TWO ECOLOGICALLY DEBATABLE IMPERATIVES IN THE BIBLE

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Abstract

This study examines two ecologically debatable biblical imperatives (Gen. 1:28), the verbs *to subdue* (כבשׁ) and *to have dominion* (רדה), using both a philological and a contextual approach.

A broader biblical philological inquiry shows that each of the two verbs carries multiple nuanced meanings, including invasive ones, each dependent on its distinctive context. This suggests that the context of the two imperatives is the appropriate locus to study them.

Their immediate context (Gen. 1:28) reveals them as parts of God's blessing focused on life. Their entire context, the priestly creation text (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), yields three exegetical results hermeneutically relevant to both verbs: ethical and aesthetic, theological, and anthropological outcomes. These contextual features carry four hermeneutic criteria pertaining to the ecological nature of the two contested imperatives and on the ecological nature of the first creation text of the Bible (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) as well.

Keywords: Bible, ecology, subdue, have dominion, blessing, aesthetics, cosmos, God's image.

Introduction

In recent decades, it has been periodically claimed that »the Judeo–Christian tradition bears the huge burden of guilt for the ecological crisis« (Sadowski, 152).

Specifically, a »faith in perpetual progress« is said to be rooted solely in the »Judeo–Christian teleology« (Damonte, 32). Two biblical imperatives- verbs *to subdue* (כבשׁ) the Earth and *to have dominion* (רדה) over living creatures (Gen. 1:28)[1] are frequently cited as the root of this tradition. However, numerous exegetes (cf. Fischer, 153) argue that the contested verbs of the biblical priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) are often misinterpreted.

The aim of this study is neither to defend nor to contest either position. My objective is to gain an accurate understanding of the disputed biblical imperatives of the two aforementioned verbs.

Approaching the matter *sine ira et studio*, if possible, I examine the imperatives in question in two steps. Firstly, I aim to analyse them philologically. Then, I seek to interpret their meaning from their biblical context – both the immediate context (Gen. 1:28) and the broader context of the entire priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1-2:4a).

1. Philological surveys of two ecologically questionable imperatives

On the sixth day of the creation, the Creator speaks directly to humankind[2] (Gen. 1:28–30). It is a solemn act of enthronement of the human being, made in God's image, into the created world. The priestly writer clearly emphasizes that the Creator's speech is a God's blessing containing sequence of »five… direct imperatives« (Joüon, 345). The interpretation of the imperatives of the verbs *to subdue* and *to have dominion* is at the centre of the controversy in question.

1.1. The verb to subdue (כבשׁ: Gen. 1:28)

In biblical Hebrew, the verb *to subdue* (כבשׁ) can refer to land, people, groups, individuals, or objects. For example, during of the conquest of Canaan, the biblical people perceive that the land already lies subdued before them (cf. Jos. 18:1). Furthermore, the fact itself that the land is subdued before the Lord and

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[1] In this paper all quotations of the Hebrew (and Aramaic) biblical text are cited from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartiensia* (BHS / BH⁴, Stuttgart, 1998) and from the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) for *Genesis* (Stuttgart, 2016). The biblical quotations in English are usually from the *English Standard Version* (ESV, 2011 updated). Citations from other English Bible versions are duly denoted.

[2] Hebrew generic noun אדם (Gen. 1:26.27) has various equivalents in the English Bible versions, for instance: humankind (CJB, NET), mankind (NAB, NIV), humanity (CEB), man (KJV, ESV). Cf. בני האדם (Gen. 11:5: sons of men, humans, people). The Bible itself explicates the Hebrew אדם as »male and female« (זכר ונקבה: man and woman) (Gen. 1:27). Cf. ἄνθρωπος (ἄρσην, θῆλυς) in the Septuagint (Gen. 1:26–27).

his people, is a clear sign to the Israel's leaders that God had been gracious to David (cf. 1Chr. 22:17–18).

The verb *to subdue* (כבשׁ) also applies to people. For instance, the prophet Jeremiah warns a severe punishment for those among his people who had enslaved their fellow Hebrews (cf. Jer. 34:16; cf. also 2 Chr. 28:10). In a figurative sense, the verb *to subdue* (כבשׁ) can mean *to step toward* (or on) something with the ruler's consciousness (cf. Jacob, 61).

