

“DOMINION” AND OUR ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

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In 1967, Lynn White, Jr., an American medieval historian, published an article entitled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.”ⁱ White built his argument inductively and provided numerous historical examples in support of statements like “all forms of life modify their contexts.” His thesis was that because Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology rooted in the Bible, “our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone.” He concluded that “we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.”

White’s thesis has been hugely influential, having been cited thousands of times in a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to religious studies, environmental ethics, history, ecological science, philosophy, ecofeminism, psychology, animal studies, and anthropology. White’s prescience was astounding—he used the word “crisis” fifty-five years ago, whereas today we are still stuck on the term “climate change,” “crisis” making only cameo appearances in the literature and the media. The crisis to which he was referring has only worsened in the decades since his article was published. Correspondingly, the scholarly debate about the way religion and culture contribute to both the crisis, or more accurately crises, and to their solutions shows no sign of abating.

White’s critique that the dominion clause in Genesis is at least in part to blame for the environmental crisis is the first part of his narrative about Western Christianity as “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.” The second part of his narrative is one of recovery, of an alternative Christian view of the human’s relation to nature. We must, he writes, “find a new religion, or rethink our old one.” To help us rethink Christianity’s view of the human as master of nature, the slave, he offers the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, “the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ,” “the greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history.” White points out that Francis, at once profoundly heretical and profoundly religious, “tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation.” If we look at our world today, some eight hundred years after Francis, we have to agree with White that Francis’s project failed. However, since the roots of our trouble are so largely rooted in religion, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. “We must,” states White, “rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.”

My aim in this essay is to contribute to the ongoing conversation about White’s thesis by taking a closer look at the idea of dominion as expressed in Genesis 1. In that optic, Christianity’s anthropocentrism, revealed in its imperialist urge to increase and multiply at the expense of the more-than-human world can be seen as our true original sin, our lack of humility as a species, the hubris responsible for our self-expulsion from an Edenic world of unity with all the creatures of nature into an ever-expanding hellish disruption and destruction of the unity Pope Francis calls the foundation of “our common home.”

This first step in revisiting dominionism in Genesis 1:26-28 suggests that the conventional, traditional interpretation of those verses has been misleading and self-serving. What White calls the “Christian axiom” that nature exists only to serve humans is rooted in our centuries-long

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misinterpretation of this biblical text—in other words, in the propagation of “fake” Biblical news over some 1700 years. This misinterpretation has not only established the dualism of “man” vs. nature but has furthermore insisted that it is God’s will that human beings exploit nature for our proper ends—a belief that has led inevitably and ironically to a crisis that is pointing to the demise of the more-than-human world and to the demise of our own species as well.

It is important to note here that White does not address interpretations of Genesis. Rather, he posits that the biblical narratives in and of themselves are the root of Christianity’s anthropocentrism and its discontents. My own position is that the narratives are not the problem; the interpretations are. Of course, I am not the first to suggest this, as this essay will make clear. What is needed is a close analysis of the history of the term “dominion” that will work to correct the misinterpretations. The logical conclusion of dominion as conventionally understood and exercised is obviously leading to the extinction of life on planet Earth. Can this really be the intention of a Creator who declared that creation was “very good”?

Because there are multiple ways that White’s essay is relevant to contemporary insights into and concerns about our relation to non-human animals—to their liberation from the master-slave relationship we have imposed upon them; to their need for protection from our misuse and abuse; and to their basic right to life, sustenance, and freedom from harm—my analysis will employ an animal-friendly hermeneutic that in critically retrieving the original meaning of the word dominion challenges the anthropocentric assumptions with which so many Western interpreters have read this and other biblical texts. My hermeneutic bears similarities to those employed by liberation and feminist theologians.ⁱⁱ Like theirs, but from a somewhat different point of view, it will provide striking reasons for rejecting anthropocentric interpretations.

