

Biblical Models of Co-Existence with Nature in the Light of *Laudato Si*

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Introduction - Models of Caring for Creation

The Bible and Christian tradition have some vital and profound insights into the care of the 'environment - nature' as God's creation. Biblical history and Church teachings have also proposed various ways and means for co-existence with nature. Unmindful of Hebrew or Christian revelation, many people saw the Divine working through nature. For early humans the world was alive with spirits and the divine. **The Bible is filled with reflections on the relationship between God and nature, and the role of humans in this world.** In the Bible, God is not just a powerful figure in the world rather He is the Creator of the world. He brought everything into existence which means that even the smallest dust or pebble is the handiwork of His creation. Psalm 24:1 states, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." It is said that God created the heavens and the earth and all things found therein (Gen 1; Ps 146:6; Acts 14:15.). The Book of Revelation states: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your

will they were created.” The Bible teaches that although God allows people to utilize the environment, God retains ownership of all His creation (Ps. 24:1; 89:11; Lev. 25:23; Col. 1:15-16). The Psalmist states: “You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.” However Scripture reminds us that God not only created the Earth, but also calls on us to protect it. The Bible enlightens us that God loves all that He has created. The weather, plants, and animals are all part of the nature which God created on the Earth. The Bible declares that they are as much a part of God’s creation as mankind and so to say independent of humanity. Thus, an important implication of the nature independent of human use and human-centered values (Gen 1:25; Ps 104:31; Psalm 148:9-13). One of the reasons God created and continues to sustain nature, as discussed above under the Principle of Creation Value, is for God himself to love and enjoy. Another purpose is to help meet people’s needs such as food and shelter (Gen 2:15; Gen 9:3). A third major purpose of nature is to glorify and reveal God to people everywhere (Ps 19:1-4; Rom 1:18-20). Psalm 19 states: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

The first two chapters of Genesis record two different creation accounts. The first is the story of creation in six days, culminating as a day of rest and celebration. This story was written to declare that everything is dependent, for its existence and meaning, upon God, rather than as an ordered or scientific account of the origins of the world. The crowning part of the story is the creation of humanity, with the expression ‘made in the image’ reflecting the privilege and responsibility given to humanity of overseeing God’s rule on earth. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after

our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen 1:26). He was still willing to share with us to use for our own good and for the good of the entire humanity. Genesis 2:15 says that “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” God gave mankind a command and told him that he must tend or keep the garden. The Hebrew word for “tend” or some translations say “keep” is “*shamar*” and it means more than just keep it neat and tidy. The Hebrew word means “to guard” or “to watch and protect.” The other Hebrew word in this verse that’s very important is the word “work” or as some translations more accurately say “to cultivate” and is from the Hebrew word “*abad*” meaning “to serve.” “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it*” (Gen 2:15). God is telling Adam and by extension, He tells us the same that we must work to care for this earth, not just our own little “Garden” where we live but the earth in general. This is even clearer because God says, by use of the Hebrew word “*shamar*” where it says “keep it” as the word insinuates, “to keep, guard,” or “protect.” We doubt very much that Adam was careless in his duty to work and keep the Garden in the way in which God commanded him. However we have destroyed many areas of the planet to suit our own needs. This earth groans under the weight of the ravaging of the planet. Pope Francis says that “This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life” (*Laudato Si.* #2). God gave mankind dominion over the earth but not in order to use or misuse it at any cost for any reason. “The

laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings” (*Laudato Si.* #68). Thus, an important implication of the Principle of Creation from a moral standpoint is that, God places value on elements of the environment independent of human use and human-centered values (Gen. 1:25; Ps. 104:31; Ps 148:9-13). As this is not our earth, the title holder is God and He will hold us responsible for how we care for it. As we read in Revelation 11:18, those who abuse and destroy the earth will not go unpunished and knowing that the earth is not really ours, we should treat the earth with the respect of knowing, it is God’s own possession and not ours.