In the Book of Esther, the verb *to subdue* connotes a rape, a violation of a woman (7:8).

Notably, the noun derived from the same root (כבשׁ), refers to the footstool (כֶּבֶשׁ) of Solomon's royal throne (2Chr. 9:12).

Therefore, in biblical Hebrew, while the verb *to subdue* (כבשׁ) generally carries positive connotation, it has oppressive implications when applied to land, people, and individuals.

1.2. Verb to have dominion [רדה: Gen. 1:(26).28]

In the section of the priestly creation account concerning for humankind (Gen. 1:26–30), the verb *to have dominion* (רדה) appears twice: first in God's announcement to create humankind (Gen. 1:26) and then in God's direct speech to humankind (Gen. 1:28). In both instances, whether in the Creator's intent (Gen. 1:26) and in his charge to humankind in the world (Gen. 1:28), the purpose expressed by the verb *to have dominion* (רדה) is articulated similarly. Notwithstanding, the verbal forms differ in the two instances. In the announcement, the verb *to have dominion* is in the cohortative form, whilst the same verb is used in an imperative in God's command.

In the Hebrew Bible, the verb *to have dominion* is generally used in connection with people or individuals, including notably the Messiah. It appears both in a direct and symbolic sense, in domestic and agricultural activities alike. For example, the Prophet Isaiah uses the verb *to have dominion* to announce a future time when Israel will rule over its former oppressors (Isa. 14:2; cf. 14:6; cf. other uses of the same verb: Num. 24:19; 1Ki. 9:23; Psa. 72:8; Ezek. 34:4). The same verb is used by the prophet to describe the coming Messiah's action of trampling kings underfoot (cf. Isa. 41:2)[3]. In the Book of Joel, the verb *to have dominion* (רדה) is used metaphorically to describe treading the full wine press (cf. 4:13).

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[3] The use of the verb *to have dominion* (רדה) in the Qumran texts (cf. 1QS 9:23) and the Hebrew text of the Bible is quite similar.

In biblical Hebrew, while the verb to *have dominion* (רדה) generally carries positive nuances, it also bears oppressive and occasionally, menacing implications.

2. Meaning outcomes from the context of the two imperatives

The general philological exploration of the two verbs, *to subdue* (כבשׁ) and to *have dominion* (רדה) (Gen. 1:28), suggests a broad range of meanings. These variations in meaning are closely related to the different situations they are used in. The diverse contexts provide a variety of meanings. Thus, following the initial exegetical analysis, it is necessary to examine the two imperatives within their broader context of the priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), found on the first page of the Bible.

2.1. Meaning outcome from the immediate context of the two imperatives (Gen. 1:28)

The very first words that God spoke to the humankind are words of blessing (Gen. 1:28). After a brief introduction by the writer, the Creator's speech represents God's direct blessing to humankind.

Modern language translations of the Bible usually present the opening verses in two parts (»And God blessed them. And God said to them…«, Gen. 1:28), suggesting two distinct acts of God: firstly, his act of blessing, followed by this direct speech to humankind. This literal translation can lead to erroneous understanding. In fact, the Hebrew syntax allows for a rendering better aligned with modern languages: And God blessed them, saying… The Greek Septuagint presents it in that way: καὶ ηὐλόγησεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς λέγων… (»And God blessed them, *saying…*«, Gen. 1:28 LXX). This wording accurately conveys that's God's blessing is the act of speaking to humankind (Gen. 1:28–30).

In the biblical priestly text, God's blessing to individuals and to people comprises support for life and procreation (»…be fruitful and multiply«, Gen. 1:22.28). For instance, God promises to Abram and to his offspring land as an everlasting possession (cf. Gen. 17:8; 28:4). God blesses Abram's wife Sarai so that »kings of peoples shall come from her« (Gen. 17:16); According to God's promise, Jacob is to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 35:11). God tells him: »The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and… to your offspring after you« (Gen. 35:12). Joseph's sons will »grow into a multitude« (Gen. 48:16). All people can expect the blessing of the fruit of their womb and of the fruit of their ground (cf. Deut. 7:13).

