

The Image of God and our vocation of the soil

Abstract

The Anthropocene represents the sum total of anthropogenic impact upon the planet, from climate change and ocean acidification, to the threat of mass extinctions - including the pollinators of our food, land use changes for agriculture, and the disruption of key natural cycles of phosphorus and nitrogen due to the misapplication of fertilizers. Agriculture plays a key role in the Anthropocene, at both the production and consumption end. Raj Patel and Jason Moore see cheap food as one of the key elements in the rise of capitalism. This rise in turn produced the Great Acceleration of the global economy in the 1950s, which marks the beginning of the Anthropocene.

Ellen Davis identifies the present crisis as the result of humans being fully habituated to industrial culture. The solution according to Davis is to become fully human. This full humanity is achieved by recognizing the agrarian nature of the bible, and that God's work as Farmer and caretaker provides the model for our behaviour.

This paper explores a theology of the Imago Dei and our vocation of the soil by examining the agricultural themes in the two creation accounts. This theology is then applied to the human vocation in the Anthropocene in two ways. Firstly, all human activity is to be shaped by an agrarian model of our relationship to the soil, one of nurturing, abundance, and limits. Secondly, agriculture is essential to human identity, and as such all humans should be bi-vocational and become involved at some level in the production of food.

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Defining the Anthropocene

Earth history has entered into a new geological era known as the Anthropocene.¹ A commonly accepted scientific definition of the Anthropocene locates its origins in the 'Great Acceleration,' a period since 1950 of rapid economic growth.² The defining geological marker is a spike in radioactive carbon 14 in the atmosphere, associated with the beginning of nuclear testing.³ With the onset of the Anthropocene, a number of key elements of the Earth system which represent a

¹ Paul Crutzen, "Geology of mankind," *Nature* 415 (2002): 23.

² Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig, "The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration," *The Anthropocene Review* 2 (2015): 1-18.

³ Simon L. Lewis and Mark A Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519 (2015): 171-180.

'safe operating space for humanity' have been disrupted.⁴ According to Clive Hamilton, the emergence of the Anthropocene represents a dramatic break from the past, requiring new scientific, philosophical, and theological ways of understanding our situation.⁵ However, the Great Acceleration did not emerge *ex nihilo* but has several historical antecedents, including the origins of agriculture, the invasion of the Americas, and the Industrial Revolution.⁶

Agriculture and the Anthropocene

Lewis and Maslin note that the origins of agriculture have 'long-lasting environmental impacts' while not in of itself satisfying a geologically measurable origin to the Anthropocene.⁷ Agriculture replaces natural vegetation, increasing species extinction rates, and altering biogeochemical flows. Agriculture first occurred at the end of the last ice age, after a brief cold period known as the Younger Dryas. Its onset has been linked with a shift from semi-sedentary foragers to the first farmers in the Levant.⁸

Lewis and Maslin notes that one of the shortcomings of agriculture as a geological marker for the Anthropocene is its multiple independent origins: 11,000 years ago in southwest Asia, South America and north China; 6,000–7,000 years ago in Yangtze China and Central America; and 4,000–5,000 years ago in the savanna regions of Africa, India, southeast Asia, and North America. The clearing of land appears to have had a modest impact on atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane, which are greenhouse gases. The Early Anthropogenic Hypothesis suggests that human activity has modified the current interglacial cycle, at 8,000 years in carbon dioxide with the loss of forested land, and about 5,000 years ago with increased rice agriculture and an expansion in the populations of domesticated ruminants, i.e. sheep and cattle.

Agricultural changes are also associated with the New–Old World collision which began in 1492 with the arrival of Europeans in the Caribbean in 1492. Food stuffs were exchanged between the Old World and New World. New World crops such as maize/corn and potatoes were imported into Europe, Asia and Africa, while sugarcane was planted in the New World. The arrival of Europeans in the Americas resulted in an estimated 48 million deaths by 1650. The collapse of farming and reduction in fire use resulted in the regeneration of over 50 million hectares and a slight increase in global carbon dioxide levels. These deaths were due to exposure to European diseases, war, enslavement, and famine.