The notion that human beings possess a God-given right to exercise dominion over all other species and, indeed, over the whole of creation has profoundly influenced human behavior for a very long time. This alleged God-given right has been claimed to be unquestionable in the Western Judeo-Christian tradition since the Bible’s book of Genesis was accepted as canonical, that is, as the inspired Word of God. Human domination over “the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth” (Genesis 1:26)ⁱⁱⁱ has been taken to mean that all animals are subject to any sort of treatment by humans. Historically, in the Western tradition, animals have been embedded in a socio-economic cultural context that classifies them as capital and accords them few, and in most cases no, rights, including the right to life, sustenance, and freedom from harm.

Some people who subscribe to this long-accepted Christian view that animals are meant to be no more than objects under the dominion of humans justify their belief by referring to verses 26-28 of the first chapter of the book of Genesis. They claim that these verses support and even encourage their right to control every animal in creation:

26: Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

27: So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

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.”

God gives humankind “dominion” over all the creatures. But what does “dominion” mean? To answer this question we cannot depend solely on the definition of the word as found in one or more English dictionaries. The Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the Old Testament) was written in ancient Hebrew, so it is here that we must start in order to learn the meaning of “dominion.”^{iv}

In Genesis, the ancient Hebrew word for “dominion” is *radah* (pronounced *raw-daw*), a conjugated form of the verb *rada*, a verb meaning “to have dominion.” Our conventional understanding of “having dominion” over others is to rule over them, to master them; but this specific idea is found not in the verb *radah* but rather in the Hebrew verb *malak*. The Hebrew verb *radah* means specifically to rule by descending, going down, wandering and spreading. This verb literally means to exercise dominion, to rule, by going down and walking among the subjects as an equal, to have a relationship with them, so that one can learn from them. Furthermore, other Semitic languages such as Syriac (*rada*) and Akkadian (*radu*) carry the meaning of “tending the flock,” “caring for,” “being responsible for.” These languages are of great value in rendering the Hebrew in difficult and critical texts such as this one. The Hebrew verb *radah*, in the context of the book of Genesis, implies that human beings are to rule over the animals not as dictators but as benevolent leaders. Humans are to walk among and have a relationship of care and responsibility with their animal subjects. In other words, they are to rule over animals and all of creation as God does; it is thus that humans, God says, will be “in our image, according to our likeness.”^v Textually, this meaning is supported in at least two ways. First, the proximity of the two clauses in v. 26 suggests that the latter clause implies that the humans who are allowed by God to have dominion should exercise it in the way God does, precisely because humans are made in the image and likeness of God. Second, this meaning is also textually supported by the description of God creating the animals *and* human beings on the same day, the sixth day. Humans do not get a special day of creation all to themselves; they share it with all the non-human animals.

The Hebrew Bible, from original Hebrew sources, was translated into Greek in the third Century BCE for the Greek-speaking Jews living in and around Alexandria in Egypt when Greek, not Hebrew, was the dominant language in the entire eastern Mediterranean world, following the conquests of Alexander the Great (332-323 BCE). This translation is known as the Septuagint.^{vi} The Greek noun for “dominion” is *kuriarchia* which means sovereignty, supremacy, reign. In Genesis 1:26 the Septuagint text gives us the verb *archetōsan*, which means “let them have dominion.”^{vii} *Archetōsan* derives from the verb *archō*, to reign or rule. But whereas our English translations use the word “dominion” in both verses 26 and 28, the Septuagint uses a verb different from *archetōsan* (v. 26) in v. 28: here we have *katakuriēsate*, which means “let them have utter authority.” *Kata* is a preposition that when attached to certain verbs denoting destruction, diminution, dominion, etc. is intensive, adding the notion of “utterly” to the verb which here—*kurieūsate*—denotes “to have authority,” and which derives from *kuriōtēs* (lordship, dominion) which in turn comes from *kurios*, lord or master (cf. *Kyrie* in *Kyrie eleison* is the vocative case for “Lord” in “Lord, have mercy”). So the meaning of *katakuriēsate* is “let them have utter authority,” that is, let them rule with the same kind of utter, all-encompassing authority that God, the Lord, the *Kurios*, exercises.