According to the priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), the Creator explicitly performs his blessing three times. The first blessing (Gen. 1:22), on the fifth day of creation, is meant for all »living creatures« (Gen. 1:20.21.24). The fruitfulness and the ability to reproduce are the content of this blessing (cf. Gen. 1:20.21).

The second blessing from God is conferred to humankind (Gen. 1:28). The initial part of this blessing (»Be fruitful and multiply and fill…«), addresses life's prosperity and reproductive capacity, and is identical to the initial blessing given to all »living creatures« (Gen. 1:22). In addition to this common aspect, the blessing to humankind has a very distinct feature[4]: the human being is empowered *to subdue* the earth and *to have dominion* over all living creatures, created on the fifth day (Gen. 1:20–25). The psalmist reflects in this confidently and poetically: »Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings… You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet« (Psa. 8:5–6 NET).

The third blessing from God in the priestly creation account is the blessing of the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). The framework of this blessing, without explicitly mentioning any words of life, has a liturgical dimension. Geyser–Fouche and Serfontein (5), following Katharine J. Dell (66), explain it as follows: »The notion of the sustaining of life[5]… is a process initiated by God«, but it »should be continued by God's creatures«.

Hence, the immediate context of the imperatives of the verbs *to subdue* (כבשׁ) and *to have dominion* (רדה) (Gen. 1:28) within the priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) reveals them as two integral components of the Creator's explicit blessing of the humankind, directly associated with life, fruitfulness, and procreation.

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[4] Several exegetes point out that a *personal* relationship between God and humankind is emphasized in God's blessing of man and women (cf. Fischer, 155).

[5] Sadowski (2023) and Ayvaz, in a co–authored study, conclude that »the Bible and Quran similarly encourage their followers to build harmonious relations with the natural world« (p. 152). They identify »seven key issues that constitute the basis of the ecological approach to nature by Jews, Christians, and Muslims« (161–162): The Creator is the absolute ruler and owner of the world (1); He is concerned for non–human nature (2); The creation is the space in which God's existence and… attributes are revealed (3); Creation itself praises the Creator (4); Creator subdued creation to humans (5); The Creator limited humans' power over creation (6); Creator will restore the original harmony between humans and creation (7).

*2.2. Meaning outcomes from the context of the entire creation account
(Gen. 1:1–2:4a)*

God's blessing to humankind is the immediate context of the two imperatives (cf. Gen. 1:28–30). More comprehensively, it is the context of the entire priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) that reveals the aesthetic (and ethical), theological and anthropological horizons of the two imperatives.

2.2.1. Aesthetic (and ethical) aspect of the priestly creation account

The priestly creation account spans a period of seven days. The first six days represent phases of creation[6]. The word *good* (טוב), as illustrated in the table below, is one of the unifying thematic and literary expressions (Gen. 1,4.10.12.18.21.25.31) throughout the first account of the Bible (Gen. 1:1–2:4a):

DAYS	DYNAMICS OF CREATION PROGRESSION	CREATOR'S EVALUATIONS
1. day 1:3–5	light, day and night (1:4)	good, טוב (1:4)
2. day 1:6–8	expanse…, i.e., heaven (1:6–8)	
3. day 1:9–13	dry land and the seas (1:10) vegetation (1:12)	good, טוב (1:10) good, טוב (1:12)
4. day 1:14–19	lights of the sky (1:17)	good, טוב (1:18)
5. day 1:20–23	sea creatures and the winged creatures (1:21)	good, טוב (1:21)
6. day 1:24–31	beasts, livestock, creeping creatures (1:25) humankind (1:26–30)	good, טוב (1:25)
	everything that he had made (1:31)	very good, טוב מאד (1:31)

The Creator himself evaluates every completed part of creation as *good* (טוב). His final evaluation, on the seventh day, is *very good* (טוב מאד; Gen. 1:31), and should be understood more broadly. It encompasses *humankind* (Gen. 1:26–27) and *everything* (Gen. 1:31), the whole created Universe.