⁴ Will Steffen, Katherine Richardson, Johan Rockström, Sarah E. Cornell, Ingo Fetzer, Elena M. Bennett, Reinette Biggs, Stephen R. Carpenter, Wim de Vries, Cynthia A. de Wit, Carl Folke, Dieter Gerten, Jens Heinke, Georgina M. Mace, Linn M. Persson, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, Belinda Reyers, and Sverker Sörlin, "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet," *Science* 347 (2015): 1–17.

⁵ Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth* (Melbourne: Allen and Unwin, 2017).

⁶ Lewis and Maslin, *Defining the Anthropocene*.

⁷ Lewis and Maslin, *Defining the Anthropocene*.

⁸ Ofer Bar-Yosef, "Climatic Fluctuations and Early Farming in West and East Asia," *Current Anthropology* 52:4 (2011): S175-S193.

The 'Great Acceleration' is taken to mark the beginnings of the Anthropocene by geologists. It marks 'of the post-1950 changes simultaneously sweeping across the socio-economic and biophysical spheres of the Earth System.'⁹ The Great Acceleration is marked by a rapid upward trend in global population, GDP, fertilizer consumption, water use, etc. Fertilizer consumption has dramatically increased following the shift from natural fertilizer sources to the Haber-Bosch process that fixes unreactive atmospheric nitrogen. The Anthropocene can be measured by human impact on the nine planetary boundaries that represent a safe operating space for humanity.¹⁰ Agriculture impacts several of these, including biogeochemical flows. Both nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers result in the eutrophication of aquatic ecosystems, i.e. deoxygenation, resulting in dead zones in lakes, rivers, and coastal regions. Nitrogen in the water supply can also result in blue baby disease, a congenital heart defect, and some cancers.¹¹

Patel and Moore observe that the production of cheap food has played a key role in the rise of capitalism. Rather than the earlier land a politically produced surpluses, capitalism focusses on labour and market solutions. Labour becomes more efficient such that fewer people work the land, and food is kept cheap to enable cheap labour. The land is transformed into monocultures designed to bring in profit.¹² Such an agricultural system soon gives rise to exhaustion of the land, notwithstanding the Green revolution and the use of fertilisers discussed above.

In the Beginning – agriculture and the Image of God

In order to understand the place that agriculture occupies in the Hebrew Bible, and the human vocation to tend the soil carefully, we need an understanding of the ontology that underpins the creation account in Genesis 1. John Walton argues that Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) ontology, including that of the Hebrew Bible, is functional and not primarily material. This means that questions about material origins, while of interest to the modern reader, were not of primary concern to the original community in which the text evolved and was read. The main issue is not creation from nothing, but the purpose and function of that creation. The present analysis will show that agriculture is part of the right functioning of creation in Genesis 1.

Walton contends that that biblical ontology is functional based on an analysis of the Hebrew word for create, *bārā'*. The verb *bārā'* is only ever used with God as the subject or implied subject.¹³ Walton finds that the objects for this verb are not easily identified in material terms. His analysis shows *bārā'* has as its object the cosmos (10), people in general (10), specific groups (6), specific individuals (5), creatures (2), phenomena such as darkness (10), components of the cosmic geography (3), and conditions of the heart (1).¹⁴ From this list he concludes that there are no clear examples of material creation, although he concludes neither

⁹ Paul Crutzen, "Geology of mankind," *Nature* 415 (2002): 23.

⁹ Steffen, et al., *The trajectory of the Anthropocene*.

¹⁰ Stefen et al., *Planetary boundaries*.

¹¹ Vaclav Smil, 'Global population and the Nitrogen cycle,' *Scientific American* July 1997: 76-81.

¹² Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 140.

¹³ Walton, *The Lord World*, 40-43.

¹⁴ Walton, *The Lost World*, 41-42.

can he prove conclusively functional ontology. A material ontology is always assumed for the *tōhû wābōhû* under the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Unlike process scholar Catherine Keller, Walton does not deny the doctrine, but only that it does not apply in Genesis 1:2. Instead, Walton argues that function is given to the *tōhû wābōhû* (Gen 1:2) over a seven-day period. The two nouns *tōhû* and *bōhû* are typically translated as formless and empty, but Walton argues they should carry more agricultural overtones.

