THE SABBATH AS A SUBVERSIVE RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL/ECOLOGICAL VIOLENCE? LESSONS FROM CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Violence has often been framed as a forceful assault intended to damage or disrupt the other. Environmental violence is certainly included in discussions of violence given the forceful and disruptive nature of the climate emergency affecting both humans and other members of the creation community. In the face of environmental/ecological violence, this paper asks, how can the biblical text serve as a resource for responding to such violence? The field of ecological biblical hermeneutics may offer a response to this question.

Ecological biblical hermeneutics seeks to reread and interpret the Bible from the perspective of or with a greater sensitivity to the non-human creation. By reviewing the various movements within ecological biblical hermeneutics, one emerging area of development is to identify heuristic keys or interpretative lenses. As W. Brueggemann affirms that "the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative" (Sabbath as Resistance, 2017), I propose that the biblical Sabbath can serve as an interpretative lens. Such a lens based on the Sabbath can be a tool for an ecological rereading of the Bible in response to environmental violence.

INTRODUCTION: VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ECOLOGY/ENVIRONMENT

Violence is a rather complex concept, both in its meaning and its actual real-life phenomenon/referent. It is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as "the use of physical force so as to

injure, abuse, damage, or destroy; injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation; or intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force."[1] Oftentimes, it is associated with human action, related to the exertion of power, "making others act as we choose" asserting one's own will against the resistance of others. According to Hannah Arendt, "violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues."[2] Such understanding of violence assumes that there is a certain rationality and intelligence behind the implementation of such instrumentality to reach a particular end, independent of but usually occurring against resistance. It may be inferred that violence is perpetrated by humans as an instrument to augment one's strength, to achieve one's particular ends, usually imposing one's will on another. From this inference, it may appear that violence is an exclusively human affair. How then can ecological/environmental violence be understood? If indeed the present ecological crisis can be considered violence, how can the biblical text serve as a resource for responding to such violence?

To address these questions, the use of the terms "environmental" or "ecological" in relation to violence will be explored, in view of defining what environmental or ecological violence means. Then, I will attempt to answer the question: how can the biblical text serve as a resource for responding to ecological violence? I will do this by a modest evaluation of the various schools of thought and movements within the field of ecological biblical hermeneutics. Finally, drawing from Brueggemann's insights, I propose that the biblical Sabbath can serve as a rich resource to

[1] "Violence," *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*, n.d., accessed October 4, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence.

[2] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 51.

address ecological violence especially in the context of biblical hermeneutics.

ENVIRONMENT OR ECOLOGY?

Before proceeding with the definition of what environmental or ecological violence means, it is necessary to clarify the seemingly interchangeable terms 'environment/environmental' and ecological'; and the terms 'nature' and 'creation.' It should be acknowledged that these two sets of terms are used rather loosely and pointing out their differences is essential. One helpful distinction is Rolston's distinction of "environment," "ecology," "nature" and "landscape" in his inquiry about the aesthetic appreciation of landscapes.[3] He defines 'environment' as "the current field of significance for a living being, usually its home, though not always…" and are "settings under which life takes place for people, animals and plants," while "ecology" is construed as "the interactive relationships through which an organism is constituted in its environment."[4] "Nature is the entire system of things, with the aggregation of all their powers, properties, processes, and products – whatever follows natural law and whatever happens spontaneously."[5] Finally, landscape refers to the local scope of nature which is modified by culture, nature as experienced from perspectives, unaided by no instrumentalities.[6]

Given these distinctions, the term 'environment' considers the setting in which an organism's life takes place distinctly from the organism in question, while ecology considers that organism

[3] Holmes Rolston III, "Does Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscapes Need to Be Science-Based," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 4 (1995): 379. Rolston is an American philosopher who has largely contributed to environmental ethics and environmental philosophy.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

connected to its environment. In more familiar terms, environment may refer to the setting in which humans are located and in which their life and existence takes place, which includes everything save humanity itself, while the term 'ecology' considers humanity as part of the natural world and not separate from entire system of relationships that make up their environment. The term "environment" is more associated with the natural world as distinct from humans. The term 'ecology' places humans as part of and integrated with the environment which, in a manner of speaking, envelops human existence.

Rolston's distinction is similar to Pope Francis' understanding of the 'environment' and 'ecology' in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. Francis mentions his predecessors Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI's concern for the environment being subject to exclusive human use and consumption; and calling humans to respect and protect it.[7] Francis also defines more clearly on the one hand, 'ecology,' referring to the "relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop," and on the other, 'environment,' referring to the relationship existing between nature and society which lives in it."[8] While ambiguous, his definition of the environment sets "nature and society" as distinct from the environment because the former "lives in it."[9]

The distinction between "nature" and "creation" may seem to be a matter of secular versus religious nomenclature. However, according to common use of the term, one may deduce that "nature" refers to the entire phenomena of and in the physical world including plants, animals, elements, and landscapes, distinct

[7] Francis, "Laudato Si: Encyclical on the Care for Our Common Home" (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 5–6, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[8] Ibid., 138–139.

[9] Ibid., 139.

from humanity.[10] Hilary Marlow, a biblical scholar from Oxford, in her work on ecological ethics and the Old Testament, notes that the "nouns 'creation' and 'the created world' could reasonably be assumed to denote all that God has made – i.e. his human and non-human creation'... in practice many people use these phrases to refer to everything *apart from* humans – a synonym for the natural world."[11] Hence in this paper, the terms "nature" will be used to denote the created physical world *apart from* humanity while the term "creation" will be used to refer to the entire created reality which include both nature or non-human creation *and* humanity.

Having cleared the terminologies to be used, we now turn to how environmental violence is understood. Bandy Lee, a forensic psychiatrist, social psychiatrist, and a leading global expert on violence, offers a definition of environmental violence which is composed of various dimensions. These are:

> (a) the violence between people(s) over natural resources; (b) environmental policies that can be violent against people; (c) the secondary violence from the natural world (in the form of excess earthquakes, tsunamis, heat waves, and hurricanes) as a result of human degradation of the earth; and (d) direct damage to the environment by humans that threatens their own survival.[12]

For a large portion of the development of her article on environmental violence, Lee presents environmental violence as the violence inflicted by humans to fellow human beings that is the

[10] "Nature," last modified September 6, 2023, accessed September 11, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/ dictionary/english/nature.

