the Earth - A Call to a New Theology*, 123

Incidentally, modern industrial agriculture would do well to recapture this respect for land. However, “the side-effect threatens the very survival of farming in every country where chemical farming is gaining a footing.”<sup>33</sup>

Besides calling for a stewardship towards God’s creation to be the *imago dei* is a call to a relationship towards those created beings that exist now and will exist in future. Human beings are called upon to situate themselves in the “sixth day of creation” our cooperation with God. We are called upon to preserve our eco-system and not turn the world into an ecological time-bomb, ready to explode at any time.

#### 1.4.1 Dominion

Webster’s dictionary defines dominion as “Supreme authority”. However, while we were granted dominion over God’s creation, our *dominion* was never intended by God to be tyrannical.<sup>34</sup> God entrusted creation to us as stewards. Many people believe it is acceptable to God or at least justifiable to exercise “*dominion*” regardless the pain, suffering and destruction or the negative effects caused to creation. We err in believing that we are free to exercise our *dominion* over all creation to the detriment and without regard to the intrinsic value and God-given propriety owed to creatures.

The issue of animal rights is gaining ground especially in Africa. This follows the issues on human rights and those advocating for it are proposing we extend the idea of right from humans to other animals. The love of animals and basically of all creation requires that we recognize that they too have value independently of us. They do not

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. S. McDONAGH, *To Care for the Earth - A Call to a New Theology*, 123

<sup>34</sup> Tyrant means a ruler who exercises absolute power oppressively or brutally, cruelly, harshly or severely.

exist just to be useful to us. They have value for themselves and for God. Our treatment of creation should, therefore, respect the value God has given them but, unfortunately, we do not always recognize it and even in the course of Christian history, much damage has been done through the misinterpretation of the first chapter of Genesis, with God's command to humans to 'have dominion' over other creatures on earth.<sup>35</sup>

This has been taken to mean that animals are simply there for our use; we can make whatever use of them we wish for our own benefit. This view has its origin in Greek philosophy, not from the Bible. With time this meaning was read into the Genesis text.

#### 1.4.2 What is Dominion?

Many Christians are now beginning to recognize that the special role in creation that God has given to humans is not of exploitation but of responsibility. Human '*dominion*' is understood in the context of and reflecting God's rule over his world, which is that caring, compassionate love for all creatures that is exemplified in the Psalms.<sup>36</sup> The rest of creation is not there just for human benefit (though, of course, we must use our environment to live as do all earthly creatures).

In an obvious exceptional but instructive instance, Noah exercises *dominion* when he preserves all the species of animals at the time of the flood (*Gen 6-9*). Also, the Israelites land law, with its rules about leaving the land fallow in the seventh year, includes a concern of the effect of agriculture on wild animals. These two examples are

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. H. BLOCHER, *In the Beginning*, 254

<sup>36</sup>Cf. H. BLOCHER, *In the Beginning*, 255

surely precedents for acting to preserve species in what amounts to a contemporary deluge of destruction of species and for taking care to preserve the habitats and resources that wild animals need, not monopolizing the world's resources for human use.

### 1.4.3 Fellow Creatures

*Gen 1:27* relates to the idea of the human '*dominion*' over other creatures. The word "*creatures*" envisages a 'vertical' relationship of humans to animals, in which humans are in some sense set 'over' other creatures. But the scriptures also use a 'horizontal' relationship in which we stand alongside other creatures. The key being simply that they and we are all creatures of God. This thought is just as prominent in the scriptures as the idea of 'dominion', but it has been given less attention. In my view, we shall only get the 'dominion' right if we also get the relationship of 'fellow-creatureness' right too. For example, the covenant God made with Noah was made not just with humans but with all living creatures (*Gen 9: 9-10*). When God speaks about the whole earth, as he does in this covenant, he thinks of all the living creatures to whom he has given it as home. Humans do not have exclusive rights to the earth. *Psalms 8* questions the dignity of man. All creation: (heavens, moon and stars) make God visible, but humanity has been created with a clear superiority over them.<sup>37</sup> This brings forth the question, "What is man?"

Human beings are creatures but crowned with glory and splendor. These two are both attributes of the divinity. We have received both so as to become lords and viceroys

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering?*, 42-43

on earth.<sup>38</sup> Human lordship and dignity are underlined by the image that all things are put under human feet as if they were a kind of footstool.

Human beings are placed within the community of God's creation as creatures who share God's earth with others. The most important way in which scripture sets us alongside the animals as fellow creatures is in its portrayal of the worship of God by all of creation. Other creatures do not worship God in the way we as human beings do; they do so by just being themselves. They exist for the glory of God and their worship of God expresses the value they have for him.