While *bōhû* is never found on its own, *tōhû* is found with *bōhû* in Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23. In Isaiah 34:11, the context is the judgement of Edom in revenge for Zion (Is 34:8). The violence to be wrought on Edom is likened to animal sacrifice (vv6-8). In the NRSV, verse 11b reads 'He shall stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plummet of chaos over its nobles,' while in the NASB it reads 'And He will stretch over it the line of desolation and the plumb line of emptiness.' Confusion and chaos are appropriate verbs if the subject is the nobles. However, the surrounding context is a description of what is happening to the land. The following analysis shows the chiasmic structure of the description

- 9-10 the land will be burned and become desolate
- 11a the land will be occupied by wild animals
- 11b the land becomes desolate and empty, unfit for agriculture
- 12 human rulers will be nothing
- 13a the land will be full of weeds, signs of agricultural collapse
- 13b-15 the land will be occupied by wild animals

The reference to nobles, princes, and the lack of a king represents the judgment on the nation of Edom. However, the description of *tōhû* and *bōhû* is best applied to the *erets*, the land. Instead of agricultural bounty, it is full of thorns, thistles, and nettles (v13a). This suggests that the land is desolate and empty, and that the NASB reading is to be preferred.

In Jeremiah 4:23, the land of Judah will become *tōhû* and *bōhû* as in the beginning, and the heavens will have no light. The fruitful fields will become a wilderness (v26) and the land (*erets*) plundered (v20). All of this was due to Israel's ongoing idolatry to 'detestable things' and a failure to live in truth, justice, and righteousness (v2). In Deuteronomy 32:10, *tōhû* means waste or wilderness, a place of no agricultural value, and refers to the wilderness wanderings of Israel during the Exodus. In Psalm 107:40, *tōhû* is a wilderness or trackless waste (NRSV), where corrupt princes are cursed to wander.

Agricultural order is instigated over six days. On day one, time is created by the creation of light (but not of the darkness which is a given in verse 2) and its separation from darkness. On the second day, space is created by the separation of the waters above from the waters below by the firmament. On the third day, food is created by separating the waters into one place and the dry ground in another where vegetation can grow. Days four through six involve installing the functionaries. On day four, the sun, moon, and stars are installed in the firmament to rule the day and night and mark the seasons necessary for agriculture. Birds and swarms of living creatures in the waters are created on day five. After creating living creatures (*nephesh*

hayyah), God creates humans in his image and grants them dominion over creatures from all three spheres of creation: earth, sea, air. What then follows is the granting of plant food sources to humans (v29) and beasts of the *erefs* (v30).

Ellen Davis agrees with Walton that an agricultural theme runs through Genesis 1, and sees an agricultural theme joining Genesis 1 with Genesis 2, and the rest of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵ Davis sees Genesis 1 as a liturgical poem of creation. (42) Such a statement is not without controversy. Norman Habel sees a strong contrast between attitudes to creation in Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:15.¹⁶ For Theodore Hiebert, in the Priestly (P) source the human is the land's master whereas in Yahwist tradition (J), the human is the land's servant¹⁷. In contrast, Davis sees coherence both within Genesis 1 (contra Habel) and with the succeeding chapters (contra Hiebert). As a liturgical poem, Genesis 1 gives form to a way of seeing the world. As poem, we are to take seriously the form and wording. Likewise, poems draw upon older works, and Genesis 1 makes use of other creation stories. Thirdly, a poem is a work of imagination that reflects concrete experience including the experience of place, something one would expect from an agrarian reading. Finally, a poem holds a 'surplus of meaning' which can speak to different audiences at different times. This is key in applying Genesis 1 and the broader narrative to the Anthropocene.

Poems typically have rhythm, and in Genesis 1 this is 'God saw ... and it was good.' Goodness is a divine perception, and Davis believes that this represents a contemplative strategy for Israel and for us to see the world in the same way.¹⁸ Such contemplation requires use to change our minds, or metanoia, otherwise usually understood as repent.