The two creation accounts in the book of Genesis draw on images of good agricultural practice. The use of pictures and images has helped people to express their understanding of the nature and person of God down the ages. In the first story of creation, the sixth day includes a command to till and care for the earth, whereas the second story of creation uses more vivid and natural imageries. Together with other scriptures, these stories have led to the development of a variety of models describing the relationship between God, God’s people and the rest of the created order. Finally, each model is taken together that they can help us to give a basis for developing a holistic Christian understanding of a proper human relationship to God and the environment. Hence we shall explore various models proposed by scriptural passages and themes and learn the relationship that exists among the Biblical God, humanity and nature. Pope Francis rightly mentions, “The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, the relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony among the Creator,

humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.”¹ A key verse is Genesis 1:27-28 which state: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” Genesis 1:28 also establishes that in God’s basic ordering of Creation, people have dominion over nature. However, Genesis 1:28 also clearly states that the people are creations of God. As creations of God, people are under the authority or dominion of God. As Pope Francis confirms, “The first we can share with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus.” (*Laudato Si.* #246). Thus, from the perspective of God’s authority and control, people and nature are in the same class or order - all of Creation including people must submit to God’s plans and designs.

1. Goodness rather than Dominion Model

When God blessed the humanity with the command to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:26-31), He gave the birds and fishes the same commandment (Gen 1:20-23). It is clear that we are to take care of the earth because mankind was made a steward but we have failed in our responsibility. After creation “God saw everything he had made. And it was very good. There was evening, and there was morning, it was day six” (Gen 1:31). “The Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those that live it” Ps 24:1. Thus creation is the Body of God. We are part and parcel of it. The story reveals that on successive days God created yet more wonders and at

the end of most days there is a refrain, that ‘God saw that it was good’ or ‘God saw that it was very good’. The refrain in Genesis reminds us that the whole of creation has is priceless in God’s eyes. “What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness” (*Laudato Si.* #2). While it is indeed a matter of human self-interest to care for the planet, there is a danger that the planet is viewed solely from a human perspective. The first account in Genesis tells of the seventh day when God rested. The story points to the need to set aside production and consumption for a period and to reflect, give thanks and worship. Observing the Sabbath reminds the Church and the world that life has a spiritual dimension as well as a material one.

In the first story of creation, humanity is given a distinctive place and a particular responsibility within the created order. The words used in Genesis are to ‘subdue’ and ‘have dominion’. So what does ‘to subdue’ and ‘have dominion’ mean?. Lynn White Jr. wrote a famous paper arguing that “belief in religions like Judaism and Christianity was causing ecological problems because of scriptures like Genesis 1:28.”² The command within the Genesis story ‘to subdue’ the earth is a translation of the Hebrew word *kabash*. The word is used, with reference to land, elsewhere in the Old Testament within the context of conquering the Promised Land. In interpreting the passage in Genesis which speaks about dominion and subduing in Gen 1:28, Pope Francis warns, “We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man “dominion” over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures,

nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures." (*Laudato Si.* #67).

To place this in context, it is necessary to consider the difference between the life of the people of Israel two thousand years before Christ and, indeed, in the time of Christ, and the typical life in the 21st century in the west. In Biblical times, life was more precarious. Many people lived 'on the edge' of existence, their lives over-shadowed by a variety of threats including earthquake, wind and fire, famine and drought and from animals marauding their homesteads, flocks and crops. Given this context, 'to subdue' can be understood to be concerned with bringing order and well-being rather than wreaking destruction. The word 'dominion', which is a translation of the Hebrew word *radah*, is used in Genesis with reference to a relationship with regard to other living creatures: fish, birds, cattle and creeping things. To have dominion is sometimes understood in a secular context as meaning to do what you like, which may include autocratic or despotic models of management, but its use within the Old Testament has a different understanding. Old Testament kings were called to exercise their reign with due regard to the well-being of their subjects, other creatures and the land. The intention of the command 'to have dominion' is a call to those made in the image of God to rule in a way that reflects the teaching given by God.