Why, one wonders, does the Septuagint use two different verbs, two synonyms, for the notion of exercising dominion? Septuagint Greek has more synonyms than does the Hebrew of Genesis. The translators who created the Septuagint understood that the words they chose should reflect the nuances of the Hebrew words they were translating. Synonyms throw light on the meaning of Hebrew words, so

perhaps—and here I speculate—the translators (there were, it is thought 70 or 72 of them, hence the term Septuagint) wanted to capture the meaning and nuance of the Hebrew *radah* by using two different verbs. *Katakuriéúsate*, because of its link to the notion of personal lord (*kurios*), comes a bit closer to the Hebrew *radah* which denotes a benevolent, beneficent lord or master, which is how the Hebrew of Genesis 1 presents and describes God, who finds all his creatures “good.”

Translated from the original Hebrew and Greek sources into Latin by Saint Jerome late in the fourth century CE, the Vulgate was intended for any Christians who could read Latin but who were now far removed from the knowledge of either ancient Hebrew or Septuagint Greek. The “Vulgate,” from the Latin *editio vulgata*, means “the common, generally accepted version.”^{viii} (There was an Old Latin Bible—the *Vetus Latina*—but by Jerome’s time it had become fairly unreadable and unreliable because of, among other things, its numerous versions and its correspondingly numerous scribal errors.) So Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome with a monumental task, because he had scholarly knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the *tres linguae sacrae*. Like his Septuagint forebears several hundred years before, Jerome also uses two different verbs in verses 26 and 28 to denote dominion.^{ix} In v. 26, we find *praesit* (present subjunctive of *praesum*, *-esse*, to be before, to be over, to preside, from *praeses*, one who sits before, protects, takes care of (the root of our English noun “president”). With this verb, Jerome captures the benevolence in the Hebrew *radah*. In v. 28, Jerome uses *dominamini*, a form of the deponent verb *dominor*, *-ari*, meaning to rule, to be lord or master. This verb derives from the Latin noun *dominus*, meaning the master of a house, the head of a household. *Dominus* comes from the noun *domus* meaning a house or home. In vv. 26 and 28 Jerome uses two words for dominion that carry nuances of home, protection, care, and in so doing he hews closely to the Hebrew *radah* and only a bit less closely to the Greek *kurieúsate*.

The Vulgate held sway in the Christian Western world until translations into the vernacular began to appear, such as that by Martin Luther and that of English scholars well versed in biblical Hebrew and Greek: the “King James Version” (KJV) which was published in 1611, authorized by the reigning English monarch, King James. This translation, along with several others I consulted—the New American Bible (NAB), the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)—use “dominion” in verses 26 and 28 (the NJB uses “let them be masters” in v. 26 and “be masters” in v. 28). The first meaning of “dominion” in the third edition of the multi-volume Oxford English Dictionary (OED)^x is “the power or right of governing and controlling; sovereign authority; lordship, sovereignty; rule, sway; control, influence.” Its etymology is given: <obsolete French *dominion* (in Godefroy), <Latin type **dominion-em*, derivative of *dominium* property, ownership <*dominus* lord. The second meaning given in the OED is “the lands or domains of a feudal lord.” The third meaning of “dominion” in the OED is a specifically legal one: “*Law*. Ownership, property; right of possession”. [= *dominium* in Roman Law.]^{xi}

The second meaning, with its connection to feudalism and its system of lands or domains belonging to a feudal lord, is crucial: this first appearance of the ideas of ownership and property, not present in the Hebrew, Septuagint, or Vulgate (with its fourth-century pre-medieval Latin), may be due to the development of the feudal system with its lords who owned property (i.e., land and its animals) and its serfs (workers of the land who were hardly members of lordly households). The notion of animals as property, as capable of being owned—a notion that subsists to this day in most English-speaking countries—has a long and complex history. The idea of legal ownership and legally held property may be one of the reasons that “dominion” came to have the less than positive connotations that it has today, connotations that have supported and even encouraged the abuse of and cruelty toward animals that is a major scourge of our times.^{xii}