A first key is the key role seeds play in the account. On day three, the dry land called earth (*erefs*) is created as the waters below the heavens were gathered into one place (Gen 1:9). From the *erefs* comes forth sprout–out sprouts, plants seeding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit. There is an emphasis on self–perpetuation and abundance with greenery of various kinds. (48) The closing bracket on seeds is in verse 29 as every plant and fruit tree seeding seed is for human eating. All other greenery is for animals (v 30). Following Walton, from a functional perspective, soil, water, and the principle of seed bearing are all tied to the production of food. The account of the emergence of dry land mirrors the annual appearance of soil after the flooding of the Nile.¹⁹

In the extended discussion on seedbearing plants, Davis sees an awkwardness and departure from the conciseness of the first two days of creation. This points towards the particularity of place and the genetic diversity of the region at the time.²⁰ The region of the Fertile Crescent

¹⁵ Ellen F. Davis, 'Learning Our Place: The Agrarian Perspective of the Bible', *Word & World* 29 (2009):109–120. Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Norm Habel, *An Inconvenient Text, p?*

¹⁷ Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 157.

¹⁸ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, chapter 3.

¹⁹ Walton, *The Lost World*, 58.

²⁰ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 50.

marks one of the locations of the origins of agriculture.²¹ With the formation of permanent settlements came the storage of seeds. Hence 'read in this way, the Priestly account of creation seems not far remove from the overtly agrarian character of the Yahwist's "drama of soil."' Davis further notes a connection with the broader Priestly literature on dietary regulation noting that in verse 29 'food is for eating.' This theology of eating forms an anti-idolatry polemic both against Baalism and its fertility gods inseminating the Earth and Mesopotamian myths where humans were created to feed the gods.²²

Part of the problem for exegetes over the years has been the translation of Genesis 1:28. The verb *rdh* has traditionally been understood as dominion. Davis understands the basic means of *rdh* as 'the travelling around of the shepherd with his flock.'²³ Hence, it is rendered as 'exercise mastery among' rather than 'have dominion over,' and hence according to Richard Middleton is an exercise of communal power.²⁴

Another concept that Davis believes connects Genesis 1 to the rest of Scripture is that of the *imago Dei*. The concept is not reused in Scripture until the New Testament, yet Davis concludes that it is both a powerful and open-ended concept that sets up what follows not just in Genesis 2 as Richard Middleton observes, but the entire rest of Scripture. What was limited to the king in contemporary ANE cultures was democratized by P to humankind as a whole.²⁵ The Priestly vision for human life is realized in Israel and its holiness as a people (Lev 11:44–45; 19:2 etc). This vision of holiness emphasized the land and covenanted creatures along with the people.

Davis argues that P's holiness includes the land, and that human life is fundamentally ecological. The picture of life in Genesis 1 flows from two centres of action, God and the earth. Order is earth centred and meaning is God centred. In this, Davis insists upon a unity to the text, as opposed to Norm Habel's view that the text is ruptured by Genesis 1:26–28. Instead, the poem takes a 'special species perspective' that shows us how life in God's image is meant to conform with other forms of life into a 'harmonious whole.'²⁶ What follows then is the most essential task of securing food along with the other animals (vv. 29–30). Understanding the text to be exilic, Davis interprets verses 29–30 in the context of a Mesopotamian temple centred agricultural system. In this context, the image of God represents a democratisation of the kingly role to all those involved in the agricultural system.

Humans from the Hummus – life as gardeners

²¹ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

²² Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 51.

²³ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 55, quoting Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1190.

²⁴ Richard Middleton, *Liberating the Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 52

²⁵ Middleton, *Liberating the Image*, 291.

²⁶ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 56-57.

As Jewish scholar Ziony Zevit notes, agricultural themes are clearer in the Garden story.²⁷ The Garden story begins in 2:4.²⁸ While it can be argued that 2:4a is a suitable summary of 1:1-2:3, and 4b represents an unnecessary repetition of 4a, Zevit argues that the Cosmic Creation story is not just about the heavens and the earth but also the inhabited world and the humans that inhabit it. He sees Genesis 2:1 as forming an inclusio with Genesis 1:1-3 with the reference 'heavens and earth.' Verse 4a is a repeated phrase in Genesis (see also 2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2) 'there are the generations of' which links what has been mentioned before to what comes next. (77) Verse 4b is an adverbial phrase of time which begins a long sentence to the end of verse 7. Verse 4a forms a bridge or 'editorial join' between the two creation accounts, from a Cosmic Creation to a Garden, from Elohim to YHWH Elohim. (78) We are then to read the second account as different from but adding to the first.