The second story, sometimes known as the 'garden' story declares how man was formed first and then of woman in the Garden of Eden and includes the story of the 'fall'. This story comes from a different tradition unlike the first story. It was concerned with providing answers to some fundamental questions facing the faith community of Israel, including the refusal of humans to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and the consequence of this action. The second creation story moves from a pre-historical state of harmony in creation to the fall, symbolised by an act of

environmental disobedience. The story of the fall is related in Genesis 3 which first tells of the life of bliss in the garden and the intimate delight in the relationship among God and Adam and Eve. The story then records the desire of humanity to become 'like gods' and is made explicit in the taking of the fruit from the forbidden tree. The punishment given was their expulsion from paradise and condemnation to a life involving suffering. It is notable that the fall is symbolised by an act of environmental disobedience. In speaking of a lost paradise, the story has a mythical quality, but it has been used through the years to explain the problems of evil and suffering in the world through separation from God and it is a powerful sign of humanity's yearning for a better world.

Pope Francis says that "Today we have destroyed many areas of the earth to suit our own needs and this earth must groan under the weight of the ravaging and pillaging of the planet. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (*Rom 8:22*)" (*Laudato Si.* #2). Today, if you look around, much of the earth, it is anything but good. We are desecrating the earth to extract wealth in the form of minerals, gas, oil, and precious metals and gems, leaving behind a wake of devastation and ruin. God will hold us accountable for exploiting the earth because He created it good but evil has infested the earth and "we know that the whole creation has been groaning together" (*Rom 8:22*) since then. We cannot separate our life with God from our life on earth. But we are ignoring God's warnings about the land that "It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares" (*Jer 29:11*). Hence at least those who do care should make sure and keep or guard their own gardens of Eden, wherever they might be. Pope Francis strongly affirms that "The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once

more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality” (*Laudato Si.* #75). Hence we have a duty to care for the good of the earth and to care for the goodness of humanity.

2. Caring rather than Suppressing Model

The garden story of creation gives another perspective on the relationship that humanity is called to have with nature. The story opens with a garden into which the man, Adam, having been formed from the dust and given breath, was placed. The man was then commanded to till and care for the soil. Pope Francis rightly points out that “”Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations” (*Laudato Si.* #67). The story reminds us that we are a part of nature but with a particular responsibility for it. We have the privilege of sharing God’s garden, but responsibilities in our use of it. In the garden story there is a sense of God calling us to tend and care, till and cultivate a living, loving relationship with the earth from which we came, and to which we will return. The story also marks the symbolic launch of a dynamic journey for God’s people from the Garden of Eden to the City of Gold (Rev 21:18). Proverbs 27:18 says, “Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored.” This is a double proverb in the sense that the one who tends or takes care of the fig tree will probably tend other things and by doing so, he is guarding his master’s possessions. “There is also a sense in Scripture of continuity between this world and the next. It is as if the new creation will be the full realisation of the present order.”³ God commands us

to keep and care for the earth but God's edict to have dominion over the earth doesn't mean to have complete domination and exploitation of it.

The creation stories may be viewed as a set of pictures that portray the relationship among God, humanity and the rest of the created order. While they were written against the background of particular economic, social and political circumstances, they contain some insights which transcend time and circumstances. If taken together, Genesis 2:15 actually reads "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to serve it and guard or protect it.*" It is obvious then that God commanded mankind to guard and protect the creation, for what applies in the Garden surely applies to wherever mankind is working. God is the God of order and not chaos (1 Cor 14:33). Work is also commanded by God and not just keeping or guarding the creation. God holds man responsible and will hold him accountable for how he keeps the earth because it was a command from God, not a request. God commands us to keep and care for the earth but God's edict to have dominion over the earth doesn't mean to have complete domination and exploitation of it but sadly, this is what has happened; we continue to destroy the land, denude the forests, strip-mine the hills, burn through the resources, and gut the earth. This is the only place that we have and if we choose to abuse it, it will be a choice we will live to regret. "We might not be able to tend the world but we can tend our own little corner of it and do what we can where we live. The God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil. Injustice is not invincible" (*Laudato Si.* #74).