The best way to learn to value other creatures is to learn to worship with them, to recover the sense, so powerful in the book of Psalms, that our own worship is part of the worship of the whole creation. In worship we do not stand above our fellow creatures, but beside them and before God who created us all. Coming to appreciate the value they have for God raises our hearts and minds in praise to their creator.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering?*, 42-44

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 Introduction

Among the numerous saints that have adorned the history of Christianity, Francis of Assisi is one of those who still today exercises great attraction and meets with the approval of a great diversity of men. Francis of Assisi belongs to all and his influence spreads beyond Christianity. In our current disarray, many turn to him looking for that secret wisdom of which he knew and through which he brought a new quality of presence to the world.<sup>39</sup>

This new type of presence is the most precious gift that he gave to the world. It is a presence that is profoundly human as well as evangelical and cosmic. A total presence that has the gift “of converting all hostility into fraternal tension, within the unity of creation.”<sup>40</sup>

Our industrial civilization is in a *cul-de-sac*.<sup>41</sup> We are rightly proud of our scientific and technological progress. It has made human beings the “masters and possessors of nature”. However there is a very heavy price to pay. On one hand, our environment and our quality of life are threatened by the growing control of humanity

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. A. MASSERON, *The Franciscans*, 25

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. MASSERON, *The Franciscans*, 26

<sup>41</sup> Cf. J. MEYER, *Social Ideals of St. Francis*, 98-110

and technology over nature. On the other hand, an ever more pronounced technological exploitation of natural resources, with the only law being the law of profit, raises great human problems in the areas of unemployment and social justice.

Some scholars argue that Christians are responsible for the ecological crisis because they took God's command to have dominion over creation as a command to dominate and subdue it. (*Gen: 1: 27-28*) We should however note that, there is no religion which has been more focused on the human person than Christianity and none is more rigid in excluding all but the human person from divine grace and in denying any moral obligation to lower species.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.1 Unity of Creation

St. Francis of Assisi had a fraternal attitude towards creatures, which was far from being pure sentimentality, and which was inspired by a clear and profound understanding of creation.<sup>43</sup> There was nothing which could limit his peaceful gaze or even oppose the action of the spirit within him. He was as free as the wind. In a letter he wrote to all the inhabitants of the world, "he wished them the true peace from heaven."<sup>44</sup> (2Ltf). In doing so, Francis did not only want to unite men and women in peace but also wanted to extend that peace to all creation, reconciling men and women with nature. This desire for a fraternal presence in the world finds its expression in his Cantic of Brother Sun or Cantic of Creatures.

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. J. MEYER, *Social Ideals of St. Francis*, 113

<sup>43</sup> Cf. I. DELIO, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, 15

<sup>44</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE SAINT*, 41-45

### 2.1.2 Canticle of Brother Sun<sup>45</sup>

With this canticle, Francis is looking at himself as well as at the universe. Integration, harmony, balance, reconciliation and union, all these are expressed in the images of air-earth-fire-water and in the masculine - feminine components of the world.<sup>46</sup> This canticle is a celebration of the beauty of the world. It is a cosmic praise in the traditional biblical songs and Psalms pattern. However, a new dimension arises here: a desire for fraternal communion.<sup>47</sup> Francis rejects the spirit of domination and welcomes all creatures as brothers and sisters. He associates them with his highest destiny, identifies himself with them as originating from the same source, and with them, he raises himself up to God in praise.<sup>48</sup>

This fraternal communion with creatures is not sentimentality nor is it dreaming. It does not oppose the turning of natural resources to good account and their use by men and women. As well as their beauty, Francis celebrates their usefulness. There is, in this fraternal communion with creatures, a great love of life that is akin to and melts into that of the creator for his work. Francis came up with his religious respect for everything that exists. He condemned all human cupidity that rapes the earth and tortures life.

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<sup>45</sup> Francis had composed the first and largest part of the "Canticle of Brother Sun" in the early part of 1225 when he was staying with Clare and the Ladies at San Damiano. The mystical events of the previous fall at La Verna were etched deeply in his soul. He was lying in a little darkened hut next to the enclosure of the Poor Ladies. His cell became overrun by field mice who gave him no peace. He was nearly blind suffering from the effects of an eye infection. He probably had tuberculosis and was also afflicted by periodic bouts with malaria, dating from his journey to Damietta and the Sultan. He was very concerned over the state of the Order which seemed to sink to a new low as far as his ideals were concerned. Finally, there was the pain from the wounds of the stigmata in his hands, feet, and side. It was under these conditions that Francis composed the first part of this song. He was getting ready to bring his life to a close and hand himself over to his Lord Jesus.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. I. DELIO, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, 51

<sup>47</sup> Cf. I. DELIO, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, 57

<sup>48</sup> Cf. I. DELIO, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, 58

In the canticle, we find Francis placing himself as a brother alongside all other creatures of God - Brothers and Sisters sun, moon, wind, water, fire, and earth, as well as, peace and death itself.<sup>49</sup> We may wonder how Francis would have reacted had he known the elements in their beauty and power as revealed by modern research and invention. However, there would have been a pall on his delight in the thought that, whereas God gave these marvels to man for his welfare, “they are so often thoughtlessly exploited for the personal advantage of a few regardless of the harm resulting to the many.”<sup>50</sup>

St Francis would certainly grieve to see Sister Earth, “who sustains and governs us and produces various fruits, with flowers of color, herbage,”<sup>51</sup> (CtC 9) made the prize of ravaging exploiters who see in her and her produce only money rather than people’s livelihood; or to see sister water, “who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste,”<sup>52</sup> (CtC 7) harnessed so that fortunes are paid to designing financiers, instead of ensuring that the utmost in utility goes to the greatest number of people; or even to see indeed everything, both high and low, in the fine, the liberal and the industrial arts as well as in the sciences, estimated only for its money value, instead of brotherly factors for the welfare of all.