[11] Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.

[12] Bandy X. Lee, "Causes and Cures VIII: Environmental Violence," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 30 (September 2016): 106.

result of various environmental factors: resource scarcity, population growth, unequitable distribution and access to power, even resource abundance. Environmental factors such as these are seen to be causes of violence among humans. On another layer, Lee posits that environmental violence may also be understood because of structural violence, one which is rooted in the perception of scarcity of resources as in the case of colonialism of many Third World nations. Violence here is environmental "[b]ecause all human affairs lie within the natural environment, environmental factors easily tie into justifications for violence or human rights abuses, but this does not imply a simplistic relationship between scarcity and violence."[13] In both cases, environmental violence is thought of as violence among humans, brought about by various circumstances including environmental factors.

Later in Lee's article, environmental violence is extended to also mean the "violence" of natural calamities which affect humans. In its sixth report in 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) mentions that there is much clearer and stronger evidence of climate change severely and negatively impacting and making vulnerable both nature and societies.[14] Catastrophic and extreme weather events are felt in various parts of the world, from stronger typhoons and hurricanes,[15] massive floods

[13] Ibid., 107.

[14] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "FAQ 1: What Are the New Insights on Climate Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation Compared to Former IPCC Reports?," last modified February 27, 2022, accessed June 29, 2022, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/about/frequently-asked-questions/keyfaq1; United Nations, "The World's Food Supply Is Made Insecure by Climate Change," *United Nations* (United Nations, n.d.), accessed August 5, 2021, https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/worlds-food-supply-made-insecure-climate-change.

[15] Henry Fountain, "Climate Change Is Making Hurricanes Stronger, Researchers Find," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2020, sec. Climate, accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/climate/climate-changes-hurricane-intensity.html.

and landslides,[16] to droughts and heatwaves.[17] Closer to home, the Philippines is one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of this climate crisis. According to the Global Climate Risk Index of 2021, the Philippines remains at the top four countries most affected by extreme weather events from 1999-2018 and from 2000-2019 considering the annual averages.[18] "The impacts of climate change in the Philippines are immense, including annual losses in GDP, changes in rainfall patterns and distribution, droughts, threats to biodiversity and food security, sea level rise, public health risks, and endangerment of vulnerable groups such as women and indigenous people."[19] The devastation of countless human lives

[16] Petra Wischgoll and David Sahl, "Death Toll Rises to 170 in Germany and Belgium Floods," *Reuters*, July 17, 2021, sec. Europe, accessed August 5, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-belgian-flood-deaths-rise-157-search-continues-2021-07-17/; "Devastating Floods in Pakistan," Text.Article (NASA Earth Observatory, August 30, 2022), last modified August 30, 2022, accessed September 12, 2022, https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/150279/devastating-floods-in-pakistan; "News – FloodList," accessed September 12, 2022, https://floodlist.com/news.

[17] Ellen Ioanes, "Severe Heat and Droughts Are Wreaking Havoc across the Globe," *Vox*, last modified August 21, 2022, accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2022/8/21/23315264/droughts-extreme-heat-climate-crisis; "'The next Pandemic': Drought Is a Hidden Global Crisis, UN Says," *The Guardian*, last modified June 17, 2021, accessed August 5, 2021, http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jun/17/the-next-pandemic-drought-is-a-hidden-global-crisis-un-says; Michael Le Page, "Why Have We Seen so Many Heatwaves around the World in 2022?," *New Scientist*, last modified September 8, 2022, accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.newscientist.com/article/2336829-why-have-we-seen-so-many-heatwaves-around-the-world-in-2022/; "IPCC Report: 'Code Red' for Human Driven Global Heating, Warns UN Chief," *UN News*, last modified August 9, 2021, accessed November 22, 2021, https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/08/1097362.

[18] David Eckstein et al., *Global Climate Risk Index 2021 Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events?* (Bonn: Germanwatch, 2021), 13.

[19] Climate Change Commission, "Climate Change Impacts," *National Integrated Climate Change Database Information and Exchange System(NICCDIES)*, accessed June 29, 2022, https://niccdies.climate.gov.ph/climate-change-impacts.

and livelihoods, vulnerable groups, and communities by extreme weather and natural hazards may also be considered violence.

Lee also construes environmental violence as the self-inflicted, cyclic, and systemic/structural forceful disruption of humans to themselves. This dimension of environmental violence may be understood on two levels, first, the direct violence against nature/environment through the collective, interconnected, systemic human action; and second, the resulting violence on humans brought about by natural calamities discussed in the preceding paragraph.[20] She observes that "as we eradicate nature at rates never before seen on this planet, we threaten our own habitat with its complex systems that provide essential conditions for human life. As a tragic consequence of unchecked exploitation of nature, humanity now runs the risk of destroying it and in turn, becoming a victim of this devastation."[21] It is important to note that while changes in climate patterns have natural causes, scientists affirm that most of the climate change happening today is aggravated by human activity. The unprecedented burning of fossil fuels and increased greenhouse gas emissions are among the many other anthropogenic causes of climate change.[22] It can be pointed out that individual choices, consumption patterns, and lifestyles are contributing to the worsening of the crisis in the larger scale of

[20] Lee, "Causes and Cures VIII," 107–108.

[21] Ibid., 108.