Translators of the Bible from the Hebrew text usually render the seven instances of the word טוב as *good* (cf. Gen. 1:4.10.12.18.21.25.31). However, this expression carries other meaning is biblical Hebrew. Hence, a resting place should be *desirable* (טוב: cf. Gen. 49:15), the heart could be *merry* (cf. Jdg. 16:25), and a new–born son is a *lovely* and *beautiful* child (cf. Exod. 2:2). From a philosophical, particularly ethical view, there is nothing better for humans than being *joyful* and doing *good* (cf. Eccl. 3:12).

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[6] The seventh day (Gen. 2:1–3), a day of rest, is blessed (ברך) and sanctified (קדשׁ).

The Greek Septuagint equivalents of the Hebrew word good (טוב), *καλόν* (Gen. 1:4.8.10.12.18) and *καλά* (Gen. 1:21.25.31), like the Hebrew טוב (Gen. 1:4.10.12.18.21.25.31), encompass a range of meanings, such as beautiful, good, lovely, desirable. By choosing the words καλόν and καλά, the LXX primarily stresses the aesthetic aspect of creation, although not excluding the ethical dimension. In fact, »beauty is the visible form of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical condition of beauty« (John Paul, 3).

It is evident to the Bible reader that the priestly creation account (Gen 1:1–2:4a) portrays the Universe creation in six days as an artistic activity. In the Bible, it is the »divine Artist« (John Paul, 2) who gradually executes his work while meditating about it. The Creator, according to the first Bible account, in a rhythmical way, repeats the insight of his contemplation seven times. In the biblical world, the number seven implies fullness and excellence. This reflects God's »delighted gaze upon creation«. The Creator observes that all creation is *beautiful* (καλόν), indeed »supremely beautiful« (טוב מאד: καλὰ λίαν) (cf. John Paul, 3)[7].

2.2.2. Creation of the Universe as a temple–constructing design

The priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) has an »anticipatory announcement« (Popovic, 664)[8] (Gen. 1:1–2) of God's act of creation. The conclusion of the narrative (Gen. 2:4), combined with the priestly (Gen. 2:4a) and Yahwistic parts (Gen. 2:4b), functions as a transitional text. In a conclusive manner, the first part informs the reader about a completed creation (Gen. 2:4a). The second part opens a road to a different, Yahwistic style (Gen. 2:4b).

Some biblical scholars perceive the priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) within a seven–day framework as »a temple–building« undertaking (cf. Schaser, 2023). The origin of the priestly text is tied to the Babylonian exile, during which the people went without their land and the holy city. The priestly tradition helped them to remain monotheistic in a polytheistic surrounding and to obtain universalistic openness. Their God is the Creator of the entire

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[7] The combination of two Greek words, *beautiful* (καλός) and *good* (ἀγαθός, cf. Hebrew טוב), plays an important role in Greek philosophy, particularly in ethics. For instance, Plato (*Philebus* 65 A) writes: »The power of the Good has taken refuge in the nature of the Beautiful«. By fusing the two concepts, the Greek has an expression that embraces both: *kalokagathía* (καλοκαγαθία), or beauty–goodness (cf. John Paul, 3).

[8] In the first verse of the Bible (Gen. 1:1) Popović (664) distinguishes the following thematic elements: »the title and anticipatory announcement of the… account of creation«, »the solemn statement about God as the Creator of the entire… world and about the created world as God's work« and »the conditions before the creation«.

world. They did not have their temple, yet they were able to recognize God's presence in the entire Universe.

The process of God's temple–like creation unfolds in six sequential scenes (Gen. 1:3–5; 1:6–8; 1:9–13; 1:14–19; 1:20–23; 1:24–31)[9]. Each scene is clearly defined, and the creation of every part begins with the same phrase »And God said, Let…« (Gen. 1:3.6.9.14.20.24). The description of each of the six parts, six scenes, is concluded in the same modus »And there was evening and there was morning, the first… sixth day« (Gen. 1:5.8.13.19.23.31). As expected, no such specification is given for the seventh day because on the seventh day, blessed and sanctified, »God rested[10] from all his work …« (Gen. 2:3).