### 2.1.3 Francis and the Creature World

St. Francis found in the divine privileges bestowed on man motives for respect which amounted to reverencing of creatures as things for which and with which to praise

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. J. MEYER, *Social Ideals of Saint Francis*, 61

<sup>50</sup> Cf. J. MEYER, *Social Ideals of Saint Francis*, 61

<sup>51</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE SAINT*, 113-114

<sup>52</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE SAINT*, 113-114

God, rather than things to exploit selfishly.<sup>53</sup> For example, Francis could not see the wood in the trees. He wanted to see each tree as a separate and almost sacred thing, being a child of God and, therefore, a brother or sister of man.<sup>54</sup> (AC 88) He extends compassionate love to inanimate creatures, becoming indignant when someone does not treat them “courteously”. When the brothers go to the forest for wood, he asks them not to cut the trees down so much that they have no hope of sprouting again. Francis would be saddened when the entire garden was plowed for the planting of vegetables; he would command that one part be left untouched so that his sisters the flowers may go on growing freely.<sup>55</sup> (AC 88)

For Francis, inferior creatures are not just “creatures”; they are manifestations of the power of God, his messengers, a means though which man may know him and love him. He knows how to perceive in them beauty and goodness which raises him to the source of all good.<sup>56</sup>

According to Francis, those who ‘fraternize’ with the creatures open themselves to all that those creatures symbolize.<sup>57</sup> This is because they fraternize with that obscure part of themselves that is rooted in nature created by God. Francis on his part rejected nothing. He assumed everything in his surge towards God. His spiritual life did not take place in a separate universe. He went to God with his cosmic roots, with his “sister mother earth who carries us and governs us.”<sup>58</sup> (CtC 9) All duality is here overcome; the dark forces of life are transfigured into forces of light and a wolf is tamed.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. L. CUNNINGHAM., *Brother Francis*, 58

<sup>54</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG. et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 193

<sup>55</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG. et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 194

<sup>56</sup> Cf. L. IRIARTE DE ASPURZ, *The Franciscan Calling*, 161

<sup>57</sup> Cf. L. IRIARTE DE ASPURZ, *The Franciscan Calling*, 163

<sup>58</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE SAINT*, 113-114

Francis discovered the luminous meaning of creation through an interior experience of a new genesis. Celano says that, “He appeared to be, a new man, a man of the age to come.” (1C 82)

## 2.2 MAN: IMAGE OF GOD

### 2.2.1 Francis' Life

Francis' embrace of the leper, the marginalized person within medieval society, was the identified moment of his conversion.<sup>59</sup> (1C 12) After this experience he left the world to live among the lepers, and what before had been bitter now was sweetness and light.<sup>60</sup> (Test 3) His identification with the lepers was more than pity or a social protest. The leper helped Francis to understand his place in life, his place before God. He saw himself to be a poor man, like every person to be born naked and to die naked, *sine proprio*<sup>61</sup> before God. The brothers of his community were to be known as *minores*,<sup>62</sup> men who lived without appropriating anything to themselves. In effect Francis chose to walk through life with the poor, as one of them. He accompanied them and all those who could understand their identity as being utterly dependent on God. No one should lord it over another.

Francis had a deep love and respect for the poor, seeing them as the image of Christ, the son of a poor mother.<sup>63</sup> (2Cel 83) Once a friar spoke harshly to a poor man and

<sup>59</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE SAINT*, 195

<sup>60</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 533

<sup>61</sup> Means without appropriating anything belonging to oneself

<sup>62</sup> Latin word meaning “minor or lesser”. A word usually used to define the brotherhood and its mode of being before the world. (fratres minores – lesser brothers).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 263-393

Francis told the friar, “Who curses a poor man does an injury to Christ, whose noble image he wears, the image of him (Christ) who made himself poor for us in this world.”<sup>64</sup>(2C 52)

His love for the poor did not mean that he despised the rich. Indeed, Francis cautioned his friars not to look down on those “wearing soft or gaudy clothes and enjoying luxuries in food and drink (2C 39) All the brothers of the brotherhood were equal, no matter what their social or economical background; no one was to cling to an office within the brotherhood. This clearly shows us that Francis saw in every particular person the image of God and as such, being equal, dominion over the other was completely out of question.

### 2.2.2 Francis’ Option for the Poor

Throughout the centuries Franciscans have been challenged to make their own the words of Francis. “The rule and the life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of their own, and in chastity.”<sup>65</sup> (LR 1) While each vow has offered its particular challenges, it is undoubtedly safe to say that poverty has generated the greatest amount of debate and the sharpest polemic Saint Francis among the sons of. Over the years, the controversy has centered on the question of whether or not it is possible to live the radical poverty of Jesus Christ as espoused by Francis and his earliest followers.

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 303

<sup>65</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 99

An insistent cry arising from the third world, serves as a catalyst for various documents of the Vatican II and several other papal pronouncements which has made us aware of the dehumanizing poverty that is the characteristic situation of so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.<sup>66</sup>

Those who aspire to be the brothers and sisters of St. Francis should follow him in spirit to go among lepers of the world today.<sup>67</sup> They ought to show preference for the marginalized, for the poor and the oppressed, for troubled, and the sick, and be happy to live among them and show compassion. They should always see them as the “image of God”, a brother or sister, equal in dignity. They ought to look at what is happening in the world from the perspective of the poor, in fellowship with all those considered unimportant.

