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THE IMAGE OF GOD AND OUR VOCATION OF THE SOIL

Agriculture and the Anthropocene

Earth history has entered a new geological era known as the Anthropocene.[1] The commonly agreed origin of this era was the 1950s with the "Great Acceleration," a period of rapid economic growth.[2] With its onset, several key elements of the Earth system which represent a "safe operating space for humanity" have been disrupted. This disruption is measured by nine planetary boundaries, which represent conditions present in the preceding era known as the Holocene.[3] Several of these boundaries are associated with agriculture.

Land use changes due to agriculture and other human activities contribute to global warming via carbon dioxide emissions. Croplands represent the largest contribution to this as the cleared forest biomass releases carbon dioxide, as does the soil profile.[4] Land clearing contributes to defaunation – the loss of species and populations – due to habitat loss.[5] Further, land use changes and intensive agriculture are implicated in zoonotic diseases such as COVID19 [6] and Japanese encephalitis.[7]

Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas with anthropogenic sources related to agriculture. Rice is a staple for more than three billion people, accounting for up to 11% anthropogenic of

[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] 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.
[4] R.A. Houghton, "How Well Do We Know the Flux of CO2 from Landuse Change?" *Tellus B: Chemical and Physical Meteorology* 62, no. 5 (2010): 337–351.
[5] Rodolfo Dirzo, Hillary S. Young, Mauro Galetti, Gerardo Ceballos, Nick J. B. Isaac, Ben Collen, "Defaunation in the Anthropocene," *Science*345, no. 6195 (2014):401–6.
[6] Odette K Lawler et al., "The COVID-19 Pandemic is Intricately Linked to Biodiversity Loss and Ecosystem Health," *The Lancet* 5 (2021): 840–850.
[7] Andrew F. van den Hurk, Scott A. Ritchie, Cheryl A. Johansen, John S. Mackenzie, and Greg A. Smith, "Domestic Pigs and Japanese Encephalitis Virus Infection, Australia," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 14:11 (2008): 1736–1738.

methane emissions.[8] Ruminants – domestic sheep and cattle – are also a significant source of anthropogenic methane emissions.[9] Both nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers result in the deoxygenation of aquatic ecosystems. Nitrogen is also implicated in congenital heart defects in newborns, and some cancers.[10] Nitrogen from fertilisers produces 60–70% of anthropogenic nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas.[11] There is an estimated 100,000 novel entities in global commerce today that have "the potential for unwanted geophysical and/or biological effects."[12] The agricultural pesticides was first implicated in the death of North American birds by Rachel Carson with her book *Silent Spring*.[13] More recently, neonicotinoid insecticides have been experimentally shown to be implicated in the decline of insects,[14] including wild bees.[15]

The modern Anthropocene did not emerge *ex nihilo* in the form of the Great Acceleration, but has several historical antecedents, which includes the origins of agricultural society. Simon Lewis and Mark 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.[16] 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.[17] With the onset of agriculture, energy

[8] Marte Nikolaisen, Jonathan Hillier, Pete Smith, and Dali Nayak, "Modelling CH4 Emission from Rice Ecosystem: A Comparison Between Existing Empirical Models," *Frontiers in Agronomy* 4 (2022). doi:10.3389/fagro.2022.1058649.
[9] I. Tapio, T.J. Snelling, F. Strozzi, et al. "The Ruminal Microbiome Associated with Methane Emissions from Ruminant Livestock," *J Animal Sci Biotechnol* 8, no. 7 (2017). doi:10.1186/s40104-017-0141-0.
[10] Vaclav Smil, "Global population and the Nitrogen cycle," *Scientific American* July 1997: 76-81. L Knobeloch, B. Salna, A. Hogan, J. Postle, and H. Anderson, "Blue Babies and Nitrate-contaminated Well Water," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 108, no. 7 (2000): 675-678.
[11] S.Y. Pan, K.H. He, K.T. Lin, et al. "Addressing Nitrogenous Gases from Croplands Toward Low-emission Agriculture," *npj Clim Atmos Sci* 5, no. 43 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41612-022-00265-3.
[12] Steffen et al., *Planetary Boundaries*, 7.
[13] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin, 2001).
[14] S.H. Barmentlo, M. Schrama, G.R. de Snoo, PmM. van Bodegom, A. van Nieuwenhuijzen A, and M.G. Vijver, "Experimental Evidence for Neonicotinoid Driven Decline in Aquatic Emerging Insects," *Proc Natl Acad Sci* 118, no. 44 (2021):e2105692118. doi: 10.1073/pnas.2105692118.
[15] B. Woodcock, N. Isaac, J. Bullock, et al., "Impacts of Neonicotinoid Use on Long-term Population Changes in Wild Bees in England," *Nature Communications* 7 (2016): 12459. Doi:10.1038/ncomms12459.
[16] Simon L. Lewis and Mark A Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519 (2015): 171-180.
[17] Ofer Bar-Yosef, "Climatic Fluctuations and Early Farming in West and East Asia," *Current Anthropology* 52, no. S4 (2011): S174 – 93.