Before creating living creatures (Gen. 1:20–25) and humankind (Gen. 1: 26–27), the Creator carefully prepares a suitable environment for them during the first four days (1:3–19). The Bible describes that work as the ordering of the created Universe through separations and ornamentations. The Creator separates the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:4), the waters below the expanse from the waters above (Gen. 1:7; cf. Gen. 1:6). The creatures are given specific purposes: the heavenly lights (Gen. 1:14), the greater and the lesser and the stars (cf. Gen. 1:14–15.16) are to »give light upon the earth« (Gen. 1:15) and serve as signs for holidays and festivities (cf. Gen. 1:14). The Creator demonstrates great dedication in the careful preparation of the Earth as a beautiful and good (טוב) home for all living creatures, especially for humankind.

In the span of the seven days of creation, the seventh day holds a particular significance. It is »a sign forever… that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth…« (Exod. 31:17). Moreover, it is »a sign« that the Creator »sanctifies« (קדשׁ) his people (Exo. 31:13–14), although their temple does not exist anymore in their capital city. As a matter of fact, the idea of the Universe as God's temple, full of the Lord's glory (cf. Isa. 6:3), is present in different parts of the Bible. For example, the prophet Isaiah cites God's words: »Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool« (Isa. 66:1). Similarly, the Psalmist witnesses how the Earth »worships… and sings praises…« to the Lord »in awesome in his deeds toward the children of man« (Psa. 66:4–5).

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[9] Cf. the overview table in the previous chapter (2.2.1. Aesthetic (and ethical) aspect of the priestly creation account).

[10] Schaser (2023) perceives an ancient polemics in the priestly seven–day creation framework. Specifically, an ancient text, found in the city of Ugarit, describes that Baal's temple was constructed in only seven days (KTU 1.4 VII). Seven days were needed to build a single temple to a pagan deity in a limited space. In contrast to that, the God of Israel created the Earth and the entire Universe during the same time span, whereas for him the seventh day was a day of rest.«

The peculiarity of the priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) consists in the fact that, according to this text, the Creator himself, in gradually building »heavens and the earth« (Gen. 1:1), prepares both, a home for the humanity and an abode for Himself. At the outset of creation, (cf. Westermann, 132), the »construction site« of the projected edifice, like any construction site, was without shape or form, in chaos (cf. Gen. 1:2), however it was brought to completion as a cosmic beauty (cf. Gen. 1:31).

2.2.3. Humankind as the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27): dignity and task

The entire priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) provides the context in which the Bible reader seeks the correct understanding of the two ecologically debatable imperatives. This context, as previously noted, displays its strong aesthetic and theological attributes. Its third attribute is anthropological.

The creation of humankind is the most solemn act in the process of the world's creation (Gen. 1:26–27). Its description unfolds two parts. Firstly, there is a God's intention expressed through the Hebrew cohortative to »make[11] man« (Gen. 1:26), and subsequently, the act of humankind creation itself (Gen. 1:27). The divine Artist has a *pattern* for the creation of the human being. The model for it is God himself. The Creator intended for the humankind to be in his »image« (צֶלֶם) and his »likeness« (דְּמוּת). The accomplishment of his most important creation project occurs exactly as it was planned: »in his own image, in the image of God«, »male and female« (Gen. 1:28). Humankind is the image (צֶלֶם) of God on Earth. But what does it mean that both, woman and man, she and he, are images of God?

Through a philological lens, it is possible to detect several meanings of the Hebrew expression *image* (צֶלֶם, ṣelem). In the biblical Hebrew, it frequently refers to a molten metal statue (for instance, in Num. 33:52; 1Sam. 6:5; 2Ki. 11:18; Ezek. 7:20) or simply a portrayed image (cf. for example in Ezek. 23:14; Psa. 73:20).

I examined a dozen English Bible versions to establish how translators deal with the term *image* (צֶלֶם, ṣelem). Without exception, from the *King James Version* to the *New English Translation*, all interpret the Hebrew word as *image* in

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[11] For the description of the creation of humankind (Gen. 1:26–27) the priestly writer uses two verbs *to make* (עשׂה, cf. Gen. 1:26: »Let us *make* man in our image… «) and *to create* (ברא, cf. Gen.: »So God *created* man in … «). Claus Westermann (120) clarifies that the verb *to create* (ברא) is a specifically theological term and has exclusively God as subject in the biblical priestly text.