### 2.3 Franciscans and a Renewed Call to Opt for the Poor

Even during the lifetime of Francis, the question of poverty had become controversial among the friars.<sup>68</sup> (IMP 11) It is not surprising then, that more than 30 years after the death of Francis, when St. Bonaventure was elected Minister General of the Order he was soon embroiled in the controversy and found it necessary to defend the virtue that was so near to the heart of his spiritual father. In his first encyclical letter,<sup>69</sup> he encourages the friars to embrace poverty, since according to the scriptures, ‘she is a tree

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<sup>66</sup> From the various church encyclicals on the “Social Teachings of the Church” e.g., *RN, QA, MeM, PT, SRS, PP, GS*.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE FOUNDER*, 533

<sup>68</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE PROPHET*, 168

<sup>69</sup> J. BOUGEROL, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 22

of life to those who lay hold of her, and those who hold her fast are called happy.' (*Prov* 3:18)

However and for all his concern, Bonaventure differed from Francis in treating the question of poverty. Francis' conversion was effected through contact with those who were most despised by society, and his vocation was sustained by constant encounter with the crucified and poor Jesus Christ in and through the poor of the world who were likewise crucified.<sup>70</sup> (Test 1-2) His was a relational approach to poverty, one in which those who suffered the effects of concrete poverty in their lives played an essential role. By contrast, the poverty defended by Bonaventure was more of an entity-in-itself, one that could be measured without reference to the poor of the world. This lent itself to scholarly discussion, and the stage was thus set for centuries of debate about the concept of poverty with little regard to those who, in fact, were poor and lived it in the flesh.<sup>71</sup>

Today, there is a new urgency for Franciscans to reconsider the issue of poverty or, expressed in a more contemporary manner, to make a "preferential option for the poor." Franciscans, faced with the enormous poverty of masses of our brothers and sisters throughout the world, are challenged to renew the spirit of their Father in our midst. They are invited to take this step by the cries in the third world countries.

Francis responded to the condition of poverty in his day with a literal and immediate embrace of those who were poor. Followers of Francis are called to do no less. However, they can only fashion our contemporary "option for the poor", in Francis' model of "accompaniment". Here, accompaniment means to walk with those on the margins, to be with them, to let go. Through this encounter with Christ at the margins,

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE SAINT*, 125

<sup>71</sup> Cf. M. GASNICK, *The Francis' Book 800 Years with Saint Francis from Assisi*, 54

they, who with Francis once saw the poor only as the 'other', the feared one, the object of dread, then pity, then charity, can as individuals and societies, experience a profound, ongoing, spirit - led conversion of heart, soul and mind. Slowly our centers of gravity move outside of ourselves and we find ourselves suddenly dancing with the Poverello and his despised friends in unknown places and with great joy.

For Francis, the decision to come down off his horse to embrace the leper, to accompany those who inhabited the margins of society, was a difficult and protracted one. Once made, however, it oriented the rest of his life and brought him into contact with the source of life who is God himself. He identified himself with the image of God in the poor and the despised in the society. A decision to walk with the outcasts of society will likewise bring them into contact with the suffering Jesus who brought life through his death on the cross, and will reanimate their desire to follow in the footsteps of the Poverello.

## **2.4 Integrity of Creation**

Francis' profound love for God and for all God's creation is powerfully expressed in the Canticle of the Creatures. Celano says, "In every work of the artist he praised the Artist; whatever he found in the things made, he referred to the maker. He rejoiced in all the works of the hands of the Lord and saw behind things pleasant to behold their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he saw beauty itself; all things were to him good." (2C165) St. Bonaventure writes; "of all creation he made a ladder by which he might mount up and embrace him who is all desirable." (LM 9:1)

### 2.4.1 Francis as a model of Non - Violence (peace-maker)

For eight centuries, “Peace and all Good” has been used as a greeting by the Franciscan family.<sup>72</sup> Any greeting, however, can be an empty formula without a reality dwelling inside the wisher. For Francis the peace he wished sprang from his inner peace and his deep reverence for every creature that came from God’s hand. The secret of Francis as a peacemaker was that he let God inside himself bring peace to those he met. When the wolf of Gubbio ran ferociously toward him, Francis made the sign of the cross over the fierce animal and called him “brother.”<sup>73</sup> These two actions re-introduce the wolf to his place inside the family circle of God’s creatures, reconciled by Christ’s love manifested on the cross. The wolf calmed down after receiving the benefit of redemption and was ready to listen to Francis’ reproaches and to his request of a pact with the inhabitants of Gubbio.

Francis instructed his brothers not to get into arguments in their preaching and to “be gentle, peaceful, unassuming, and courteous and humble.” (LR 3) However, this does not imply fear of truth; Francis himself did not refuse to be challenging. Respectfully but stubborn, he resists the pope and his advisers who want to mitigate his Rule,<sup>74</sup> (AC 18) he challenges the crusaders and their sinful actions, he tells the sultan that he does not know the true God, he resists his own brothers who want a less rough life, (1MP 3) he throws away the tiles of the roof of the friary of which he disapproves (2C 27); and to the wolf of Gubbio he points out his crimes without any ambiguity.

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<sup>72</sup> M. GASNICK., *The Francis’ Book 800 Years with St. Francis of Assisi*, 131

<sup>73</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi. THE FOUNDER*, 104

<sup>74</sup> Cf. R.J. ARMSIRONG, et al., *Francis of Assisi, THE SAINT*, 382

Francis does not only respect the sacredness of his opponent, but he tries to make opponents conscious of their own divine preciousness that they may have forgotten or disdained. He sees the sacred presence of God in people and his spiritual eye allows him to see and reach the divine presence in the others, whereas many would like to kill them.