The grammatical construction of v4b-7 is like that in Enuma Elish, indicating here that it is a foundational story. In verse 7, the man (*hadam*) was formed not out of dust but a clod of soil or *aphar min haadamah* (OBJ). This is a mud ball or freshly dug up clump of Earth. That it is wet follows on from the soaking of *haahdamah* in verse 6. This clod provided the necessary inert matter into which personality could be infused.²⁹ This is clear both from Mesopotamian myths where a clod formed part of magic, ritual performances or creation accounts, and in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 104:29). The creature made is not Adam but the adam. Zevit sees as significant in contrasting the adam from the animals. The word adam is related both to the soil *adamah*, but also the colour red *adom*, and blood *dam*. Hence, the soil in view is terra rossa. Theodore Hiebert notes that *adamah* is used in a precise sense, as cultivable soil, as opposed to the more general *erets*.³⁰ The breathed upon clod became a *nephesh hayyah*, as was domestic and wild animals (Gen 1:24). The nephesh was not the Greek immortal soul but referred to the totality of an individual (Ex 23:9) and was infused in the blood (Lev 17:13-14).

Zevit reveals much of what is understood life in the garden to be like to be a projection from Greek mythology.³¹ God planted a garden and put the adam in there to work it as it grew naturally. There was no refrain as in Genesis 1 to indicate otherwise. Zevit understands Eden as meaning bountiful, based on 'ednah sharing the same consonantal root as Eden.³² Hiebert notes that this bounty was of rain-based highlands, and not irrigated lowlands (Gen 2:5 cf. Dt 11:10-11).³³ Elsewhere, Eden is described as well watered and agriculturally endowed (Gen 13:10; Joel 2:3). Hence, life in Eden meant hard, but rewarding agricultural labour.

Davis comments further on the nature of this labour. The Hebrew 'bd is often translated as work done for someone, except where it refers to soil, where it is usually translated as work done on or with something (e.g. Gen 2:5). From this, Davis concludes that the human pair were to work

²⁷ Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

²⁸ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 75.

²⁹ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 80.

³⁰ Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape*, 34.

³¹ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 86.

³² Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 86.

³³ Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape*, 36-37.

for the soil, serving its needs.³⁴ Likewise, *smr*, usually translated as keep as in a flock (e.g. 1 Sam 17:20) can also mean observe, as in keeping the Sabbath (e.g. Ex 31:13). Davis takes from this the need to observe the soil, learn from it, and respect its limits. These limits of the soil are instantiated within it by God and provides us with a lesson that human ingenuity cannot always overcome limits.³⁵

From Eden to Noah – soil and curse

Ziony Zevit argues convincingly that the Hebrew Bible is unaware of the Fall.³⁶ James Barr argues further that the origin of sin and evil is not the main point of the Garden story.³⁷ Instead, Genesis 3 is best understood as sapiential literature. The serpent as one of the animals of the field (Gen 3:1a cf. 2:19), who had been shrewder (*'aruwm*) than the others.³⁸ Those who are *'aruwm* are shrewd and calculating (e.g., Prov 12:16; 13:16; 22:3). Against Zevit, who sees the *nahas* as a simple serpent, Walton argues that it represents an agent of chaos (cf. Isa 27:1 where Leviathan is a *nahas*).³⁹ This is possible, given the various elements of combat myths that have been muted in Genesis 1–3.

The presence of the *nahas* presents us with moral ambiguity in an otherwise good creation, and Terje Storladden places Genesis 3 alongside Qohelet and Job, texts which force us to wrestle to make sense of the world.⁴⁰ Both the *nahas* and YHWH God acknowledge that knowledge of good and evil was gained by eating the fruit (Gen 3:5, 22), which Barr identifies as the power of rational and ethical discrimination.⁴¹ The closest parallel is the wise woman of Tekoa and her praise of King David's knowledge of good and evil (2 Sam 14:17). Brett also observes that 'desirable' (*nechmad*) in Genesis 3:6 is also found in Proverbs 21:20 in connection with food in the house of the wise. Likewise, gaining wisdom (*haskil*) is found in Proverbs 16:23 and 21:11 in a positive light.⁴² Eve sought this wisdom, not the deceptive shrewdness of the serpent (Gen 3:1, *'arum* cf. *'oramah* in Pr 1:4) whose obfuscation inverted YHWH God's command.⁴³ Neither does she appear to be grasping for divine status or control.⁴⁴ Being patient and learning wisdom is a tree and fountain of life (Prov 3:18; 13:12–14), but Adam and Eve were impatient and grasped at wisdom too quickly.⁴⁵ So while Zevit is correct to note that the story is about gain of wisdom, there is also a loss of innocence and of status as will be discussed below.