English. However, in the biblical context, the reader can discern whether the word *image* (צֶלֶם, ṣelem)[12] signifies a type of image or statue[13].

As for the second part of the Creator's design for the human being (Gen. 1:27), these same Bible versions offer two variants. They mainly render it as »after our *likeness*« (ESV et al.) or »to *resemble* us« (CEB). Translators interpret the word *likeness* (דְּמוּת) in the Bible as a pattern (2 Ki. 16:10), manner (Ezek. 23:15) or likeness (Isa. 40:18).

The Creator's project to create humankind in God's *image*, after God's *likeness* (cf. Gen. 1:26), is, in fact, a Hebrew narrative parallelism. The second part conveys a very similar, almost synonymous meaning with the first part. If a Bible reader harbours any scepticism about the meaning of a creature as *God's image*, the second part clarifies and reinforces it in a complementary way.

As previously mentioned, the formation of the priestly creation account was influenced by the exilic situation. The exiles had to find adequate answers to their essential questions »in a foreign land« (Psa. 137:4). In the everyday environment they encountered statues and images of pagan deities. On the contrary, they adhered to a strong commandment from their God: »You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath!« (Exo. 20:4–5).

The priestly creation narrative poetically articulates the exiles' possible question could they have any visible sign of the presence of their God? The answer is decidedly affirmative. Every human being, any person, without exception, is an »image« (»statue«) of God, because »God created humankind in his own image, …male and female he created them« (Gen. 1:27). In this way, on the first page of the Bible, the priestly writer also gives a specific biblical articulation of the dignity of the human person.

Theological anthropologists propose several pathways when attempting to explicate the biblical version of humankind as the »image (statue) of God«. G. Fischer (153) offers a thematic list of their interpretative proposals: a mate-

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[12] The Greek Septuagint has »according to our image« (κατ᾽ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν) (v. 26) and »according to divine image« (κατ᾽ εἰκόνα θεοῦ) (v. 27). Unlike the the Hebrew text, there is no parallelism »in the image…« in the LXX. Modern language Bible versions usually contain the expression »image« as the equivalent for the Hebrew צֶלֶם (ṣelem). Cf. Germain: »Bild« (ZUR); »Abbild« (EIN); French: »image« (FBJ and TOB); Italian: »immagine« (CEI and IEP).

[13] G. Fischer (148, 153) deploys a courageous translation of the words expressing God's design to create humankind in his image and likeness: »Wir wollen Mensch machen als unsere Statue, wie unsere Ähnlichkeit… (Gen. 1:26). »Und Gott schuf den Menschen als seine Statue, als Statue Gottes…« (Gen. 1:27). Undoubtedly, the expression »image« (צֶלֶם, ṣelem) frequently means statue the in Hebrew Bible (cf. Num. 33:52; 2Ki. 11:18; Ezek. 7:20).

rial resemblance (in terms of essence, substance); an understanding as a relationship; a moral interpretation (a moral likeness to God); a capacity of creativity[14], a generous sharing and will for a peaceful and balanced world…

A few decades ago, anthropology and ethics in particular used to write about a strong interrelation that should exist between human *indicative* and human *imperative* (cf. Parsons, 99). Functionally, the priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) implies a link between human dignity as the image of God (*indicative*) with the corresponding behaviour on and toward the Earth and the Universe (*imperative*)[15].

Conclusion

The biblical imperatives associated with verbs *to subdue* (כבשׁ) and *to rule* (רדה), from the first biblical creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), are frequently cites as the root of the current ecological crisis (cf. Damonte, 27). However, numerous exegetes (cf. Fischer, 153) argue that the contested verbs are often misinterpreted.

In this investigation, as I mentioned at the start of this writing, I did not intend to contest or defend any of the opposing views. With an approach *sine ira et studio*, as far as possible, I studied the two debatable biblical imperatives in two steps.