#### **2.4.2 The Respect for the Sacredness of Every Person and All Creation**

It is an awesome challenge for us to revere the sacredness in every human; a bandit, a war criminal, a torturer, a dictator, a pitiless landowner or corrupt people. It is also a challenge to respect the sacredness of every creature in the midst of the ecological crisis leading the earth to destruction. The problem is not only to be respectful and brotherly toward a fierce wolf, the plants of our garden and the water of the torrent we encounter along our way, but, to recognize the sacredness of the air and water and land and all the species on the planet.<sup>75</sup>

Earth resources belong to humankind as a whole and most dramatically we ourselves are compromised in their pollution and destruction. It is a challenge to see greed destroying all the resources of the earth: plants, animals, minerals, the cultivable lands and even the earth's beauty so needed for human development. All these creatures have their role in the construction of the cosmic Christ, a community of free beings able to survive and together to witness the tenderness of God.

If we do not recognize our own dignity, if we are not in intimate contact with the triune God dwelling within us, if we are contaminated by the way of making every reality an "object - objects" that we can count, then, even love ceases to be a precious mystery

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. L. IRIARTE DE ASPRUZ, *The Franciscan Calling*, 240

and becomes a thing, and the presence of the one who is love, who establishes our sacred dignity, becomes hard to acknowledge.

### 2.4.3 Human Rights

The most marginalized members of any society are at greatest risk of having their individual and collective human rights pushed aside. Before his conversion, Francis did exactly that to those suffering from leprosy. However, all that changed one day when Francis met a leper on the road, dismounted, gave him some money and then kissed him. Some days later, he visited the dwelling places of lepers and did the same “thus he exchanged the bitter for the sweet.” (Test 3)

Human rights, a popular term in recent times, are an expression of collective consciousness and a symbol of the struggle of many social movements and of entire peoples. Although officially recognized in worldwide declarations, conventions, and in national constitutions, human rights are actually like a confluence of many waters from which continue to emerge new liberties, rights and responsibilities for individual persons and peoples in the entire world.

The famous “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (UDHR)<sup>76</sup> assumes the defense and protection of all people, protecting their freedom and rights against any discrimination, with equality under the law applied in all fairness. Human Rights are for all human beings or else they lose their validity.<sup>77</sup> The ancient Romans recognized the

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<sup>76</sup> On December 10, 1948 The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. M. DANEEL, *African Earthkeepers*, 152

distinction between *ius in re* and *ius in spe*, the actual rights that people truly have and possess and the rights that are just a hope, an ideal not yet realized.

Within the vast sphere of modern human rights, the inspiration that Francis of Assisi communicated to his brothers appears to be something strange, distant, a useless, instrument. Certainly, Francis was conditioned by the historical, political and ecclesiastical context of his time, but he overcame these limitations by his reading of the Gospel and his courage to take it on as a personal way of life and lifestyle in the world. The term “human rights” is however not part of the vocabulary of Francis. But, he had an open communication with lepers and princes, leaders and beggars, the elite and the poor, plus the profound respect with which he treated all creatures was an uncommon human experience. Francis is capable of motivating new generations to confront the unreal suffering of those without fundamental human rights.

Called a “fool”, Francis did not know any of the social and economic indicators, tables and statistics that circulate in the modern world. Nevertheless, he penetrated deeply the reality of his time and reformed it.

Dominated by the papal and imperial powers, the middle ages did not provide a favorable climate for the formulation of the rights of any human person. The language that prevailed in philosophy and theology was generic and universal, with little interest in the concrete. However, two Franciscans namely Duns Scotus and William of Ockham broke this mold.

Dun Scotus stressed on the individuality of people and things, created in the image of Christ. He said that the “love of God does not work with concepts and abstract

categories but with individuals who have a name and a face.”<sup>78</sup> William of Ockham continues the same thrust and for him “God creates people and things, single and diverse, in full liberty. Opposed to the concentration of power, Ockham became the “father of the Conciliar Church,”<sup>79</sup> giving an active voice to the faithful and their representatives in the building up of the Body of Christ on earth.

For Franciscans, Francis is the way to the living gospel that is the Lord Jesus. Open solidarity with all, in order to save all, marked the life of Jesus and Francis of Assisi. The Franciscan movement encounters the reason for its vitality and work in this vast panorama of love, dedication and service.<sup>80</sup>

The brothers are called to help the poorest, neediest and marginalized to lift up their heads and obtain their dignity by securing their rights. Despite a secularized formula, human rights incorporate the justice of God and Christian hope, and the encounter of human rights which is to save creation, still groaning with the sufferings of these times. (*Rom 8*)

According to the model of Francis, the brothers do not live for themselves but for others within and outside of the institutional church.<sup>81</sup> Within this life of service, human rights, helps one to discover the Human needs in the face of the poor and suffering people. The preferential option for the poor is an obligation for those who commit themselves to the Gospel, since the criteria of the final judgment on humanity is our solidarity with the least of our brothers and sisters. Every time that you did good to the

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. M. GASNICK, *The Francis' Book 800 Years with St. Francis of Assisi*, 98

<sup>79</sup> Cf. M. GASNICK, *The Francis' Book 800 Years with St. Francis of Assisi*, 104

<sup>80</sup> Cf. J. MEYER, *The Words of St. Francis*, 40

<sup>81</sup> Cf. J. MEYER, *The Words of St. Francis*, 40

least of my brothers and sisters, the small, poor, abandoned, sick, marginalized and excluded in the society, you did it for me. (*Mt 25:31-46*)

Learning how to enter into the sphere of human rights on behalf of the poor, ill-treated, and marginalized is not easy. Franciscans are not accustomed to be without housing, jobs, food, services, school and money. Even though it may be against their will, they easily manage privileges; money for their works, gracious assistance and social support in case of a legal process or prison that may result from the struggles in which they participate on the side of the poor, though at times they may forget their call to fight “for” and find themselves fighting “against” the poor.