extraction from the biosphere increased from less than 0.01% to about 3%. A return to hunter gathering became difficult due to agricultural surplices, more frequent births, and the increased labor requirements of agriculture.[18]

The Early Anthropocene Hypothesis suggests that human activity has modified the current interglacial cycle, with carbon dioxide emissions associated with the loss of forested land beginning about 8,000 years ago in, and methane emissions associated with increased rice agriculture and an expansion in the populations of sheep and cattle from about 5,000 years ago.[19]

Agricultural changes are also associated with the so-called New–Old World collision which began with the arrival of Europeans in the Caribbean in 1492. Apart from the exchange of food stuffs and feral animals, the invasion of north America by Europeans in resulted in an estimated 48 million deaths due to disease and conflict by 1650.[20] This population collapse resulted in the reversion of over 50 million hectares from farmland to forests, producing a measurable increase in global carbon dioxide levels. Heather Davis and Zoe Todd identify the ideological origins of the Anthropocene in colonization and the origins of capitalism, and like many scholars, prefers the term Capitocene.[21] Raj Patel and Jason Moore observe that the production of cheap food from agricultural surplices has played a key role in the rise of capitalism. Rather than the earlier land based politically produced surpluses, capitalism focusses on labor and market solutions. Labor becomes more efficient such that fewer people work the land, and food is kept cheap to enable cheap labor. The land is transformed into monocultures designed to bring in profit.[22] Such an agricultural system soon gives rise to exhaustion of the land.

This summary of the impacts of agriculture on the planet would appear to ignore the obvious benefits of providing humans with sufficient nutrition. Zero hunger is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[23] Yet the key word here is sustainable. How

[18] See Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (London: Pelican Books, 2018), 115–16.
[19] Lewis and Maslin, *The Human Planet*, 144.
[20] Lewis and Maslin, *The Human Planet*, 164–68.
[21] Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16 (2017): 761–80.
[22] Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 140.
[23] For the Sustainable Development Goals, see https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

can humanity continue to pursue agriculture in such a way that continues to support our existence, together with the flourishing of non-human species? This paper examines the Priestly creation story (Gen 1:1–2:3), and the non-Priestly Garden narrative (Gen 2:3–3:24). Can these accounts provide 'roots' for environmental justice in the way in which we relate to soil? I propose that these texts are, among other things, fundamentally agricultural in outlook. It is a fundamental aspect of our humanity to seek our own wellbeing, and agriculture is one such way of doing so. Hence the Imago Dei implies a vocation of the soil, which is our shared origin with all other creatures.

Agriculture and disorder

The first creation story has traditionally been identified with the Priestly (P) school, with its interest in temple, sacrifice, and Sabbath keeping. The Priestly political imaginary may be the work of more than one generation of scribes, including P in dialogue with older sources.[24] It is possible to divide P further into the Holiness School (H).[25] The bulk of this material is found in the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17–26, while some H-like theology is evident in Gen 1:1-2:3.[26]

There are numerous hints in the P's creation account to indicate that agriculture was central to their worldview. The first is the use of the Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu*, typically translated as "formless" and "void" respectively. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, *bohu* is only ever found with *tohu*, in Isa 34:11 and Jer 4:23. Isaiah 34 describes judgment on the nations (vv. 1–4), in particular Edom (vv. 5–10) in vindication of Zion (v. 8). Verses 11 – 15 form a chiasm, where the central focus is on the judgment on the rules of Edom (v. 12) in the form of environmental destruction.[27] This makes better sense than the NRSV, which translates v. 11b as "He shall stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plummet of chaos over its nobles." The structure is as follows:

[24] Mark G. Brett, *Locations of God: Political Theology in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 56–57.
[25] David P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond: Different Perspectives," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 53, no.4 (1999): 351–64.
[26] For a discussion of why the Priestly creation account is limited to this passage, and evidence for a Holiness redactor, see Mick Pope, *From Creation to Canaan: Biblical Hermeneutics for the Anthropocene* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2024).
[27] Pope, *From Creation to Canaan*, 42.

vv. 8–10 introduction. The smoke from the pitch of sulphur shall rise forever and the land will be a waste or dried up (*charab*)

v. 11a the land is full of wild animals: hawk, hedgehog, owl, and raven

v. 11b God stretches out the line of confusion (*tohu*) and the stones of emptiness (*bohu*)

v. 12 the human rulers will be nothing

v. 13a thorns, nettles, and thistles shall be found in Edom's strong places

vv. 13b–15 wild beasts of the desert and demons inhabit the land

The NASB follows the thought that if thorns, etc are found in stronghold and fortresses (v. 13a), that the subject of the *tohu* and *bohu* must be the rulers, since it is their places of power that have been abandoned. However, v. 9 curses both the land (*erets*) and dust (*aphar*). The extent of judgment is all inclusive. The parallel of wild animals (v. 11a cf. vv. 13b-15) indicates a breakdown in order, with wild beasts of the desert (v. 14) overtaking the land. Likewise, *tohu* and *bohu* describes the spread of weeds indicative of a breakdown in agricultural tending of the *aphar*.

Jeremiah 23 describes invasion of Judah. Language of uncreation is employed, with the formula "I beheld (*ra'ah*)" and "behold (*hinneh*)" echoing the language of P's creation account (Gen 1:31). The earth is *tohu* and *bohu* and there are no lights in heaven (Jer 4:23b cf. Gen 1:2). The mountains and hills shook (Jer 4:24 cf. the creation of dry land Gen 1:9–10). There were no people (Jer 4:25a cf. Gen 1:26) or birds (Jer 4:25b cf. Gen 1:20–22). In summation, the fruitful land (*karmel*) was a desert (*midbar)* and the cities in ruins. As in Isaiah 34, *tohu* and *bohu* is associated with destruction, particularly of agricultural lands.

Agriculture and order

Hence, in Genesis 1, agricultural order is imposed on the pre-existing agricultural disorder over six days. On day one, time is created by the creation of light 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. 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. Finally, God creates the living creatures (*nephesh hayyah*), and humans in God's image, and grants them plants to eat (vv. 29-30).

Ellen Davis identifies agricultural theme running through P's narrative,[28] stressing the key role seeds play. On day three, the dry land called earth (*erets*) is created as the waters below the heavens were gathered into one place (Gen 1:9). From the *erets* 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.[29] The closing bracket on seeds is in v. 29 as every plant and fruit tree seeding seed is for human consumption. 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.[30]

This extended discussion is an awkward 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.[31] The region of the Fertile Crescent marks one of the locations of the origins of agriculture.[32] Hence "read in this way, the Priestly account of creation seems not far removed from the overtly agrarian character of the Yahwist's 'drama of soil.'"[33]

The concept of the *imago Dei* is linked to our relationship to soil. 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. Gen 1:26--28 shows us how life in God's image is meant to conform with other forms of life into a "harmonious whole."[34] 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, although it is equally

[28] 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).
[29] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 48.
[30] John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 58.
[31] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 50.
[32] Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).
[33] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 50.
[34] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture,* 56–7.

compatible with a post-exilic setting, Davis interprets vv. 29–30 in the context of a Mesopotamian temple centerd agricultural system. Hence, the image of God represents a democratization of the priestly and kingly role to all those involved in the agricultural system.[35] This theme is also present in the Garden story as we shall see.

Agriculture and limits

The securing of food is not ultimately determinative. Concern is often shown over the verbs *radah* and *kabash*, which are translated as "rule" and "subdue."[36] Normal Habel concludes that we should abandon Gen 1:26–28 for the "green" text of Gen 2:15.[37] Two responses may be made. First, alternative understands of these concepts are possible. Davis understands the basic means of *radah* as "the travelling around of the shepherd with his flock."[38] 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.[39] Moreover, this communal power must be related to the task of securing food, as the agricultural themes running through the Priestly creation account suggest.