3. Steward rather than Owner Model

In the Bible, God commands man to be a steward of the environment. The two garden stories taken together with the message from the psalm that 'the Earth belongs to the Lord' have led to the development of the stewardship

model. Genesis 2:15 would better read as: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to serve it and to guard and protect it." That means that we are stewards of the earth and the Master will require of us an account on how we've been stewards of what He has given us. So far, it's not been good stewardship to say the least. Stewardship may be perceived as a model that allows the concepts of both 'dominion' and 'subduing' to be held together. A good steward would exercise dominion or rule on behalf of the landlord and for the benefit of all the creatures under his care. The stewardship model retains the relationship between humanity, the earth and God, for ultimately the steward is accountable to the one who entrusted the responsibility. However, a difficulty of the stewardship model is that it may become too human-orientated, and there may be a temptation on stewards to place human concerns at the centre. Our notion of stewardship comes from the biblical creation theology, disseminated throughout the Bible but it is most visible in Genesis, the Psalms, and the Wisdom literature of ancient Israel.

The biblical notion of creation is the idea of sequence. God creates order out of primordial chaos. This order is moral as well as physical; it requires ethical behavior to maintain the harmonious working of creation. Creation is a relational entity, a harmonious whole in which creatures fulfill their appointed places and functions. "New investigations in creation and its complement, wisdom theology suggest that the environment is to be understood as a delicate, fragile system of interrelated parts that is maintained and enhanced by the recognition of limits and given and by the judicious exercise of choices."⁴ The entire created order has its origins in the sovereign, creative and sustaining power of God. In other words, creation is centered on God. Creation is not a singular event; it is an on-going process requiring the continual sustaining power and presence of God. This body of theology, as it receives renewed attention by biblical scholars, has important implications

in our attempt to interpret and respond to the environmental crisis. Walter Brueggemann says that “The recovery of creation as the horizon of biblical theology encourages us to contribute to the resolution of the ecological crisis,”⁵ The word *world* is actually *kosmon* in Greek—the cosmos- it’s for all creation. ‘Go to all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation’” (Mk 16:15). The “midwife” of creation (see Col 1:15-20; Jn 1:1-5). “He loves the Earth as much as he loves us.” The general principles of a Christian environmental ethic have practical implications for the role of people as caretakers or managers of nature. Christian environmental ethic has practical implications for the role of people as caretakers or managers of the environment.

The Bible teaches that as caretakers or managers of the environment, people are to practice good stewardship. The word “steward” and “stewardship” is used throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Bible (Gen. 44:1; 1 Chron. 28:1; Matt. 20:8; Lk 12:42; 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 4:2). Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesy about the dire consequences that occur when man disobeys God and fails to take care of the Earth. The word used for ‘steward’ in the Bible can also be interpreted as manager or servant. General characteristics and responsibilities of a steward include being faithful, wise and responsible. The steward should be concerned with meeting daily needs and is not to abuse or waste what he or she has been put in charge of managing. The steward is to maintain self-control and not overindulge in nature. He should follow the household or estate owner’s wishes and instructions with respect to use and management of what has been entrusted to his or her care (Lk 12:42-46; 16:1-9). As stewards of nature, people have been appointed by God to manage the “domestic environmental concerns” of our planet earth home.