The Franciscan mentality that has nothing of one’s own “except for our vices and sins,” (ER 17,7) opens the door to ordinary work in the world and the church and the collaboration in local movements, non-governmental organizations and official state services in the area of Human Rights, quality of life, ecology and world wide politics. It is in this context that the “*image of God*” in creation will be evidenced.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 Introduction

Care for God's creation is an intrinsically religious issue. God is the creator of our universe. The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls our attention to this fact "Our creed begins with the creation of heaven and earth, for creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works" (CC 54). The covenant made with Noah (*Gen 9:9-11*), was a covenant made with all creation, and it reminds us that although humans are unique and special in God's eyes, we share creaturehood with the rest of creation and must exercise a stewardship of care and responsibility for the sake of God's creation and for future generations.<sup>82</sup> Our liturgy and Christian spiritual tradition especially that of the Franciscans, point towards a respect for creation and a view of creation as sacramental, revealing the presence of God.

Our linkages of justice for creation with justice for those on the margins of society conceptually and practically emerge as a great task. It offers the church as a whole, a unique role and opportunity to join both the dimensions of environmental justice protection and care of God's creation and justice for the poor and vulnerable.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. B. ANDERSON, "Creation in the Old Testament", 65

<sup>83</sup> Cf. D. CHRISTIANSEN, 'And God Saw it was Good', 110

### 3.1 Environmental Responsibility

Each and everyday of our lives on earth we have looked at the world and seen that it is good. We have delighted in its beauty, been grateful for the good things that provide us with shelter, food and clothing.<sup>84</sup> Sadly enough all this remains at the level of sense knowledge and it is never internalized, and perhaps that is why many of us know too little about the functioning of the world and the interconnected web of life on our planet. Therefore we can do harm without knowing what we are destroying.

Questions on ecology have a moral dimension for Christians who ought to rediscover a religious character in their attitudes towards other created things.<sup>85</sup> We have been familiar with the prayers of the Psalms in which all creatures are called upon to give glory to God and to bless the Lord. (*cf. Psalms* 96:11-13; 148:1-4,7-10) This invites us to reflect on a new Christian “responsibility within creation and our duty toward nature and the creator” as an “essential part of our faith.”<sup>86</sup>

Christians must learn to appreciate the beauty of creation. Our contact with nature has a deep restorative power and our contemplation of its magnificence imports peace and serenity. In order to achieve this, a serious examination of our lifestyles is needed and it is only possible once it is lead by a desire for conversion. This could be a conversion from ignorance to true knowledge, from selfishness to caring, from merely “using” to respecting and to a religious awareness.

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. I. BRADLEY, *God is Green*, 98

<sup>85</sup> Cf. G. HENDRY, *Theology of Nature*, 65

<sup>86</sup> Cf. I. BRADLEY, *God is Green*, 100

As I have already stated earlier, '*dominion*' properly understood, demands a total respect for all created reality. The Bible itself rules out selfish exploitation in a passage from the Book of Wisdom. "God of our ancestors... in your wisdom you have fitted human beings to rule the creatures that you have made, to govern the world in holiness and saving justice." (*Wis 9:2*) Vatican II took up this text and said: "Men and women were created in God's image and commanded to conquer the earth with all it contains and to rule the world in justice and in holiness; they were to acknowledge God as maker of all things and relate themselves and the totality of creation to God, so that through the dominion of all things by the human race the name of God would be majestic upon the earth."<sup>87</sup>

The Bible is concerned with religious truths. In the first creation account two religious truths are made quite clear. Firstly, created in God's image, human beings are able to relate to God, to enter a relationship of interpersonal communion and intimacy. This is not just an incidental feature of human nature; relationship to God enters essentially into the structure of human existence; it is a condition of life and death. Secondly, being in God's image also means relationship to the rest of creation. The way human beings relate to the world and accept responsibility for it centers essentially into their relationship with God. The dominion is not one of selfish exploitation. The aim rather is to further the goodness, order and development of the world, to bring it to full achievement of its goal through respect for the sovereignty of God.<sup>88</sup> This is all that the Franciscan spirituality on ecology calls for.

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. D. CHRISTIANSEN, "*And God Saw it was Good*", 109

<sup>88</sup> Cf. D. CHRISTIANSEN, "*And God Saw it was Good*", 112

### 3.2 Threats and denials to Created life

With its stress on the inherent dignity and value of each creature, the Franciscan vision of life stands in sharp contrast with many other visions evident in our modern world. Some of these alternatives are in direct contrast to the Franciscans vision. Others are distortions or exaggerations of visions which properly understood can save life. Every vision proposes either implicitly or explicitly, a hierarchy of values.<sup>89</sup> Human actions will ordinarily reflect the operative values a person's culture adopts. Important to grasp is that one must look at the operative values since many people will in theory endorse a Christian, even specifically, a Franciscan set of values. But the moral practice of a person or the actual value enshrined in a given culture may differ considerably from those professed. This is not just a matter of hypocrisy (saying one thing and doing another) or moral weakness (not living up to one's commitments) but a moral blindness (not being self-critical enough to realize there is a discrepancy between beliefs and actions). The remedy is not to scold or condemn but to assist people in uncovering in their own lives and in their society the forces which truly direct and motivate behavior.

