

Humankind - over the earth (Dominion)



Genesis 1:28 (NRSVA)

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'



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The inescapable fact about the biblical term "dominion," from the Hebrew verb *radah*, is that it grants humans the right and responsibility to rule, to govern the rest of creation. It establishes a hierarchy of power and authority in which the human race is positioned above the rest of the natural world. Such a conclusion is clear from the use of *radah* elsewhere in the Old Testament, where it is employed for the rule of the head of the house over household servants (Lev. 25:43) and of Solomon's officers over his conscripted labour force (1 Kings 5:16 [Hebrew, 1 Kings 5:30]).

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The verb "subdue," from the Hebrew *kavash*, depicts a hierarchical relationship in which humans are positioned above the earth and are granted power and control over it. The verb *kavash* is even more forceful than *radah*, describing the actual act of subjugation, of forcing another into a subordinate position.

Transmission of this vocation into the
notion of 'stewardship'

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Humankind - of the earth (Dependence)

Thus Genesis 2 presents us with an alternative to the dominion theology of Genesis 1. Human beings are not created with special privilege or power. The first human is made of the same stuff, the arable soil of the biblical hill country, as are all of the other forms of life; and the divine breath blown into his nostrils is the same breath with which all the animals live and breathe (Gen. 2:7; 7:22). The language with which the role of the human in the earth is described is **not the language of lordship but of servanthood.**

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