Second, the work of harvesting is ultimately limited by the concept of ceasing or *shabat*. The "religious life" of the Hebrew laity, and agriculture is noted in a lexical connection between the creation account and the list of festivals in Leviticus 23. Genesis 1:14 reads

> Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons (*moadim*) and for days and years.

Leviticus 23:2 identifies *moadim* as representing more than a climatological reference

[35] Middleton, *Liberating the Image*, 291.
[36] Norman Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), 2–6. In Numbers, *kabash* is used in the context of the conquest of Canaan (Num 32:22, 29).
[37] Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 77.
[38] 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.
[39] Richard Middleton, *Liberating the Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 52.

> These are the appointed festivals of the LORD (*moadi Yhwh*) that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals.

The *moadi Yhwh* are religious festivals linked to a harvest. Hence for the Hebrews, agriculture was a mnemonic for salvation history. That this list includes the weekly Sabbath, as well as the cessation of work on several of the other festivals, demonstrates another important aspect of a religiously rooted environmental justice principle.

Sabbath is key to H. The seventh day is sanctified (*qadesh*) because God ceased (*shabat*) from the work of creation (Gen 2:3). While there is no command to keep the Sabbath, the creation of sacred time after the completion of the work of creation implies that such a command will follow, and that it will encompass all of creation (*erets*).

This idea is taken up in Leviticus, where the land (*erets*) is to find its rest from human agricultural activity. The seventh year Sabbath is portrayed as being for the land to take a complete rest (*shabat shabaton,* Lev 25:4–5). The land must observe a total cessation to *Yhwh* from its customary vocation (Lev 25:2). That the land is active in Sabbath keeping, rather than the passive recipient of human Sabbath observance, is suggested by comparison with Lev 23:32 where the people are to "celebrate your Sabbath." The underlying Hebrew is the same.

Furthermore, the land has a relationship with *Yhwh* that precedes that of Israel, although now they appear to share the same covenant (Lev 26:42). There is a parallel between Leviticus 25 and the creation story: creation of the *erets* ("earth") by God precedes that of the *adam* just as *Yhwh* has prior relationship with the *erets* ("land") before the arrival of Israel. The *adam* as the divine image bearers are blessed to multiply, to subdue the *erets* (for agriculture) and have dominion (Gen 1:26–30). The *adam* is the divine image bearer in God's creation, with the implied responsibility to allow all the *erets* to enjoy the Sabbath (Gen 2:2–3).

What can we conclude at this stage for any sense of roots of environmental justice in the Priestly tradition of the Pentateuch? First, any sense of environmental justice is subsumed into the assumption of the priority of agriculture. It is the primary way in which the Israelites knew and experienced what we now refer to as the environment. Environment can be seen as a modern

abstraction, and artificial separation between the human and the more than human. Instead, agriculture represents a concrete relationship between the human and soil. This relationship is tenuous, with fallowing for the land essential without chemical fertilizers.[40] Such fallowing would have to be more frequent than the Sabbath year of Lev 25:3–7, and hence according to Michael LeFebvre, the "septennial land sabbath was an economic practice embodied within a theological institution."[41]

Second, this theological institution necessarily prescribes lay Israelite holiness, and that includes Sabbath keeping (Lev 19:30; 26:2). Hence, given the land was allowed its Sabbath, and that human Sabbath keeping was to be inclusive of this (Lev 26:35), Israelite holiness included giving rest to the land. In the Anthropocene, where humans affect all areas of the globe from our economic activity,[42] me we might rightly argue that the Holiness tradition instructs us to give the entire planet rest.

Third, while the Priestly tradition accepts a domestic/wild binary, it does not do without including all the earth in this rest. Recall the blessing of the seventh day comes after the completion of the work of creation, and that this includes (Gen 1:24) domestic (*behemah*) and wild animals or beasts of the earth (*chayah haerets*). Likewise, the septennial Sabbath (Lev 25:7) allowed domestic (*behemah*) and wild animals (*chay*) that are in the land (*erets*) to eat off the land.