³⁴ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 29.

³⁵ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 30-31.

³⁶ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, xxvii.

³⁷ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1992), 11.

³⁸ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 161.

³⁹ John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 133.

⁴⁰ Eric Storladden, *The God of the Eden Narrative*, in *Enigmas and images : studies in honor of Tryggve N. D. Mettinger* ed. Fredrik Lindström and Stig Norin (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011): 3–21.

⁴¹ Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 62.

⁴² Mark Brett, "Earthing the Human in Genesis 1–3," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Normal C. Habel and Shirly Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 83.

⁴³ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 166–67.

⁴⁴ Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 13.

⁴⁵ Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 90.

After their eating, the couple did not show guilt for their actions, but having their eyes opened felt shame at their nakedness and hid from the divine gaze.⁴⁶ Being clothed was normal in Israelite culture (Gen 9:20ff). Barr claims that God was angry at the pair, but that there was no breakdown in relationships.⁴⁷ This is not convincing; the pair's status as gardeners has changed. Likewise, because of their new awareness, they could no longer be naked in God's presence.

Following God's questioning of the pair come the 'curses.' Zevit understands '*aruwr* (cursed) as a state of being by virtue of the activity (cf. Dt 27:15–26). The serpent is '*aruwr*, diminished and in an impoverished state, but its mode of locomotion has not changed.⁴⁸ Likewise, given Genesis 4:1 is in the past tense, indicating that Cain was already born, Genesis 3:15 suggests an intensified enmity not a new state of affairs.⁴⁹ God neither curses the woman or the man. The pronouncement on childbirth (Gen 3:16) does not use words for physical or psychological pain, but '*itsabon*, referring to exhaustion. God gave a name to the woman's sensations and changed her perceptions of them. Adam's sentence also involves exhaustion in his agricultural labours (Gen 3:17). The ground would appear diminished ('*aruwr*) in its productivity on account of him.

The cursed relationship between humans and soil continues under Cain. Like his father, Cain's relationship with soil is imperiled due to his disobedience. Cain loses status and a place in the ancestral lands, being expelled east of Eden as his father was.⁵⁰ As such the Cain–Abel story mirrors those of Abraham and Lot, Jacob and Esau, etc.⁵¹

Noah is key in the restoration of order and the undoing of the cursing of the ground (Gen 5:29, cf. Gen 3:17–19). Noah comes from the root *nwh*, which means rest.⁵² He was to provide comfort from toil ('*itsabon*, Gen 5:19 cf. Gen 3:16–17). The Akkadian cognate of *nwh* is *nahu*, which means relent. This double meaning shows Noah is the one through whom order will return.⁵³ In Genesis 8:21a, God does not continue to curse (*qallel*) the ground because of the human. This is a stronger word than used than in Lamech's declaration about Noah in Genesis 5:29 ('*aruwrah*). Adam's gloomily outlook on labour is lifted. For an Israelite agriculturalist, growing food was simply work.⁵⁴ Hiebert notes that response to Noah's offering in the Yahwist tradition is a listing of the major occasions in the agricultural year in the Israelite hill country.⁵⁵ The termination of the curse on the land marks the end of the primeval age. Noah plants a

⁴⁶ Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 63; Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 173–4.

⁴⁷ Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 11.

⁴⁸ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 194.

⁴⁹ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 188.

⁵⁰ Edenburg, *From Eden to Babylon*, 157.

⁵¹ Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape*, 40.

⁵² Longman and Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood*, 116.

⁵³ Longman and Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood*, 118.

⁵⁴ Zevit, *What Really Happened*, 223.

⁵⁵ Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape*, 45–47.

vineyard, marking him out in the line of highland farmers.⁵⁶ This termination is in fact a process still ongoing.