Moreover stewards are held more accountable, especially if they do wrong when they know better (Lk 12:47-48; 16:10-12). People who are

most concerned with creation care should be those who have been reconciled with Christ. Their motivation is to share the gospel, protect human life, and steward and appreciate the creation in a way that realigns us back to worship and obedience to Christ.⁶ Numbers 35:33 states, “You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.” God clearly commanded Israel to not pollute the land even though He was speaking about establishing cities of refuge where those who had accidentally killed someone could take refuge from any family member that wanted to avenge them, thereby shedding blood on the land but even if it’s not the exact application for taking care of the earth, the principle of good stewardship cannot be lost.

4. Creator rather than Destructor Model

Another perspective has been derived from the understanding given in Genesis 1:27 that humans are made in the image of God. ‘God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’ This concept in Genesis 1:27 is also dealt with in Psalm 8, which has creation as its theme. In this psalm we read: “Yet you have made him little less than a God, crowning his head with glory and honour. You make him master over all that you have made, putting everything in subjection under his feet: all sheep and oxen, all the wild beasts, the birds in the air, the fish in the sea and everything that moves along ocean paths.” In Psalm 8: 5-8 and within the context of subduing, the psalmist places humanity just below God in the heavenly order, and attributes almost God-like qualities to humanity. This approach, together with the understanding that God’s creative activity continues, has given an insight about humanity as co-creators, working alongside God. As co-creators, humans are attributed with awesome powers and responsibilities. It is a model of privilege but with

the danger that, by understanding ourselves as almost God-like, we are in danger of losing the balance.

The second 'garden' story of creation is a reminder that one of the consequences of playing God is separation from God. Humanity, along with the other living and non-living components of creation, is co-created, a part of the created order in which God takes delight. A proper response to the creating God is to worship God and respect the rest of the created order. Revelation 11:18 says, "The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." God will not leave those unpunished who destroy the earth because those who do so are only interested in using and abusing the earth to make a profit. Pope Francis in his *Laudato Si* affirms that "Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity" (*Laudato Si*. #14). The above model offers helpful insights into the proper relationship between humanity, the rest of the created order and God. It offers a more sustainable model to guide our way of life than the current one which dominates our world, based on the foundation of unfettered economic growth and human greed.

5. Servant rather than Kingly Model

In Christian traditions the priest takes on the role of mediator between the people and God. Extending this to the care of creation, the model of priestly care would be to oversee on behalf of God. This care of creation is seen as an offering given back to God as part of Christian thanksgiving. This

priesthood model helpfully includes the concept of acting for God, not like a God. Its basis is not that the care of creation is entrusted to the ordained part of the church, but rather that the whole of humanity is called to be a bridge between God and the rest of the created order, between God's purpose on Earth and God's purpose in heaven. Within this role of priesthood there is an understanding of not just offering sacrifices but taking on sacrifices as a loving act to bring about new life for all. However, this concept is not readily translated across all Christian traditions but in part, because of different understandings of the term priesthood and also because there is no clear need for a mediator between God and his creation.

An associated model is the concept of companionship with God. This model provides an image of walking with God and experiencing both the joys of creation and tensions of living within it. The term can be found wanting in times of difficulty. For example, applying the companion model to the present environmental crisis may give an image of both humanity and God bearing the pain and trials together. However, the model does not necessarily lead to a due sense of human responsibility for the state of the environment, the urgent need to take a new path and the direction of it. "I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation that includes everyone, since the environment challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all" (*Laudato Si.* #14).

6. Covenant rather than Contract Model

The term covenant is used in the Bible to describe an agreement or binding relationship, based on commitment. The Old Testament is laid on the foundation of a covenant between God and God's people, Israel. "In the Bible, the God who liberates and saves, is the same God who created the universe" (*Laudato Si.* #73). It is an understanding that is developed in the

New Testament where, through Christ's life and death, God offers grace to an flawed humanity. The Old Testament records that obedience may be rewarded by a blessing: for example in Leviticus 26:4 a string of such blessings is offered, including the arrival of rain to swell the crops, if the people obey God's laws and commands. Conversely, later in the same chapter (24:18f), it is made clear that the failure to adhere to God's commands will lead to a series of punishments. Within a covenant setting, God's blessing is contingent on observing God's commands which cover a number of areas including some environmental issues! While many covenants recorded in the Old Testament are of a secular nature, between two leaders, or have a divine/human nature, between God and God's people, the covenant made before Noah at the end of the flood, and recorded in Genesis 9 has a universal aspect. It is made by God to 'every living creature' and reminds us of the value God attaches to all life.