Etymologies are helpful and important in all textual matters, and in this case they firmly support the context. In verses 26, 27, and 28 we find four mentions, telling mentions of what humankind is to be like: “in our image,” “according to our likeness,” “in his image,” and “in the image of God.” Over the centuries, gallons of ink have been spilled to elucidate the meaning of *imago Dei*, “in the image of God.”^{xiii} In Hellenistic philosophy, in Augustine, and thence to Aquinas, and on to the Enlightenment and into our own time, to be in “the image of God” has been understood to mean that humans are possessed of reason and free will—two attributes that animals do not appear to have. So here again, we see the hydra-head of anthropocentrism rearing itself. But perhaps we should not stray too far from the biblical text. We might start with what the creation account in Genesis 1 itself tells us what it is to be in “the image of God.” Four references in three verses. First of all, to be in God’s image and likeness, vis-à-vis the whole of creation, is to find all of it “good” as God does: light in v. 4; earth and sea in v.10; all vegetation, plant life in v. 12; sun and moon in v. 18; all swimming creatures and winged birds in v. 21; all wild and domestic animals on the earth in v. 25; finally all of creation in v. 31 where God finds everything not only “good” but “very good.” This is the clearest and strongest affirmation in the Bible of the sacred character and value of the natural world.^{xiv} To be like God, in God’s image and likeness, humans are to be benevolent guardians of this very good creation, so that animals and plants, rivers and seas may themselves be fruitful and multiply.

Secondly, to be in the image and likeness of God, humans are also to live a benevolent and peaceful way of life. Verses 29 and 30 make clear that this is to be the kind of life where the ultimate form of malevolent dominion, predation, the harming and killing of sentient beings to satisfy one’s appetite, has no place:

29: God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

30: And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.”^{xv} And it was so.

The seven-fold repetition of the words “every” and “everything” in these two verses makes clear that food will be abundant for both humans and nonhuman animals alike. Animals will not need to eat other animals in order to survive nor will humans need to eat animals. The syntax of God’s polite injunction seems less a command than an invitation to consider and accede to limits on the urge to exercise dominion over animals, an invitation to qualify and circumscribe unnecessary desires that can only be fulfilled at the expense of other lives.

No sort of flesh—marine, terrestrial, or avian—is included in the food chain. The absence of flesh as acceptable food for humans is notable. The entire book of Genesis took shape over a long period of time, much later than the prehistoric human origins that the mythic narratives of creation and flood speak of so poetically. Flesh was obviously being eaten in the time when the Genesis authors wrote, so its exclusion as a food source here is meant to contrast the prelapsarian nature of eating with the postdiluvian eating of animal flesh that we will see in Genesis 9.

But the point of excluding flesh is not abstinence for the sake of abstinence. The practice of vegetarianism indicates that the relationship between humans and nonhumans is intended by God to be built on the moral ideal of non-violence, on primordial peace. Both human animals and non-human animals will be equals in terms of the food that they are given to eat, equal in that all sentient life will be

treated with respect. There will be no bloodshed. Equality in the humble act of eating makes these two verses the closest in-text exegesis we have of the Hebrew term *radah* in the Priestly creation narrative. In refusing to harm animals, in refusing to subjugate them by hunting and eating them, humans embody and epitomize a *radah* relationship with them. Surely, this Genesis text presents not a historical reality but rather an eschatological hope that benevolent, respectful, and responsible living always remains a possibility for humans. But this text does make quite clear what being “in the image of God” means: it is to be benevolent, non-violent, and protective of animals, our fellow mortals and, like us, God’s sentient creatures. One can only wonder at the dearth of theological and exegetic engagement with these verses and what that dearth may reflect.

God’s benevolent injunction will be relaxed in Noah’s time, in the renewal of creation after the flood (Gen. 9:2-5), sadly because of the disobedience and violence mysteriously present in the human heart: “for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth,” says God (Gen. 8:21). So God sends the flood that destroys the whole world, excepting Noah’s family and one male and one female of each species. Whereas in Eden humans and animals roamed freely in a spacious garden, now they are “cooped up” in an ark, unable to leave their floating prison until dry land is assured by the return of the dove carrying an olive branch. Once out of the ark, they are permitted to eat animal flesh. The original, long-ago injunction to be vegetarian is lifted. God concedes to human frailty. And the result is stark: “The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.” There is no mention of benevolent dominion here, only fear and dread. What was once a relationship based on peaceful co-existence is now a relationship built upon abject fear and terror. Meat eating is a divine concession to a world that is no longer as God desires it to be. God grants this dietary allowance in the postdiluvian world order as an outlet for human violence. It is not a positive development. It is a tragic compromise that expands the arena of human action to include violence against animals.