The holiness connection

A compelling inclusio of the garden narrative is with the holiness literature H, particularly Leviticus 26. Geoffrey Harper cites 37 shared lexemes with Genesis 1 and 67 with Genesis 2–3.⁵⁷ Several of these are significant as the words are rare elsewhere. Fruit, tree, and land (*erets*) are associated with *ntn* (to give), or remove for disobedience (Gen 1:29 cf. Lev 26:4, 20). Bread (*lechem*) is eaten under curse by the ‘sweat of your brow’ or as blessing ‘to the full’ (Gen 3:17–18 cf. Lev 26:5). The divine blessing to be fruitful and multiply (*rbh*) is reiterated as part of a confirmation of covenant (Gen 1:22, 28 cf. Lev 26:9). YHWH walks among his people (hithpael of *hlk*) in anticipation of judgment and at the highpoint of blessing and an increase in the intimacy of the divine–human relationship (Gen 3:8 cf. Lev 26:12). Blum further links *hlk* with P’s discussion of Enoch and Noah’s intimacy with God (Gen 5:22, 24; 6:9).⁵⁸ Another link is the seven day structure of Genesis 1–2:4a with its ending on Sabbath rest, and the centrality of Sabbath in Leviticus 25–26 (half of the book’s usage of *shabat*).

Davis also links Genesis 1 to Leviticus 26 and the broader Priestly tradition. Firstly, God is the owner of Canaan and Israel possesses it only under strict circumstances (Lev 25:23 cf. Gen 2:15–17). Secondly, the Priestly tradition emphasizes the fruitfulness of the land (Num 13:23 cf. Gen 1:9–12; Gen 2:8–14). These are combined in Leviticus 26:3–5a, 9, where obedience leads to a watered earth, fruiting trees, and a fruitful and multiplying people (cf. Gen 1), and disobedience leads to desolation of the *erets* (Lev 26:32–34).⁵⁹

These parallels provide some context for the verb *kabash*, which is usually translated as subdue (Gen 1:28). The verb also appears in the entry into Canaan (Num 32:22, 29; Josh 18:1), and it could simply mean ‘take possession.’⁶⁰ Richard Bauckham further sees subdue as an agricultural term, allowing humans to fill the earth.⁶¹ Since Genesis 1 is likely exilic, Brueggemann sees the command to subdue is one of encouragement, a promise of return to the fertile land.⁶²

Davis instead sees the command to take possession as a challenge and conviction. Canaan was creation in microcosm, and P reflects this. God was the owner (Lev 25:23) and Israel is only allowed to possess it under rigorous conditions of obedience. Secondly, there is a

⁵⁶ Hiebert, *The Yahwist’s Landscape*, 47–48.

⁵⁷ G. Geoffrey Harper, “I Will Walk in Your Midst”: The Implications of Leviticus 26:3–13 for Social Wellbeing, paper presented at SCD, 23 July 2016.

⁵⁸ Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 287–332, 291–292.

⁵⁹ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 61.

⁶⁰ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 59–62.

⁶¹ Richard Bauckham, “Reading the Bible in the Context of the Ecological Threats of Our Time,” lecture given at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theology Society, Milwaukee, November 2012, accessed 6 November, 2018, <http://richardbauckham.co.uk/uploads/Accessible/ETS.pdf>.

⁶² Walter Brueggemann, “The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers,” in *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, by Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 107.

celebration of the fruitfulness of the land (Num 13:32). There is a direct connection between obedience and fruitfulness that echoes Genesis, for example in Leviticus 26:3–5a, 9 where obedience leads to a watered earth, fruiting trees, and a fruitful and multiplying people. Disobedience leads to desolation of the *erets* (Lev 26:32–34). Hence, in an exilic context, the call to conquer or take possession is ironic and self-critical. The human project may yet fail as Israel did.⁶³ The link then between the command to *kabash* and the Garden story is the *toledot* formula which introduces not the sanctifying of the Sabbath day of human history following Middleton, but a story where most of humanity does not enter into this rest.