Since urbanization is a key aspect of the Anthropocene,[43] most human beings are separated from the process of agriculture, yet it continues to be the key manner of survival for most of humanity. As we have seen, it is also one of the ways in which we impact the non-domestic world, if such a thing can be said to exist. Hence, this suggests that for humanity to move through the Anthropocene, we must at once become both more deeply connected with the ways in which our food is produced, but also more connected to the principles of Sabbath rest from precisely these ways. While Sabbath is a pragmatic practice, in the Priestly tradition, it is also an act of holiness, and hence the church too

[40] Michael LeFebvre, "Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee," *BET* 2, no. 1 (2015):33.
[41] LeFebvre, "Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee," 34.
[42] On the declining place of "wilderness" see Mick Pope, "The Earth is Full of your Creatures: A Theology of Wilderness," *Anglican EcoCare Journal of Ecotheology* 1 (2014): 65–78; Mick Pope, "Rediscovering a Spirituality of Creation for the Anthropocene," in *The Nature of Things: Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's Creation*, ed. Graham Buxton and Norm Habel (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 92–102.
[43] Steffen, et al., "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene."

should seek to understand our vocation of the soil as a sacred task.

Humans from the Hummus – life as royal gardeners

It is generally recognised that the Garden story is more environmentally friendly. As Jewish scholar Ziony Zevit observes, agricultural themes are clearer in the Garden story.[44] As we saw earlier, Habel identifies it as a more Christian text than P's mandate, a view I have refuted. To fully appreciate this narrative as a potential root for a biblically informed environmental justice principle, it is important to liberate Eden from a simple, paradisiac prelapsarian past.[45]

The first observation from this passage is that of human solidarity with the rest of creation. In Gen 2:7, the man (*haadam*) was formed out of the earth, *aphar min haadamah*. Zevit sees as significant in 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 referring to the soil *terra rossa*.[46] Theodore Hiebert notes that *adamah* is used in a precise sense, as cultivable soil, as opposed to the more general *erets*.[47] The breathed upon clod became a *nephesh hayyah*, as was domestic and wild animals (Gen 1:24). We shall see shortly the difference that being created from the dust of the earth makes compared to directly from the earth. Yet the common origin ties to the use of the formula "these are the generations of (*toledot*)" (Gen 2:4) that the Garden story describes the origin of the Earth family.[48] We are all earthlings.

The second observation, following Walter Brueggemann, is that our creation from the dust (*aphar*) of the earth in Gen 2:7, rather than simply straight from the earth as with the garden trees and animals implies a royal identity for the *adam*. Comparing Gen 2:7 with 1 Kgs 16:2, and 1 Sam 2:8 (paralleling Ps 113:7–8) reveals that *aphar* can refer to a pre-royal status:

1 Kgs 16:2 I lifted you out of the dust (*aphar*) and made you ruler over my people

[44] Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
[45] Nicholas Wyatt, "A Royal Garden: The Ideology of Eden," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 28, no. 1 (2014): 1–35.
[46] Zevit, *What Really Happened,* 82.
[47] Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape,* 34.
[48] Mick Pope, *From Canaan to Creation: Biblical Hermeneutics for the Anthropocene* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2024), 58.

1 Sam 2:8 // Ps 113:7–8 He raises up the poor from the dust (*aphar*); and he lifts the needy from the ash heap to set them among princes

Of course, *aphar* can refer to literal dust, as in the curse of the serpent (Gen 3:14) and is also indicative of our mortality (Gen 3:19). However, these parallels beg the question of where Eden was, who the *adam* was, and what was their role?

Several factors link Eden to the Tabernacle and hence serving the Garden with serving God. First, the Garden was entered from the east (Gen 3:24). The entrance to the tent of meeting was to the east (Num 3:28), as was the entrance to the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek 8:16). Second, Gordon Wenham observes that these guardian cherubim (Gen 3:24) feature in Solomon's temple in the inner sanctuary, decorating the walls and doors (1 Kgs 6:23–32), and the top the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 25:18–22).[49] Third, as Geoffery Harper has observed, the divine presence in both Eden and the sanctuary is indicated by *Yhwh* walking to and fro within them. The *hithpael* of *halak* (Gen 3:8), is also used in connection with the Tabernacle being carried with the people (2 Sam 7:6–7), the divine presence within the camp (Deut 23:14), and throughout Canaan (Lev 26:12).[50] The implication is that as in other parts of the ancient Near East, gardens were associated with temple cults and the wise royal rule. Such temple theology is not dissimilar to that found in P's creation account, where creation is described as a protological temple.[51]