7. Belonging Rather than Alienation Model

Another model is that of belonging. The people of Israel belonged to families, to tribes and ultimately to God. Belonging is a model that encompasses the relationships of individuals and groups to each other and also the relationship of humanity to God. To 'belong' has notions of both privilege and responsibility, which have a dynamic quality. The Old Testament laid the basis of human relationship to the land and with it came both the privilege of being able to live in a place overflowing with milk and honey and the responsibility to care for it. "In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature", for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls

us together into universal communion” (*Laudato Si.* #76). To belong involves all in civic responsibility, though for the model to work well within the current environmental situation, the people need to understand that they belong not just to human communities but also relate to other life and the land too. “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (*Laudato Si.* #118).

Conclusion

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals a God whose creative power and loving care embrace all that exists, from earth and sky and sea to every creeping, crawling, swimming, and flying creature. Yet the significance of the Bible’s extensive teaching about the natural world is easily overlooked by Christians, accustomed to focusing only on what the Bible says about God’s interaction with human beings. To meet their intended purposes, God created and sustains all of creation within particular orders. The first large-scale Creation ordering of interest is the Biblical hierarchy among God, people and nature. Understanding and applying a Christian environmental ethic requires a proper interpretation of Biblical verses establishing and describing this basic hierarchy.

In addition to providing a comprehensive biblical theology of creation care, they probe behind the headlines and politicized rhetoric about an ‘environmental crisis’ and climate change to provide a careful and judicious analysis of the most up-to-date scientific data about the state of our world. Hence Pope Francis states that “We all know that it is not possible to sustain the present level of consumption in developed countries and wealthier sectors of society, where the habit of wasting and discarding has reached unprecedented levels” (*Laudato Si.* #27). They conclude by setting forth a bold framework and practical suggestions for an effective and faithful

Christian response to the scriptural teaching about the created world. But rather than merely offering a response to environmental concerns, Creation Care invites readers into a joyful vision of the world as God's creation in which they can rediscover who they truly are as creatures called to love and serve the Creator and to delight in all he has made. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (*Laudato Si.* #217).

The above models all offer helpful insights into the proper relationship between humanity, the rest of the created order and God. While the above models provide a comprehensive framework, they also contain some pictures which, taken together, may offer a more sustainable model. That will guide our way of life than the current one which dominates our world, based on the foundation of unfettered economic growth and human greed. Thus ecological crisis is ultimately linked to a crisis of ethics a spiritual void that permeates today's technocratic society. Pope's appeal to action is a clarion call to humankind to show what it is capable of doing, the obligations in care of the nature and that it is capable of taking responsibility for our duties towards the protection of nature as our common home. As Pope Francis States, "Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (*Laudato Si.* #19).

Endnotes

- ¹ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si* (24 May 2015; Rome), N. 66.
- ² LYNN WHITE, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crises," *Science* 155 (3767): 1203-1207.

- ³ N. T. WRIGHT, *New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of the Christian Hope*, Grove Books Ltd, Ridley Hall, Cambridge, 1999, B 11.
- ⁴ D. J. HALL, *The Steward*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 32.
- ⁵ W. BRUEGGEMANN, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *Theology Today* 53 (1996): 188.
- ⁶ T. HENNIGAN, "Toward a Biblical Basis for Ecology with Applications in Mycorrhizal Symbiosis in Orchids," *Journal of Creation* 23 (1): 78–85.