[22] The Royal Society, "Climate Change: Evidence and Causes | Royal Society," *The Royal Society*, accessed August 8, 2022, https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/climate-change-evidence-causes/basics-of-climate-change/; David I. Stern and Robert K. Kaufmann, "Anthropogenic and Natural Causes of Climate Change," *Climatic Change* 122, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 257–269; Jonathan Chaplin, "Laudato Si: Structural Causes of the Ecological Crisis," *Comment Magazine*, last modified September 24, 2015, accessed August 5, 2021, https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/laudato-siandrsquo-structural-causes-of-the-ecological-crisis/.

systemic and structural causes.[23] As seen from the connections, human beings are not only one of the causes of the climate crisis but also their own victims. Although Lee is concerned primarily with human existence being under threat due to their own doing, the violence against nature and the consequent violence brought by natural disasters acknowledges the human influence of such violence.[24]

Jürgen Zimmerer, writing from the perspective of human rights, connects environmental violence with the issue of genocide. He argues that environmental violence is "amongst the main driving forces of collective violence and that climate change will dramatically increase the likelihood of genocide occurring in areas at risk."[25] With this premise, environmental violence may be similar to the first element in Lee's discussion of environmental violence which is violence of humans perpetrated against other humans caused by conflict over natural resources or other environmental factors. In addition, Zimmerer construes environmental violence as violence against nature/environment and its consequence of the violence of natural calamities on humans. He recognizes environmental violence to be due to the clustering or integration of various anthropogenic factors that influence or cause the exhaustion of breach of planetary boundaries that render the planet hostile to human existence and the destruction or disruption of other systems in the biosphere. He explains,

> The idea to group together a multitude of factors, all of which have serious effects on the earth as a human habitat and tend to intensify each other… such as peak

[23] Elliot Hyman, "Who's Really Responsible for Climate Change?," *Harvard Political Review*, January 2, 2020, accessed August 6, 2021, https://harvardpolitics.com/climate-change-responsibility/.

[24] Lee, "Causes and Cures VIII," 108.

[25] Jürgen Zimmerer, "Climate Change, Environmental Violence and Genocide," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (April 3, 2014): 265.

> fossil fuels or population growth, all possess an environmental dimension. This being the case, the generic term 'environmental violence' seems useful. Violence in this understanding, however, is not only physical violence, let alone collective physical violence, but is also structural violence.[26]

Zimmerer's construal of environmental violence flows from two premises. First, he mentions that climate change is commonly attributed to "man[sic]-made environmental change and its catastrophic effects." Second, he includes the idea of the "Anthropocene," in which the "interconnectedness of various human activities" is seen to be the "prime mover of global physical phenomena."[27] While his article mostly projects the idea of environmental violence as the environmental factors that cause or influence violence, Zimmerer still underlines the role humans play in the occurrence of such violence against nature/environment which gives rise to conditions that render conflict and genocide to be more likely to happen in societies and communities.

In sum, what are the common themes from these authors' understanding of environmental violence? First, one can note the structural nature of environmental violence; that it is made up of various causes that impinge on and build on each other, such as population growth and scarcity of resources among many other factors. Second, it is also common among the various construal of ecological violence to stress the cyclical dynamic of environmental factors and the violence it causes. The initial human-generated forceful disruption of natural processes and systems past their

[26] Ibid., 268; See Johan Rockström et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (November 18, 2009), accessed November 20, 2023, https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/.

[27] Zimmerer, "Climate Change, Environmental Violence and Genocide," 267.

sustainable thresholds in turn produce or at least largely influence the violence to and among humans. The third theme that emerges is that, on various levels, environmental violence threatens life on earth, both human life and non-human life and other systems in the biosphere.

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AS VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ENVIRONMENT

In this paper, ecological violence and environmental violence will be used interchangeably while recognizing their critical differences. By speaking about ecology, we mean the relationships that exist in the natural world, including both humans and non-humans; while environment refers to the entire physical world, as the locus or setting distinct from and in which human life is situated. Can the present ecological/environmental crisis be considered violence? Given the two vectors of the understanding of environmental violence on the one hand, and the anthropogenic character of environmental destruction on the other, it may be said that the present environmental crisis can be considered as a kind of violence perpetrated against the ecological community by humans. Also, with the multi-layered nature of the violence discussed above, this paper then considers both terms –environmental violence and ecological violence– along with their respective nuances as referring to the complex phenomenon of violence happening in the natural world. One should highlight the voluntary and systemic nature of human action, to impose human will on the natural world to serve human ends. The instrumental nature of violence as a course of action mostly through destructive methods can rightly be applied to how humans have dealt with the environment. Lois Lorentzen observes that "[t]he ongoing human war against non-human nature surpasses all other forms of violence in the early 21st century. An all too familiar litany of environmental

woes includes: (1) [m]assive deforestation, (2) [l]oss of biodiversity, (3) [g]lobal warming, and (4) [t]hreats to water.[28] But given the interconnectedness of all life in the planet, the war against non-human creation is also tantamount to humans waging war against themselves and worse. Given that there is an acknowledgement that the violence is not just inflicted on the non-human creation or the environment but that the harm extends to the entire ecology, humans and non-humans alike, this paper will then use the term ecological violence hereafter.

Shifting the focus on theology and biblical studies, it is important to note that in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, violence (*ḥāmas*, or its other related terms like *šamad*, "to destroy"; *ḥārag*, "to kill") does not only occur in human-non-human relationships and relationships among human characters.[29] In the Bible, God is portrayed to have wrought violence on humans and non-humans, most notably in the stories of Noah and the great flood in Genesis 6:9-9:17, the plagues of Egypt in Exodus 7:14-11:10, 12:29-32. However, a discussion of divine violence in its breadth and depth, is beyond the scope of this paper and merits another discussion.[30] This paper focuses its attention to respond to

[28] Lois Lorentzen, "Religion and Violence Against Nature," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 19 (January 1, 2006): 242.

[29] An in-depth study of the word violence and its related terms in the Hebrew bible is done by David JA Clines, "The Ubiquitous Language of Violence in the Hebrew Bible," in *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception*, vol. 79, Oudtestamentische Studiën, Old Testament Studies (Brill, 2020), 23–41.

[30] For an initial discussion on divine violence, see M. Daniel Carroll R. and J. Blair Wilgus, eds., *Wrestling with the Violence of God: Soundings in the Old Testament*, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2015); Hélène M. Dallaire, "Taking the Land by Force: Divine Violence in Joshua," in *Wrestling with the Violence of God: Soundings in the Old Testament*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. and J. Blair Wilgus, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2015); Jerome F. D. Creach, "Violence in the Old Testament," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, by Jerome F. D. Creach (Oxford University Press, 2016), accessed November 27, 2023, http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/

ecological violence as the human-generated violence committed against non-human creation and the entire ecological community and turning to the biblical text as a potential resource for such a response.