A philological examination, as the first step, reveals that both verbs – commonly used in the Hebrew Bible – carry multiple nuanced meanings, including invasive ones, depending on their specific context. This very fact points to the second step. It is the priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), as the proper context of the two imperatives, their »le monde du texte« (Ricœur, 49), in which their true meaning should be explored.

Their very immediate biblical context (Gen. 1:28) reveals both imperatives to be parts of God's blessing, addressed to the humankind. The biblical priestly creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), as the complete context of the two im-

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[14] In his PhD dissertation, Đurica Pardon (91) assumes that the creative process is not exclusively God's, because Creator included… humankind in it.

[15] The versions of the Bible in English and other modern languages regularly translate the first part of the words expressing the Creator's intention to create humankind (Gen. 1:26) in two phrases, for instance: »Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over…« (Gen. 1:26 ESV)«. It is different in the *Common English Bible* (CEB, 2011). In rendering the Hebrew text into English, the reader detects the connection between »Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us« (design and *indicative*) and »so that they may *take charge* of… » (purpose and *imperative*).

peratives, reveals three exegetical outcomes that are relevant to the interpretation of both imperatives:

The first outcome: The priestly creation account exhibits both ethical and aesthetic features. Each completed unit of creation is designated as *good* (טוב), seven times (Gen. 1:4.10.12.18.21.25.31). This expression is one of the strong unifying literary and thematic elements of the creation account. The number seven itself conveys fullness and excellence. The term *good* (טוב) encompasses a spectrum of meanings, such as good, beautiful, desirable… According to the priestly creation account, the Creator himself, the divine artist (cf. John Paul, 2) contemplates his work of art. From the ethical and aesthetic point of view, the entire Universe, »all that he (the Creator) made« (Gen. 1:31) is *good* (טוב; καλόν: LXX) and *very beautiful* (טוב מאד: καλὰ λίαν: LXX).

The second outcome: The priestly description of creation unfolds like a house–constructing or a temple–building project, beginning with the chaos of the construction site (cf. Gen. 1:2: תהו ובהו) and culminating in the harmony of the Universe (cf. Gen. 1:31). With extraordinary attention, the divine architect orders the Universe as a spacious, beautiful, and desirable home for humankind and every living being. The same edifice of the Universe is also God's abode. Indeed, the Bible contains explicit and implicit descriptions of the Universe as God's temple (cf. Isa. 66:1; Psa. 66:4–5). On the first page of the Bible, the reader encounters anthropology together with theology. Using the only appropriate language in this semantic field – anthropomorphic terms – the priestly creation account suggests that the Creator and His creation, God and humankind, reside in the same home[16].

The third outcome: The priestly creation account presents the human being as the image of God (Gen. 1:26,27). Amid a polytheistic world with statues and images of pagan deities, the priestly writer provides a deep lesson to the exiles in Babylon, among whom this creation text originated. It may sound shocking, but the Creator of the entire Universe also has his images on Earth. Every human being, without exception, is the image of God[17].

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[16] The Earth, according to the Bible, is entrusted to humankind to be his home, but it constantly is »the Lord's« (Psa. 24:1; cf. Lev. 25:23).

[17] McLain (14) emphasizes the contrast between two anthropological views: »…the picture of God's creation of humans as god's image, mini–god replicas thus equipped to rule creation (1:26), stands as a striking contrast to the depiction–found in the Enuma Elish and other Mesopotamian cosmogonies–of humans created to take over the work of the gods and care for them in their temples.«

Anthropologists offer various suggestions about the theological meaning of the human person as the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27)[18]. In this regard, two ideas are inseparably connected within the very structure of the priestly creation account. These are the dignity of every human person (cf. Francis, 19) and the human behaviour[19] towards the created world. The biblical psalmist, having in mind the dignity of human beings, addresses the Creator poetically: »(You) make them a little less than the heavenly beings« (Psa. 8:5 NET[20]).

Therefore, the interpretation of the two biblical imperatives is accurate if it is consistent with their biblical context. The thematic emphasis of the immediate biblical context (Gen. 1:28) and the three exegetical outcomes from the complete context (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) of the two imperatives provide four hermeneutic criteria on the ecological nature of the two biblical imperatives, as well as the ecological nature of the entire first creation account of the Bible.