God has one reservation, however: “Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another” Human beings no longer act in the image and likeness of a benevolent God. In Eden humans and animals lived as a “communion of subjects”; now they are simply a “collection of objects” (the terms are Thomas Berry’s). Prelapsarian and antediluvian creatures, including humans, are depicted as vegetarians, honoring one another’s lives; non-human animals and humans become predatory and carnivorous only after the flood. God’s design for the peace of the original creation is no more; humans have broken it. Mutual love between God and humans, God and other animals, and humans and other animals can be achieved again only by a covenant initiated by a forgiving, merciful God. Just a few verses later, in Genesis 9:9-17, God establishes a covenantal relationship not only with Noah but with all the creatures of the earth:

- 9: “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,
- 10: and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.
- 11: I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the

- earth.”
- 12: God said “This is the sign of the covenant what I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:
- 13: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
- 14: When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,
- 15: I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.
- 16: When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”
- 17: God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

This covenant is gratuitous, ongoing, everlasting, totally inclusive (“every living creature” and “all flesh” are stated five times), protective against all future obliteration, and made visible by an irrefutably physical phenomenon—the rainbow—that assures that all creatures, without exception, can depend upon the divine commitment and upon which, literally, they can stake their lives. By bringing God and all of creation together irrevocably, this covenant—and there is nothing quite like it in the rest of the Hebrew Bible—sacralizes all creatures. It re-establishes forever God’s initial plan and order. It re-affirms that all the world is “good.” Prayers of praise and gratitude will rise daily not only from leaves and grasses and rippling waves; not only from the hearts and lips of men, women, and children; but also from the songs of birds, the barking of dogs, the lowing of cows, the purring of cats, the bleating of goats, the roaring of lions, the howling of wolves. Because of the covenant established by the divine will, everything that is good, is holy.

There are few intimations in the Hebrew Bible that this inclusive, all-embracing covenant will be renewed despite ongoing episodes of human evil, but they are present. Isaiah (11:1-9) speaks of a coming peaceful kingdom brought about by one upon whom “the spirit of the Lord shall rest,” a kingdom in which

- 6: the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.
- 7: The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- 8: The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.
- 9: They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah’s vision returns us to the peace of our Edenic beginnings and we know it as if for the first time. Peace is absolutely predicated on the absence of our hurting one another and other animals. And an eternal covenant of peace is foretold in Isaiah 54:9-10 of which God says, “this is like the days of Noah to me.” In Hosea God says, speaking of God’s chosen people, “I will make you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground . . . (2:18). Indeed, it

will be only in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, that the rainbow, the sign given to Noah, is mentioned again, this time as encircling God's throne (4:3). It is also in the book of Revelation that God in the person of Jesus the Christ is called a lamb—some 30 times—and is thus identified not only with humans but also with nonhumans in what will have become “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1)—the ultimate fulfillment of all prior covenants.

Isaiah's and Hosea's and Revelation's visions all point to a desired future of cosmic reconciliation. But how are they relevant to today's world where wolves still eat lambs, people still eat lambs and kids and calves, and still spill each other's blood? What about the present, what about our moment now? What then shall we do? I agree with White that the solutions must be religious, even if they are not seen as such. Clearly, they must include much more, and go much deeper, than eating a plant-based diet, laudable as that is. They must be rooted in a change of mind and heart, a metanoia, a conversion of individuals and entire societies. That kind of change can come only from a humble acknowledgement that we have wronged the earth, a sorrow at having broken asunder our ties to plants, animals, ourselves, and God, and a resolve to be humbly reconciled with the earth from which we come.