LESSONS FROM CONTEMPORARY ECOLOGICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

At this point, this paper asks the question: how can the biblical text serve as a resource for responding to ecological violence? What is the role of the Bible and Biblical scholars in responding to ecological violence?

Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, a feminist biblical scholar and one of the former presidents of Society of Biblical Literature, argues strongly that biblical scholars can no longer play the role of an emotionally detached, value-neutral, disinterested scientists only beholden to the interests of the guild. Since "one's social location or rhetorical context is decisive of how one sees the world, constructs reality, or interprets biblical texts,"[31] such ethos takes the socio-historical context of both the authors and the readers seriously. As such, biblical scholars are ethically bound to furthering society and taking responsibility over the meanings, and consequently, the worlds constructed by them, in their work of

9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-154; Terence E. Fretheim, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," in *What Kind of God?*, ed. Michael J. Chan and Brent A. Strawn, vol. 14, Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim (Penn State University Press, 2015), 129–139, accessed November 26, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/j.ctv1bxgztr.16; Eric A. Seibert, "Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 1 (October 1, 2016): 8–40.

[31] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 1 (March 1988): 5, 15.

interpretation.[32] In a similar vein, Fernando Segovia, another past president of SBL and one of the well-known scholars of post-colonial biblical interpretation, also underlines that biblical criticism must not remain on the sidelines, rather, it must take an active stance toward the sociocultural political context it finds itself in. According to Segovia, "If critics are to adopt an activist position within the spectrum on critical tasks, to address their social-cultural context, and to marshal the resources of their field in this endeavor, then it is indispensable to secure a firm grasp on the global state of affairs today."[33] It remains, therefore, for bible critics to not just be familiar with but be adept with the current state of affairs of the society and of the world where they exercise their work of interpretation. As Hilary Marlow affirms,

> [t]heology rarely, if ever, develops in isolation. Rather it emerges in dialogue with individuals and groups, and as a response to a wide range of religious, political, and social factors. In addition, theologies of nature or creation derive their impetus from observations and questions concerning the natural world and the human place within it.[34]

Marlow's statement forwards Fiorenza's and Segovia's position that theology, and consequently biblical theology must recognize its connection and its relationship with the context in which it is exercised, in this case, the context of ecological violence.

In the pursuit of understanding the root of the ecological crisis, Lynn White, Jr. places a "huge burden of guilt" on the Judeo-Christian religion for its anthropocentric influence in causing the

[32] Ibid.

[33] Fernando F. Segovia, "Criticism in Critical Times: Reflections on Vision and Task," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134, no. 1 (2015): 16.

[34] Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20.

ecological crisis.[35] He blames the Christian faith, especially its Western form, as responsible for cultivating such a worldview of being the "most anthropocentric religion" and proposes that to get out of this crisis, it requires us to "find a new religion or rethink our old one."[36]

White's article triggered vibrant and engaging responses from the 1960's until the present.[37] Christian theologians and scholars responded with what came to be known as ecological theology. Efforts were intended to respond to White's charge against Christianity by turning to the Bible and Christian tradition to present that Christianity is not to be blamed but is in fact a great source of ecological wisdom. As South African systematic theologian Ernst Conradie observes,

> "Numerous studies have tried to defend Christianity against White's accusations by retrieving the ecological wisdom in the Biblical roots of the Christian tradition and in its subsequent history, its doctrines, and ethos, its forms of spirituality and praxis. It is therefore argued that Christianity if interpreted adequately, is not the cause of the environmental crisis but can offer ecological wisdom that may be crucial for responsible earth keeping."[38]

Marlow adds that ecological lenses in theology are not monolithic but are actually diverse. Works on ecological theology may be seen in a spectrum ranging from an apologetic stance, to a repudiation of traditional theological concepts, to a sacramental

[35] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–1207.

[36] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1205–1206.

[37] Willis Jenkins, "After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 2 (June 2009): 283–309.

[38] Ernst M. Conradie, "Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project," *Scriptura* 85, no. 0 (2004): 125.

view of nature.[39] What seems to be observable in these works is the consistent appeal to the Scriptures, although these appeals may not include sound or detailed exegesis of texts.[40] Eventually, the field of ecological biblical hermeneutics developed and scholars sought to interpret the Bible from the perspective of or with a greater sensitivity to nature/the non-human creation. Ecological biblical hermeneutics is a contextual approach which subjects biblical texts and their traditions of interpretation under the hermeneutics of suspicion and of trust to both critique anti-ecological texts and interpretations and uncover or construct potential ecological wisdom from the Bible.

David Horrell, Christopher Southgate, and Cheryl Hunt, scholars from Exeter, England, reviewed the various appeals to the Bible in works of ecological theology.[41] Following Francis Watson's work entitled "Strategies of Recovery and Resistance: Hermeneutical Reflections on Genesis 1-3 and its Pauline Reception," Horrell and his companions propose two major categories of appeals to the Bible in ecological and environmental ethics: readings of recovery and readings of resistance.[42] Under readings of resistance are two sub-types: resistance in favor of ecology, and readings of resistance in favor of the Bible.[43] These categories, although admitted by the proponents to be simplistic in

[39] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 82–84.

[40] Ibid., 84.

[41] David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible in Ecotheology and Environmental Ethics: A Typology of Hermeneutical Stances*," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no. 2 (August 2008): 219–238; David G Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future" (2014); David G Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[42] Francis Watson, "Strategies of Recovery and Resistance: Hermeneutical Reflections on Genesis 1-3 and Its Pauline Reception," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 14, no. 45 (1992): 82; quoted in Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 221.