### 3.3 Ecological justice: Nature as a Sacrament

A reflection on ecology has entered a new phase, definitively leaving behind the space and the stages of simple conservation and preservation of nature. Now the environment is considered in its multiple relationships, embracing both the natural

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. C.B. MUCKENHIRN, *The Image of God in Creation*, 55

environment and human culture and society.<sup>90</sup> In this integral perspective, social ecology highlights the possible interactions between all beings whether living or non - living, natural or cultural. It is within this search for a balance in the whole eco-system, that the question of ecological justice must be situated.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the question of whether respect for human rights also includes the rights of the earth, and vice-versa needs to be asked. In other words, how is social justice linked to ecological justice? And in a Franciscan perspective, how does our commitment to justice and peace include safeguarding creation?

Each living or non - living being is part of a subjectivity and not objectivity and has an internal value, a mission. On the other hand it is a relative being. It is in permanent relation with its creator and with other beings, since we have all come from the same source or the same creator.

One of the most significant marks of St. Francis spirituality is his acute sense of the presence of God in creation and in human history. Every being, every thing is a gift from God. He exhorted his brothers to attribute nothing to themselves, to keep nothing for themselves, at all times and in every place to give glory to God for “the marvels that God does” in them and in the universe. “Let us return all goods to the most high and sovereign Lord God; let us recognize that all goods belong to him; let us give him thanks for everything, for all goods comes from him.” (ER 17:17-18)

Everything speaks to us of God and sends us back to God.<sup>92</sup> The universe in its unity as well as its diversity is a sacrament of God, a “ladder” that leads us to the creator. (2Cel. 165) “The whole world is a shadow, way, vestige, it is the book written outside,”

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. C.B. MUCKENHIRN, *The Image of God in Creation*, 30

<sup>91</sup> Cf. I. BRADLEY, *God is Green*, 10

<sup>92</sup> Cf. C.B. MUCKENHIRN, *The Image of God in Creation*, 71

writes Bonaventure. (Hexaem, 12, n.14) For both Francis and Bonaventure, “God is everywhere and at the same time he is nowhere. God is at the end of the road of conformity to Christ and of ecstatic contemplation. But he is also there, on the road, close to the one who searches for him, even in the depths of each creature and especially in our own depths”. In everything and in every event God is present. “God is intimately present to his creatures.” (Bonaventure, *De Scientia Christi*, q.2) That extraordinary love that Francis brought to beings and things flows from this. He entered into a fraternal and respectful communion with all that lives and all that is. For this supremely Christian’s soul, loving the works of God and loving God was the same thing.

From this also flows that wonder, expressed often in canticles of praise and thanksgiving, before the diversity and the gratuity of the creator that finds its origins in the superabundance of Trinitarian love “For”, wrote Thomas of Celano “the good that is the source of all things. appeared already in this life, in the eyes of the saint, to be everything in all things.” (2 C 165) This aesthetic and religious union is opposed to the purely scientific and materialistic conceptions of the world, in all their diverse forms.

The universe, created in harmony and for harmony is like a great family whose elements in their variety is interdependent and forms a single universal fraternity. This conception of the unity of the world is profoundly rooted in the biblical visions of creation.

On the one hand, salvation history involves human history but also the entire cosmos in its openness to the divine promises. As we read in Rom 8:22 that “From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth.”

On the other hand, human beings themselves were created from the earth and the name “Adam” (*Adamah*) reminds them of their terrestrial origins. And through “Our sister bodily death from whom no human being alive can escape,” (CtC 12) they will return one day to the mother earth who saw them come into the light, (*Gen 1:3*) according to the eternal law of life of all creatures. Humanity is in communion with nature in life as well as in death.

In consequence, humanity should extend ethics and justice to nature, to all peoples who live on the earth for in destroying the environment they destroy their own habitat. The goods of creation are not and should not be reduced to the economic interests of humanity alone:<sup>93</sup> they are destined for the universal harmony of all beings. “God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good.” (*Gen 1:31*) The adjacent “good” must be understood here in its global sense all-encompassing that is ontologically and not simply in the exclusive sense of an economic good.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.5 Respect for Otherness

Everything and every human being has its intrinsic value, an “individuality” to be respected and loved stones, plants, birds of the sky, worms of the earth, lepers or beggars of the road ...all Gods creatures have a right to existence and none of them belongs completely to us: They are “different”, “other” distant and in consequence not subject to our domination.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. I. BRADLEY, *God is Green*, 15

<sup>94</sup> Cf. D. CHRISTIANSEN, *And God Saw it was Good*, 229

<sup>95</sup> Cf. D. CHRISTIANSEN, *And God Saw it was Good*, 325

A Franciscan ecological spirituality brings us before the challenge of transcending ourselves to enter into the universal community of all beings. Taken in its complex relationships with the universe, our life enlarges our sense of responsibility towards ourselves and others. This requires an inclusive attitude towards all the beings that we meet on our way, including those of the natural world. At the same time it requires a contemplative look of wonder when faced with the diversity and the mysterious singularity of each of them, inclusively without any appropriation, a solidarity that includes a profound respect for otherness.