Who then is the *adam*? Geoffrey Harper examines the relationship between the Garden narrative and H in the Holiness Code and examines the dating of H.[52] Of the options for pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic, I find the latter most convincing. Julia Rhyder argues for a post-exilic setting because H assumes the presence of the temple. The purpose of H is therefore to ensure the success of the second temple cult.[53] If this is the case, then the *adam* represents all of Israel. Such a view makes sense of the above

[49] Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *"I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood": Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 401. LeFebrve, "Adam Reigns in Eden," 32.
[50] G. Geoffrey Harper, *"I Will Walk Among You" The Rhetorical Function of Allusions to Genesis 1–3 in the Book of Leviticus* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 194. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism," 401.
[51] Pope, *From Canaan to Creation,* 39–42.
[52] Harper, "*I Will Walk Among You*," 88–97.
[53] Julia Rhyder, "Sabbath and Sanctuary Cult in the Holiness Legislation: A Reassessment," *JBL* 138, no. 4 (2019): 721.

discussion of reverencing the temple and keeping the Sabbath as being central to lay Israelite holiness.

Zevit reveals much of what is understood life in the garden to be like to be a projection from Greek mythology.[54] God planted a garden and put the *adam* in there to work it. Eden likely means bountiful or abundant, based on its shared consonantal root *ednah*, and Assyrian parallels.[55] Hiebert notes that this bounty was of rain–based highlands, and not irrigated lowlands (Gen 2:5 cf. Dt 11:10–11).[56] 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 labor.

Davis comments further on the nature of this labor. The Hebrew *abad* 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 *for* the soil, serving its needs.[57] Likewise, *shamar*, 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.[58]

Given that Eden is the tabernacle in Jerusalem, what then of the return to dust warned in Gen 3? The most obvious reference is to human mortality, but Brueggemann also suggests dethronement language, the opposite of the enthronement found in other passages that use *aphar*. Given the likely post-exilic setting, exile itself must be in mind. Leviticus 18 places Israel on the same tentative footing in the land as the nations before them and promises they will be "vomited out" by the land for covenant breaking. Likewise, Lev 26 echoes Gen 3 in the reversal of its blessings.[59] The ejection from the Garden therefore is the reminder of the possibility of exile.

However, the divine presence is not limited to the land, suggesting that even in exile, relationship with God via good earth care was possible. God's care of creation is described in two

[54] Zevit, *What Really Happened,* 86.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36–37.
[57] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 29.
[58] Ibid, 30-31.
[59] Pope, *From Creation to Canaan,* 82–83.

ways. Rain provides the needed moisture to cause both the human gardener to be formed to tend domesticated plants, and to water the wild plants outside of the garden (Gen 2:5–9).[60] Likewise, the river out of Eden divides into four to water the world.[61] Hence, while Israel's vocation was to care for its own soil, the world outside of it, and its agricultural concerns was not outside of divine care. Yet, the goal was always return to Eden, and Lev 26 points towards the "Edenization of Caanan" and to land care as an exercise of lay Israelite holiness, as discussed earlier. This Edenization was anticipated elsewhere in the prophetic literature (e.g. Ezek 36:3; Isa 51:3).[62] As we shall see below, this Edenization is not confined to Canaan in the New Testament but extends to include all of creation.

The roots of environmental justice in the non-Priestly Garden story lie in its understanding of connection between God's Tabernacle presence, and the imagery of tending the Garden. Gardens were usually a symbol of kingly wisdom to rule, be it the king of Persia (Esth 7:7) of Nebuchadnezzar with his hanging gardens of Babylon.[63] By analogy, the *adam* as gardener points to a broader rule and hence responsibility for the *adamah* beyond the garden. As noted earlier, Rhyder argues that H integrates the Garden narrative into its promotion of the temple cult in the Persian period.[64] As such then, the royal cultic role is that of the lay Israelite and demonstrated in the reverencing of the temple and keeping of the Sabbath, which as noted above, includes care for the land. Hence, the two stories (Gen 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24) point in the same direction. In an agrarian society, land care is assumed to be a part of lay holiness. The non-agriculturally related creation shares in this, even if it is not as clearly prioritised.