The first criterion is a blessing. Commitment to life, as the main characteristic of the biblical blessing, is also the fundamental ecological characteristic. Both »debatable« imperatives are an integral part of that ecological reality, which is why N. Lohfink claims that they are not commands, but rather blessings focused on life (cf. 138).

The second criterion implies ethics and aesthetics in human actions. The Bible suggests that everything, each person does, should be good and beautiful (טוב), oriented towards harmony, not towards destruction and chaos. This principle undoubtedly reflects a profoundly ecological principle.

The third criterion is the theological. The Earth, while entrusted to humankind, constantly remains the Creator's property. This criterion is ecologi-

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[18] The interpretations in the anti–ecological sense of the biblical anthropological view of human likeness to God (cf. Gen. 1:26, 27) suppose that the biblical depiction of humankind separates him from other creatures placing him above them. It is easy to agree with Lohfink (cf. 137–140) that, to a large extent, such a view reflects the actual human treatment of the Earth, but it does not mean that such an anti–ecological practice has any justification in the Bible. On the contrary, according to the Bible, the dignity of humankind as the image of God (Gen. 1:26,27) requires an equal dignity of human behaviour toward the Earth and toward the Universe as well. Human anti–ecological traces probably exist on the Moon and on Mars, and in an alarming amount in the Earth's orbit.

[19] According to the Yahwistic creation narrative (Gen. 2:4b–3:24), the Creator puts humankind into the garden of the Earth »to cultivate and care for it« (Gen. 2:15 CJB). This twofold purpose is colloquially paraphrased in words »till and keep«. »Keeping means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving« (cf. Francis, 20).

[20] This biblical quotation is from the *New English Translation* (NET, 2019).

cal because such a common property[21] excludes any option according to which human being may do on Earth whatever he wants.

The fourth criterion is anthropological. The Bible expects human behaviour towards the created world to align with the dignity of every person as the image of God on Earth. Such an intrinsically ecological approach could be expressed by the philosophical Thomistic principle *Agere sequitur esse*, which is practically applied in Pauline writings (cf. Parsons, 99) as well.

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned exegetical outcomes and the ecological criteria which, when applying the biblical hermeneutic principle *Moralis quid agas*, emerge from the context of the two » debatable« imperatives, i.e. from the first biblical creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), the Bible reader may face an enigma, how could anyone refer to that biblical narrative in connection with any destructive anti–ecological treatment of the Earth. The Bible, de facto, begins with an ecological chapter (Gen. 1:1–2:4a).

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[21] With the awareness that the biblical text does not stand behind any interpretation of the two imperatives in an invasive way, several interpreters try to formulate the role of humankind on the Earth metaphorically, as the role of God's tenant or regent or God's governor (cf. Sadowski, 161).

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Sažetak

DVA EKOLOŠKI UPITNA IMPERATIVA U BIBLIJI

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Autori ove studije istražuju dva ekološki upitna biblijska imperativa (Post 1,28), od glagola podložiti *(כבשׁ) i* vladati *(רדה). Služe se filološkim i kontekstnim pristupom. Filološka provjera ukazuje kako svaki od dvaju glagola ima u Bibliji više značenjskih nijansi, uključujući i invazivne, što ovisi o osobitosti svakog pojedinog njihova konteksta. Takva činjenica usmjerava na kontekst dvaju imperativa kao primjereno mjesto za njihovo proučavanje.*

Neposredni njihov biblijski kontekst (Post 1,28) otkriva oba imperativa kao dijelove Božjeg blagoslova koji je usmjeren na život.

Cjelokupni pak njihov kontekst, svećenički tekst o stvaranju (Post 1,1–2,4a), pruža tri egzegetska ishoda koji su relevantni za razumijevanje obaju imperativa: etički i estetski, teološki, te antropološki ishod. Te kontekstne značajke daju četiri hermeneutička kriterija o ekološkom karakteru kako dvaju imperativa (Post 1,28) tako i biblijskog teksta u kojem se nalaze (Post 1,1–2,4a).

Ključne riječi: *Biblija, ekologija, stvaranje, podložiti, vladati, blagoslov, etika, estetika, Božja slika.*