Therefore, Franciscan spirituality centered on an integral vision of life on the dignity of the earth and the intrinsic value of each being in the universe, refuses to see the natural world and the human being purely and simply as capital to be exploited. We must distance ourselves both from an irresponsible sacramentalism that is from an idea of unlimited progress that the earth and its systems cannot support.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Cf. I. BRADLEY, *God is Green*, 18

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

It is certain that the Bible portrays human beings as unique before other creatures. Gen 1:27 tells us that they are '*created in the mage of God,*' something which does not seem to apply to any other creatures. Much effort has been expended in trying to establish what this phrase means and specifically to work out in what ways human beings resemble God. Is it in possessing reason or in having an immortal soul? In fact modern Old Testament scholarship suggests that the Hebrew word traditionally translated as "*image*" might rather more faithfully be rendered as "representative" and conveys the idea of man as God's agent on earth. Such an interpretation opens the way to seeing humans as stewards of creation rather than its lords. But even if we keep to the traditional idea of the *imago dei* and see man as being made uniquely in the optic of God we arrive at a similar idea of his position *vis-a-vis* the rest of creation.

If the phrase "*image of God*" has been misunderstood over the Christian centuries this has been even truer of the key word "*dominion*" which is used in *Genesis* 1 to describe the proper relationship between humans and the rest of creation. As a whole the Old Testament stresses the oneness of human beings and other living creatures that derive from their membership of the category of *nefesh haya* (*living soul*) *Genesis* 2:7. But, it also sees a more fundamental relationship in binding man with the rest of creation. There

is no word in ancient Hebrew corresponding to our word “nature” and that is simply because the ancient Israelites had no concept of a separate world of nature existing over and against the whole of human beings.

In a way, the doctrine of human dominion over the rest of creation could be blamed for various environmental disasters which Christianity has been blamed for producing. Presently in Kenya, we are experiencing drought, hunger and disease, which have resulted due to our negligence over the environment. Our water catchment areas have been encroached upon, we have interfered with the natural resources like the harvesting of trees without replacement for our daily use, we have polluted our air and water due to our desire for selfish gain and the list continues. St. Francis, after identifying himself with the rest of creation could never accept such abuse as we are witnessing today taking place.

God does not give dominion to any creature which has not received his image. And the image of God is love. Other things belong to God but, He Himself is Love. When Jesus told his disciples “in as much as you did it to one of the least of your brethren you did to me,” (*Lk. 9:48*) was he perhaps indicating that we should feed the dumb animals as well as the starving in our communities? To pray for the endangered species of plants and insects as well as for the homeless and the suffering humanity? To me this is certainly how St. Francis interpreted this statement when he called all creatures his sisters and brothers. He has more to tell us than just being brothers and sisters to one another and to all creation. He has shown us how we can find God through all. This is because he began with a contemplation of the world and all its fullness and that it was his wonder at the splendor of creation that directed him to God. In his treatise, “*The Soul's*

*Journey to God*," Bonaventure begins with a similar contemplation of the world and all the creatures within it: "Whoever is not enlightened by such splendor of created things is blind."<sup>97</sup> Many of the great mystics have shared the same experience beginning their spiritual journey by seeing God in the mirror of his creation and being led on to rise higher in contemplation.<sup>98</sup>

It is all too easy to sentimentalize nature and to think only of bunches of flowers and birds singing in the trees while forgetting the suffering, the sacrifice and the conflict that makes nature red in tooth and claw, as well as, lush and green. But it is also easy to ignore the message of nature and, therefore, fail to see God. Perhaps it is time we revived the traditional discipline of natural theology, not so much in its old form of finding proofs for God's existence in the order and design of the universe but in an appreciation that he can be found in and through the nature.

With all this awareness, Franciscans should surely be encouraging the pursuit of scientific study and natural history. However in doing so, we should avoid being dragged into the twentieth century's understanding of science and especially biology, which is associated with genetic engineering, food technology, modern methods of birth control and other practices which seem to be manipulative and exploitative of nature and to be wholly commercial in their purpose.

Conflict resolution, peace building, justice and a proper rule of law should be areas where Franciscans, following the footsteps of St. Francis, should actively engage themselves. Franciscans should also be in the frontline in the fight for the marginalized, the poor, refugees, the sick and the less privileged in the society if they have to maintain

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. BONAVENTURE, *The Soul's Journey to God*, 77

<sup>98</sup> *Mystics like Clare of Assisi, Meister Eckhart and Sanjeev Bhalla.*

their relevance in the world today. Although St. Francis did not openly and clearly present the idea of creation being created in the image and likeness of God, his words and actions prove that he identified all creation from the same source and sharing the same destiny.

Man's end in creation, as St. Francis tried to demonstrate by his life is that he should be the viceroy of the great God of heaven and earth in this inferior world. He is to be a steward, a farmer of this goodly farm of the lower world. It is only for this reason, I believe, that man was vested with power, authority, right, dominion, trust and care, to correct and abridge the excesses and cruelties of the fiercer animals, to give protection and defense to the tame and useful, to preserve the species and improve them with responsibility as he preserves the face of the earth, its beauty, usefulness and fruitfulness to make all live in peace.

This notion of stewardship takes up the biblical theme of dominion in a way that respects God's sovereignty over all the earth. A good steward acts as a faithful deputy of God sustaining his creation and preserving it for future generations. Stewardship involves accountability and we are answerable to God for the way we manage his world during our time here. It also suggests an active and creative role in respect of the earth which we have been given responsibility for. We are to be the gardeners as well as the guardians.

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