Returning to the soil

We have seen that the two origin stories in the Hebrew bible present proper care of land 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

[60] Ibid, 64-65.
[61] Ibid, 77.
[62] Ibid, 79.
[63] LeFebvre, A*dam Reigns in Eden*, 30–31.
[64] Julia Rhyder, "Sabbath and Sanctuary Cult," 721.

small number of laborers producing a large amount of food via mechanization, or the use of cheap labor. As discussed already, agriculture has led to the pushing of several of the planetary boundaries which support human flourishing and that of the more-than-human. What then does the relationship of the image of God and its relationship to agriculture tell us about human vocation for the non-farmer?

Themes from Gen 1–3 and H are echoed in the New Testament. The so-called Nazareth Manifesto of Luke 4 hints at a Jubilee year, with Jesus' proclamation of the "year of the Lord's favour" (v. 19) and release of captives (v. 18 cf. Lev 25:40–41).[65] Unmentioned, but unavoidable in my analysis, is Sabbath rest for the land. Likewise, John's gospel incorporates both origin stories. Jesus is both the agent of creation and new creation in John 1 (c.f. Gen 1) and the new Adam in the new creation in John 20 (c.f., Gen 2). There are seven signs in John's Gospel, echoing the heptadic creation story. The eighth sign is the resurrection, indicating the new creation.[66] Hints of the struggle of the creation and its futility to human misrule are found in Romans 8, together with Exodus language promising a return from exile for people and land.[67] Finally, Rev 21–22 explicitly uses imagery from Gen 1–3. In Rev 22:2, the tree of life is for the blessing of the *nations*, and hence Edenization moves out from the church into the whole world.[68]

My argument, albeit tentative, is that if the creation accounts point to an intimate human connection to soil, and a warping or frustrating of the relationship is part of our alienation from God, then part of being redeemed is being reconnected to soil. This does not suggest that humanity must return to an essentially agrarian way of life, but that given that part of the Anthropocene is an abuse of soil, all humans are called to better respect the soil. Such respect can take three forms.

First, all human labor should indirectly nurture and serve the needs of soil. Any human activity that undercuts agriculture is a

[65] R. B. Sloan, "Jubilee," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 396.
[66] Margaret Daly-Denton, *John: An Earth Bible Commentary: Supposing Him to Be the Gardener*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2017).
[67] Mick Pope, "With Heads Craning Forward: The Eschaton and the Non-human Creation in Romans 8," in *Ecotheology in the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Divine in Nature*, ed. Melissa Brotton (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 161–78.
[68] Mick Pope, *All Things New: God's Plan to Renew Our World (*Reservoir: Morning Star Publishing, 2018), 135–136.

breaking of our mandate, let alone a lack of wisdom. This is a principle broad in application. As noted, giving land Sabbath rest from human economic activity is key.

Second, it is important that all humans see themselves as bi-vocational. Gardening represents a return to the soil, a re-grounding and reconnection to natural cycles that has been lost in modern life, and indeed is being disrupted by climate change. This is not a call to reduce human society to entirely agrarian, but a call to attentiveness. Miriam Pepper has catalogued the variety of community gardens, demonstrating that garden can provide spaces for reconciliation, meditation, education, and becoming rooted to place.[69]

Third, for those of us living in colonised lands, reconnecting with soil is an opportunity for reconciliation. Bruce Pascoe demonstrated has that Aboriginal people engaged in agriculture in a sustainable manner before colonization.[70] Learning to reground ourselves in an Australian context is intimately tied up in reconciliation. Potawatomi botanist Robin Kimmerer calls us to learn the "grammar of animacy," which is necessarily local in nature, and reflective of the traditional peoples of a place.[71] While we need to understand the whole earth as temple, i.e., think globally, we need to act locally if environmental justice is to take root in our own contexts.

[69] Miriam Pepper, "Church-based Community Gardening: Where Mission Meets Ecology in Local Contexts," *Australian Journal of Mission Studies*, 6, no 2 (2012): 54-59.
[70] Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (London: Scribe, 2018).
[71] See Robin W. Kimmerer, *The Democracy of Species* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 1–23.