[43] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 225, 228.

categorizing a range of hermeneutical strategies employed by the authors, are helpful in the critical evaluation of the range of hermeneutical strategies employed by various authors to identify or formulate a "cogent stance for a fruitful ecological hermeneutic."[44] The Exeter group proposes another reading which is situated between readings of recovery and resistance, which they call readings of "revision, reformation, or reconfiguration," an approach which they view as a way forward in the development of ecological biblical hermeneutics.[45] To identify the possible contributions of ecological biblical hermeneutics to ecological education, I will briefly review these various movements and offer some modest assessment of each. I will use Genesis 1:28 as a sample text to demonstrate how each category would interpret the Biblical text: "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." (NRSVUE)

READINGS OF RECOVERY

Readings of recovery affirm that the Biblical texts in themselves are not problematic, but the history of interpretation is tainted with an anti-ecological and destructive form of anthropocentrism. These readings "attempt to show that biblical tradition ...offers positive and valuable resources for a stance of environmental action and concern."[46] Horrell's group compares this reading with H. Paul Santmire's similar categorization reading as 'apologetic' since readings of this type try to defend the Bible and the Christian tradition from the charge that they are ecologically

[44] Ibid., 220.
[45] Ibid., 233–234.
[46] Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 11.

hostile or, at least, indifferent.[47] In the face of anti-ecological traces, ecological wisdom of Biblical texts are buried under subsequent anti-ecological interpretations and therefore must be recovered. In the case of Genesis 1:28, readings of recovery would argue that this is not a command to abuse and misuse nature. According to proponents, such understanding is a misinterpretation of the text and that the text promotes responsible stewardship of the earth. Following this reading of recovery is Steven Bouma-Prediger's *For the Beauty of the Earth*,[48] and Richard Bauckham's works *Living with Other Creatures* and *God and the Crisis of Freedom*.[49] Another example of readings of recovery is the Green Bible which, by highlighting the various texts which appear to portray God's message to care for the earth seems to construe that the Bible is ecologically friendly.[50] According to this type of reading, Genesis 1:28, especially the terms "to subdue" and "have dominion" has been misinterpreted as the justification for the misuse and abuse of the environment or the non-human creation. This positive dimension of the biblical text needs to be "recovered" from such misinterpretation and should be correctly interpreted as the charge given by God to humans for responsible stewardship of the rest of creation.

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[47] H. Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology*, Theology and the sciences (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 7.

[48] Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed., Engaging culture (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2010).

[49] Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 1. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2011).

[50] *The Green Bible*, New Revised Standard Version. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); A sharp critique of this version of the Bible is offered by David G. Horrell, "*The Green Bible* : A Timely Idea Deeply Flawed," *The Expository Times* 121, no. 4 (January 2010): 180–186.

While it is true that there are certain texts which have been distorted by misinterpretations, one must also accept that there are biblical texts that may pose a challenge to the claim that it is ecologically friendly when texts carry a multitude of possible interpretations. The Biblical text cannot be immediately accepted as construing a particular message or value when it must be subject to careful interpretation as its message can be interpreted in various ways, even opposite of what proponents of readings of recovery may claim. "Readings of recovery often involve strained and unconvincing attempts to show that a text supports and promotes the values for which the contemporary author is arguing."[51] Furthermore, the texts often carry the possibility of other equally plausible meanings, including those texts whose meanings are ecologically hostile, and are not straightforward in showing any particular pattern of ethical responsibility.[52]

READINGS OF RESISTANCE AND ITS TWO SUBTYPES

Horrell, Southgate, and Hunt classify the readings of resistance as the kind of appeal to the Bible in works of eco-theology that resists certain elements of the biblical text in favor of certain values or commitments. Unlike readings of recovery, these readings do not insist on presenting the Bible as entirely containing ecological values. Rather, these readings imply and accept that there are certain anti-ecological elements in the texts, along with the subsequent traditions of interpretations of these texts. According to Horrell and companions, "This type of reading is not one of rediscovering the positive value of texts hidden beneath a history of misinterpretation but of facing, resisting and escaping intrinsically negative texts."[53] This category has two subtypes: resistance of the

[51] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 232.
[52] Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 118–119.
[53] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 225.

Biblical text in favor of ecological values (A), and resistance of ecological agenda in favor of Biblical authority (B).

A good example of the readings of resistance A is the Earth Bible Project (henceforth, EBP) spearheaded by Norman Habel and companions.[54] They propose to subject the Bible under the suspicion that it is ecologically hostile by using a set of six eco justice principles. The six eco-justice principles are as follows: the principle of intrinsic worth, interconnectedness, voice, purpose, mutual custodianship, and resistance.[55] Genesis 1:28 for this subtype is inherently ecologically hostile or at least contains ecologically hostile elements and as such, it must be rejected and a radical reformation of interpretation of this text is needed. Hence, for this subtype of reading of resistance, Genesis 1:28 would take the words "to subdue" and "have dominion" more directly as it means, and therefore the verse is *not* a command for responsible stewardship. This subtype accepts that the text of Genesis 1:28 itself is, in fact, problematic as it sets the human being as overlords and domineering over the rest of creation. This implies that Genesis 1:28 is one of the ecologically hostile texts which goes against ecological values such as the ones set forth in the eco-justice principles, and consequently, must be rejected.

Horrell, however, notes that by placing the locus of authority to the external set of principles such as the eco-justice principles, the EBP "eschews any attempt to show how these values

[54] Norman C Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, Earth Bible Series 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Norman C. Habel, ed., *The Earth Story in Genesis*, The Earth Bible 2 (Sheffield: Academic Press [u.a.], 2000); Norman C. Habel, ed., *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, The Earth Bible 4 (Sheffield, England : Cleveland: Sheffield Academic Press ; Pilgrim Press, 2001); Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, The Earth Bible 3 (Sheffield Cleveland (Ohio): Sheffield academic press the Pilgrim press, 2001); Norman C. Habel and Balabanski, eds., *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, The Earth Bible 5 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

[55] Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, 25–54.

can emerge (or indeed have emerged) from a (particular) reading of the tradition, and thus, crucially, severely limits its ability to be persuasive for those within that tradition."[56] Horrell asks,"[w]hy then should Christians find these principles persuasive, persuasive enough to serve as a basis for ethical commitment and critical evaluation of the Bible? From where do these principles derive?"[57] For him, the eco-justice principles represent an "ecological commitment, something formed independently of the Christian and biblical traditions, in which case the Bible is pretty much dispensable" where "it does not give the Bible a generative and normative role in the ongoing articulation and reformulation of the Christian doctrine."[58] Likewise, Marlow notes that these eco-justice principles are not unique, as another author, Steven Bouma-Prediger, wrote a similar set of principles without doing away with religious language, outlining an environmental ethic that can still be theocentric rather than ecocentric.[59]

Examples of readings of resistance B are works of Constance E. Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*; and Dave Hunt, *Peace Prosperity and the Coming Holocaust: The New Age Movement in Prophecy*, where both resist the ecological values as part of the New Age agenda.[60] The Bible, according to the proponents of this subtype, is the "final and non-negotiable locus of authority" and, therefore, cannot be subjected to any critique based on an external set of principles or rules.[61] As a consequence of this

[56] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 233.