I imagine that such a depth of conversion could take as much time as it has taken for Western Christian anthropocentrism to evolve into the leading cause of the crisis we face today. Can we adopt a new, better way of seeing, being, doing? A new, better way of being human? One question is, how much time do we have now that we have arrived at the brink of the crisis? This is not a question that was being seriously entertained in 1967 when White wrote his essay. But much has changed since then. The logic of late capitalism and its mantra of excessive consumption and endless economic growth have led us to pollute soil, air, and water. Our wars and political conflicts and the greed and hubris that fuel them have spawned famines and mass migrations. Our inability, or unwillingness, to wean ourselves from fossil fuels has triggered wildfires, intense storms and floods, sea-level rise, droughts, and desertification. The world is burning up, and we are the fire, we are the cataclysm. Our exploitation of animals in wet markets and on factory and fur farms and in so many other places has given rise to the emergence of devastating zoonotic diseases, epidemics, and a pandemic in quick succession. Scientists now predict that three-quarters of all earth's species, known and unknown, will likely disappear by 2100. Wildlife trade and exploitation is the second largest driver of the loss of tens of thousands of marine, terrestrial, and avian species who become extinct every year. The “insect apocalypse” threatens the loss of two-thirds of our world food supply. We clear-cut all sorts of forests, tropical and temperate, destroying the habitats of countless creatures. The oceans, in addition to being clogged with plastics, are acidifying, and we overfish them to help feed a human population approaching eight billion souls in the blood of whose children microplastics, antibiotics, and God knows what other pathogens now float. This is the earth now, which our vaunted “dominion” has bequeathed to us. But it need not be our legacy.

We have been told that the sixth extinction is well underway^{xvi} but the previous five extinctions took millions of years to resolve. It is doubtful that our species, *homo sapiens*, which is only about 200,000 years old, will survive long enough to see the close of the sixth extinction, the first and last planetary extinction that will have been brought on by us. The earth will survive, but in another, very different, form as it has the previous five extinctions. That, however, is not an assurance that we, and nature as we know it, will.

But the fact that our time is running out does not have to shatter our hope or diminish our ability to change. Optimism is finite, but hope is infinite. In conclusion, I offer a few lines about hope from a poem by Ada Limón entitled “Instructions on Not Giving Up”:

. . . it's the greening of the trees
that really gets to me. . . Patient, plodding, a green skin
growing over whatever winter did to us, a return
to the strange idea of continuous living despite
the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then,
I'll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf
unfurling like a fist to an open palm, I'll take it all.

Perhaps from the humbled soil of our brokenness and our sorrow a small, green shoot will slowly unfurl,
and life will once more find a way.

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ⁱ *Science* 155:1203-1207.

ⁱⁱ Among others, see Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995) and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Orbis Books, 1997); Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Clair Linzey, *Developing Animal Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

ⁱⁱⁱ *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (NISB), ed. Walter J. Harrelson et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

^{iv} See Theodore Hiebert, “Excursus: Dominion or Dependence,” NISB, 8.

^v See Strong, *OT Hebrew Dictionary of the Bible*, #7287 (www.bnpublishing.com, 2012) and Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Unabridged, Electronic Database. On the challenge of analyzing the meaning of a Hebrew word, see www.ancient-hebrew.org and www.abxn.org (“Detailed analysis of *Radah*”).

^{vi} See *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*. Editio Alfred Rahlfs. Duo volumina in uno. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

^{vii} For English definitions of Septuagint Greek words, see Bernard A. Taylor, *Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint: Expanded Edition*. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009).

^{viii} See *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*. Editio tertia emendata. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969).

^{ix} See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P.G.W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). For English definitions of Latin words, see D. P. Simpson, *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*. (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

^x OED note: *Oxford English Dictionary*. <https://www.oed-com.rivier.edm.oclc.org/view/Entry/56717?print>.

^{xi} In 1651 Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* I.xvi.81 states “The Right of possession, is called Dominion.”

^{xii} For a brief overview of animals in relation to law and legal systems, see Paul Waldau, *Animal Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 81-103.

^{xiii} See Hiebert, “Excursus: In God's Image,” NISB, 7-8.

^{xiv} NISB, note for Genesis 1:4.

^{xv} The Hebrew feminine noun for food, *oklah*, is translated as “food” in Septuagint Greek, Vulgate Latin, and English translations, except for the KJV and ERV (English Revised Version), where the translation is “meat.” The context in both verses clarifies that “meat” stands for seeds and plants.

^{xvi} Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Picador, 2014).