The New Gardener

The New Testament is set in a largely agrarian milieu, with Jesus using farming themes in many of his parables. Both John 1 and John 20 echo the creation stories, indicating Jesus as the agent of new creation and the

Genesis 1	John 1
1 In beginning	1 In the beginning
1 God	1-2 The logos was with and was God
1 created the heavens and the earth	3 All things (<i>ta panta</i>) came into being
3-5 God creates light (day) and darkness (night)	4-5 light = life of all people, darkness doesn't understand/overcome 6-9 logos as true light

The second is John 1. As Craig Keener notes, parallels between John 1 and Genesis 1 are clear, albeit to make Christological rather than primarily cosmological statements. Jesus (*logos*) is identified with God, representing a so-called high Christology. The *logos* was a familiar idea in Hellenistic Judaism and was equated with Torah and/or wisdom. The *logos* is the divine creative agent; the *logos* was with God in the beginning and all things came into being through the *logos*, hence the *logos* is uncreated. The discussion of the *logos* introduces the theme of the new creation. Life is of the age to come (eternal life or life of the age) is not simply spiritual, e.g. Lazarus in Jn 11. Further, this new age is all encompassing. The *logos* does not simply become an *anthropos* but *sarx* (flesh), demonstrating Christ's relationship to all of creation. In John 20, parallels to Genesis 2 are evident.

Genesis 2	John 20
4 In the day the Lord made heavens and earth	1 first day of the week
Gen 1:3 – creation of light	1 it was still dark (back to Jn 1 as well)
8 man put into the garden	15 Mary supposed Jesus to be the gardener
22 man and woman in the garden – a fit helper	17 Mary to announce resurrection to disciples
24 man clings to his wife	17 Mary not to cling to Jesus

John is at pains to demonstrate that Jesus resurrection is a bodily resurrection. Mary was not to cling to Jesus because of her purpose, not because it was physically impossible. This also

⁶³ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 60-63.

points towards the fact that the new humanity in Christ must logically complete all that old humanity was to be, and this includes a redeemed relationship to the other-than-human.

Returning to the soil

We have seen that the Hebrew Bible presents the failure to learn wisdom from God, but to grasp at it has resulted in a skewed relationship between humanity and soil. Proper care of land is presented as a holy and sacred task, part of the good ordering of creation so that human needs for nourishment are met, we can procreate, and bear the divine image. The Anthropocene demonstrates a lack of wisdom, particularly with regards to limits. Western society in the 21st century is not agrarian in nature. Farming in the west continues the trend of a small number of labourers producing a large amount of food via mechanization, or the use of cheap labour. As discussed already, agriculture has led to the pushing of several of the planetary boundaries which support human flourishing. What then does the relationship of the image of God and its relationship to agriculture tell us about human vocation for the non-farmer?

The first point must be that those whose vocation is not explicitly agricultural must not work against the grain of agriculture. This means that all human labour should indirectly nurture and serve the needs of soil. An obvious example in the Australian culture would be the mining industry. The Adani coal mine threatens Indigenous rights, native species, and the country's largest aquifer which is of agricultural significance. Returning to the soil means not working with or within an industry that so threatens such natural systems which support food. This has implications for investment, public policy, etc. More generally, agricultural systems are threatened by climate change, and any business that does not adequately address its triple bottom line threatens our future ability to feed ourselves.

Secondly, all humans can be bi-vocational. In many parts of the world, from British allotments, to community gardens in Australia, to urban gardening on Pacific islands, people grow some of their own food. Gardening represents a return to the soil, a re-grounding and reconnection to natural cycles that has been lost in modern life. As has been suggested above, this task is essential to human nature, being a fundamental spiritual and religious exercise. Miriam Pepper has catalogued the variety of community gardens, demonstrating that garden can provide spaces for reconciliation, meditation, education, and becoming rooted to place. They provide liminal spaces to encounter God in, and proximity spaces forming a link between the church and the community.⁶⁴

Finally, Davis enjoins us to observe the soil and learn from it, indeed, to read Genesis 1 as a poem driving us to repent. Specifically in an Australian context, we learn from Bruce Pascoe has that Aboriginal people engaged in agriculture in a sustainable manner before colonization.⁶⁵ Hence, our vocation regardless of our profession is to observe and learn from Aboriginal people how to live on this continent, particularly in the pursuit of tending the garden.

⁶⁴ Miriam Pepper, "Church-based community gardening: Where mission meets ecology in local contexts," *Australian Journal of Mission Studies*, 6, no 2 (2012): 54-59.

⁶⁵ Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the birth of agriculture* (London: Scribe, 2018).