[57] David G. Horrell, "The Ecological Challenge to Biblical Studies," *Theology* 112, no. 867 (May 2009): 166; Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 120–121.

[58] Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 121.

[59] Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*; quoted in Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 94.

[60] Constance E. Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism* (Shreveport, La: Huntington House, 1983); Dave Hunt, *Peace, Prosperity, and the Coming Holocaust* (Eugene, Or: Harvest House Publishers, 1983).

[61] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 228.

commitment, this reading rejects the ecological agenda, any advances to promote care for the environment, and elements related to them such as themes like stewardship as part of rejecting anti-Christian ideologies or the New Age movement. This subtype would not read Genesis 1:28 as containing anti-ecological elements like the subtype that is in favor of ecological values. This subtype that is in favor of the Biblical authority would underline that non-human creation are created to serve the purposes of God to save humans. Hence, like the reading of resistance A, Genesis 1:28 is read and interpreted as a text which gives humans the charge to literally subdue and dominate the rest of creation. However, unlike the previous subtype, this reading of resistance accepts this text of Genesis 1:28 as the divinely ordained duty of humans, and therefore implies that this must be followed, while resistance A outrightly rejects this biblical text because it is ecologically hostile.

One problem that Horrell raised against reading of resistance in favor of the Biblical authority is its harmonizing tendency, that is, to declare that there is only one meaning of the text (that is, the Bible is to be accepted as anthropocentric and has no place for non-humans in the salvific plan of God) because this is 'what the Bible says.'[62] This is an uncritical reading of the text, and it is contrary to the reality that the biblical text can carry a variety of equally plausible meanings.

[62] Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 119–120.

READINGS OF REVISION

Horrell and his companions find the Earth Bible Project as an honest articulation of a critical rereading of the Bible without immediately assuming that the Bible is ecologically friendly or hostile, something which both readings of recovery and readings of resistance in favor of Biblical authority fall short of. However, as mentioned earlier, they find that the Earth Bible Project lacks its appeal to those who adhere to Biblical authority since they have based their critique on a set of values external to the Bible, namely the six eco-justice principles. Hence, the Exeter group turns to a third type of readings, one which Santmire calls readings of revision.

Readings of revision draws from both the biblical authority and Christian tradition and interprets the texts considering contemporary (ecological) concerns without naively jumping to the conclusion that these texts are either ecologically hostile or friendly. This type of appeal to the Bible in eco-theology accepts that there are ecologically hostile elements together with potential ecological wisdom in the text of Genesis 1:28, and as such, it calls for a radical re-visioning and reformulation of the Christian tradition.

This position, according to Horrell, Hunt and Southgate, is the most cogent since it maintains positive contact with Christian tradition, with the ability to both recover positive elements and resist negative elements from the reading of the text. It also avoids two unsustainable positions. On the one hand, it avoids simply recovering or reproducing what the text really says and, on the other hand, uncritically opposing the text on the basis of a contemporary commitment.[63] This approach allows for a stance of critiquing ecologically hostile elements within the biblical text and its

[63] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 237–238.

interpretations but to do so by appealing to and not rejecting biblical authority. Horrell, Southgate, and Hunt find this position as a "more honest denotation of what fundamentalist and evangelical readings, whether of recovery or of resistance, really are" because it takes seriously the gap between the text and contemporary context in the process of interpretation.[64] Thus, Horrell and companions agree with Conradie on the understanding that interpretation of the Bible is a constructive activity, that is, it is shaped by the ever-going encounter between the text, the traditions of interpretation, and the contemporary context of the reader.[65]

Following the Ernst Conradie in his attempt to develop an ecological hermeneutic, the Exeter group recognizes the crucial role and use of heuristic keys or doctrinal lenses to bridge the gap between the contemporary context of ecological crisis and the world of the biblical text. For them,

> An initial requirement for an ecological hermeneutic would be that it articulates the particular doctrinal/ethical lenses that can enable positive, creative, yet also critical re-reading of the tradition. Thus, it can and must be a hermeneutic which practice both 'recovery' and resistance or retrieval and suspicion.[66]

As Horrell and his companions appraise the Earth Bible Project most especially regarding their use of the six eco-justice principles, they also question what other principles can be identified which can help the Christian reader/interpreter navigate both the world of the biblical text and their contemporary context

[64] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 234.
[65] Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 121–122.
[66] Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, "Appeals to the Bible," 236–237.

but whose authority is within the biblical text and the Christian tradition. In such a lacuna, Horrell proposes his own set of heuristic keys or doctrinal lenses illustrating that it is possible to read certain texts critically while at the same time appealing to a set of principles not foreign to the biblical authority and Christian tradition. He identifies these keys as theological motifs linked with and a reformulation of the six eco-justice principles: the goodness of all creation, humanity as part of the community of creation, interconnectedness in failure and flourishing, the covenant with all creation, creation's calling to praise God, and liberation and reconciliation for all things.[67] For Horrell, "[t]hese may function to reorient a theological appropriation of biblical traditions, just as central motifs such as 'justification by faith' and 'liberation' have done when readers have faced particular challenges in the world."[68] Ernst Conradie, for his part, likewise explored other possible heuristic keys or doctrinal lenses such as "sustainable community,"[69] "stewards or sojourners,"[70] and "the whole household of God (*oikos)*."[71] Using the heuristic key of "goodness of creation" and "the household of God," the re-vision of Genesis 1:28, especially the words "to subdue" and "have dominion" may mean that it is taken together with Genesis 1:31 "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" where the subdue and dominion is only to be exercised in view of the good that God ordained for the "household" of creation.

[67] Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 129–136.

[68] Ibid., 128–129.

[69] Ernst M. Conradie, "The Heuristic Key of 'Sustainable Community': A Few Notes," *Scriptura* 75, no. 4 (2000): 345–357.

[70] Ernst M. Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?," *Scriptura* 73, no. 2 (2000): 153–174.

[71] Ernst M Conradie, "The Whole Household of God (Oikos): Some Ecclesiological Perspectives (Part 1)," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 94, no. 1 (2007): 1–9; Ernst M Conradie, "The Whole Household of God (Oikos): Some Ecclesiological Perspectives (Part 2)," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 94, no. 1 (2007): 10–28.

As this contribution primarily subscribes to Horrell and the Exeter group's school of thought, the following discussion explores and evaluates further proposals which may be considered as readings of revision.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN READINGS OF REVISION THE ECOLOGICAL TRIANGLE: HILARY MARLOW (2009)

Conradie, Horrell, and his companions, link ecological biblical hermeneutics with systematic theology by pointing out that the eco-justice principles used in the EBP can be considered as small dogmatics. Hilary Marlow on the other hand, pivots to the direction of ethics. As an alternative, she turns to investigating the biblical text of the ancient worldview regarding the environment in view of discovering a paradigm to interpret the text in light of contemporary ecological concerns.[72] Marlow notes the need for contributions that focus on the biblical text as a theological response to environmental issues, something which is in line with Horrell's stance as represented by readings of revision.

Gleaning from Christopher J H. Wright's ethical, and later ecological triangle framework, Marlow proposes what she calls the "ecological triangle," which explores how the tripartite relationships between God, humans, and the non-human creation are portrayed in the text.[73] This framework asks:

> (1) What understanding of the non-human creation (whether cosmic or local) does the text represent?; (2) What assumptions are made about YHWH's relationship to the created world and how he acts

[72] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 94–95.

[73] Christopher J. H Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2011); Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 109–11.

> within it?; (3) What effect do the actions and choices of human beings have on the non-human creation and vice versa?[74]

MODIFIED ECOLOGICAL TRIANGLE: MARICEL IBITA (2015)

The ecological triangle developed by Marlow is further nuanced in the form of the modified ecological triangle by Maricel Ibita as elaborated in her doctoral dissertation and her subsequent works.[75] In this modified ecological triangle, she adds three complementary questions to the already existing ones by Marlow:

> How does God feature in the human–non-human creature relation? How does non-human creation feature in the God-human relation? How does humanity feature in the God–non-human creation relation? Thus, while this highlights the triple relationships that the ecological triangle focuses on, it will equally pay attention to the intertwining dynamic

[74] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 110–111.

[75] Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "Micah 6:1-8: Rereading the Metaphors for YHWH, Israel and Non-Human Creation" (Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2015); Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "The Great Flood in Genesis 6–9: An Ecological Reading of the J and P Traditions," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* 50, no. 2 (May 2020): 68–76; Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "When Climate Change Changes Religion: Towards an Ecolonial Reading of the Bible in a VUCA World," forthcoming; Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "Changing World, Transforming God's Word: Narrative, Ecological and Future-Oriented Approaches to Scriptures," *Concilium (00105236)*, no. 3 (May 2022): 55–63; Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "Critical Times, the Bible and Sustainability: The Challenge and Implications of Contemporary Biblical Ecological Hermeneutics," in *In Service for a Servant Church*, ed. Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel, Ruben Mendoza, and Gertraud Ladner (Brill | Schöningh, 2023), 61–74, accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.schoeningh.de/view/book/9783657790234/BP000013.xml.

> that hovers above the three characters by means of the questions raised by the modified version.[76]

Likewise, Ibita enriches this modified ecological triangle framework with her exploration of the role of metaphor, personification, and parallelism in the text of Micah 6:1-8.[77] Using this lens, Genesis 1:28 then is read by paying close attention to the characters involved. Here, God stands as sovereign over both humans and non-humans. God blesses humans with fertility and fecundity and that the charge to subdue and have dominion may be understood as extension of the blessing. In the relationship between humans and non-humans, human subduing and having dominion are never independent of God's "blessing." Humans are never to deal with non-humans without considering God's character.

In an effort to identify doctrinal keys to interpret the biblical text, it should be mentioned that the ecological triangle and modified ecological triangle are welcome developments as they represent the other end of the spectrum where biblical authority is not dismissed in favor of an external set of values or principles. However, insofar as the ecological triangle is derived from the biblical texts and the understanding of the biblical worldview, it may be complemented and strengthened by what Conradie, Horrell and the Exeter group advocate as an integration of and engagement of theological tradition, for a more comprehensive framework in interpreting the biblical text in view of the contemporary ecological context.

[76] Ibita, "Micah 6:1-8 Rereading Metaphors," 185; Ibita, "The Great Flood in Genesis 6–9," 69; Ibita, "Changing World, Transforming God's Word," 58.

[77] Ibita, "Micah 6:1-8 Rereading Metaphors," 185–187.

ECOLONIAL READING: TINA DYKESTEEN NILSEN & ANNA REBECCA SOLEVAG (2016)

Tina Dykesteen Nilsen and Anna Solevåg agree with Horrell, his companions, and Marlow that it is necessary to appeal to biblical authority and Christian tradition for an ecological reading of the text. However, they found the approaches of EBP and the Exeter projects to be "too narrow," as these are working only within a theological framework.[78] To have a wider impact, they argue that ecological hermeneutics must go beyond theology and become inclusive and interdisciplinary. Thus, they propose what they call the ecolonial lens or approach.[79] Ecolonial readings is a hermeneutical approach that integrates both ecological and postcolonial approaches. This integration stems from their conviction that the contemporary ecological crisis is not merely confined to the issue of ecology but is in fact a complex web of issues and, thus, pushes the "scholarly discussion to be inclusive and multi-faceted."[80] In this case, while acknowledging the demand for a multi-faceted and inclusive framework, they focused on the conjunction of ecological concerns with postcolonial issues.

From this proposal, Nilsen and Solevåg suggest that alternative to the Earth Bible's eco-justice principles, the Earth Charter can serve as an interdisciplinary and interreligious framework for ecological biblical interpretation.[81] The Earth Charter is a set of principles and values "created by the independent Earth Charter Commission, which was convened as a follow-up to the 1992 Earth Summit in order to produce a global

[78] Tina Dykesteen Nilsen and Anna Rebecca Solevåg, "Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics: The Case for Ecolonialism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 4 (2016): 671.

[79] Ibid.," 674–675.

[80] Ibid., 671.

[81] Ibid., 673–674.

consensus statement of values and principles for a sustainable future."[82] It consists of four major pillars, nested under which are their own respective sub-principles and commitments: respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, nonviolence, and peace.[83] Nilsen and Solevåg acknowledge that these pillars are similar to EBP's eco-justice principles; however, they argue that Earth Charter's edge over the eco-justice principles in its integrative approach to including not only strictly ecological matters but also human rights, social justice, culture, economics, politics, and history. Similar to readings of resistance in favor of ecological values, Genesis 1:28 would then be read as a text that is ecologically hostile as the words "to subdue" and "have dominion" may be construed as antagonistic to the ecological integrity pillar of the Earth Charter, and since ecological integrity is a common good, then it also affects social justice and human rights as well.

With Nilsen and Solevåg's proposal, Conradie's concern remains valid regarding a hermeneutic that touches on the various stages of the hermeneutical process and how to manage such a broad scope and translate it into a framework. Granted that it includes religious approaches, another limitation of such an open-ended stance is the tendency to focus more on the interdisciplinary reading of the biblical text. With this limitation, Horrell's point on how such a reading can prove to be persuasive for those within the religious tradition remains.

[82] Earth Charter Initiative, "The Earth Charter" (Earth Charter Initiative, 2001), accessed March 13, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20160911220637/http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library2/the-earth-charter-text/.

[83] Earth Charter Initiative, "The Earth Charter."

ECOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (UNSDGS): TINA DYKEESTEN NILSEN (2020)

In her subsequent work, Nilsen shifts from the Earth Charter to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) as part of the interpretive framework as she finds the latter more authoritative and encompassing in terms of implementation.[84] The UNSDGs "are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. The 17 Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the Goals."[85] Nilsen observes that both UNSDGs and the goals of ecological hermeneutics intersect to respond to the ecological and humanitarian crisis and to improve the quality of life of both humans and the flourishing of the natural world. She mentions that the neutrality and flexibility of UNSDGs allow them to work with various groups and persuasions and the wide scope of authority it exercises.[86]

Nilsen herself raises some issues regarding UNSDGs in ecological hermeneutics. First, not all SDGs are relevant to ecological hermeneutics. Second, most of these can be argued as directly or indirectly anthropocentric. Finally, there is the tendency to use the UNSDGs anachronistically. Just like the issue with the EBP and the use of the Earth Charter, by appealing to an external locus of authority, the UNSDGs still does not address Horrell's

[84] Tina Dykesteen Nilsen, "Green Goals: The SDGs in Ecological Hermeneutics," *Biblical Interpretation* 30, no. 1 (2020): 12.

[85] United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Agenda," *United Nations Sustainable Development*, n.d., accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/.

[86] Nilsen, "Green Goals: The SDGs in Ecological Hermeneutics," 13–14.

question on how these goals or principles may be used as a standard to read the biblical text. Using some of the SDGs as lens to interrogate Genesis 1:28, it seems that SDG 12 to 15 are most relevant. In the command to "subdue and have dominion" one may ask if Genesis 1:28 is a biblical expression for the responsibility of humans in their consumption and use of the non-human creation. Likewise, given that subduing and having dominion has been interpreted as a justification for human superiority and abuse of the non-human, Genesis 1:28 clearly can be re-visioned to be a resource for human solidarity to take action to respond to climate crisis, to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of ecosystems in both water and on land.

GLOBAL SYSTEMIC SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH: CONTEXTUAL, INCLUSIVE, INTEGRATED, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL

Ibita takes Nilsen's proposal further to integrate various approaches. She concretizes Segovia's global systemic approach by using the modified ecological triangle in conjunction she uses this framework in conjunction with other approaches and frameworks like the McKenna questions,[87] characterization,[88] the Normativity of the Future approach by Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd,[89]

[87] Megan McKenna, *Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Bible* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994), 225; in Ibita, "Changing World, Transforming God's Word," 57.

[88] David Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 3 (1982): 411–434; Ibita, "Changing World, Transforming God's Word," 57–58.

[89] Reimund. Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, "Introduction: The 'Normativity of the Future' Approach: Its Roots, Development, Current State and Challenges," in *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective*, ed. Reimund. Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia 61 (Leuven ; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010); Ibita, "Changing World, Transforming God's Word," 58–60.

and applies them to biblical texts vis-a-vis the complex contemporary context.[90] Likewise, she parallels this with the principles of methods of biblical interpretation: contextual, inclusive, integrated, and transformational.[91]

By directly applying the ecolonial approach in conjunction with other approaches in interpreting a biblical text, Ibita demonstrates how these methodologies can be practically used in interpreting the Bible. Also, a clear advantage of these integrated methodologies is their flexibility and versatility in bringing out the ecological dimensions present in the text. However, some issues remain unresolved, especially regarding the actual use of the UNSDGs as part of the interpretative framework. Aside from being a reference of orientation or a goal the result of which is the work of the transformed readers or the contemporary interpretative community, what would an actual use of the Earth Charter or SDGs be like in an ecological reading of a biblical text?

It is also worth noting that the sustainable development as a paradigm of UNSDGs has its fair share of critiques. This gives an impression of 'greening' current economic growth paradigms but is actually more of a sanitized "business as usual" attitude, or contradiction of ecological growth together with economic expansion.[92] Premised on the idea of continuity of the current

[90] Ibita, "Changing World, Transforming God's Word," 57–59; Ibita, "When Climate Change Changes Religion."

[91] Ma. Maricel S. Ibita, "The World and God's Word: Of COVID-19, VUCA World, and Visions for the Future," *MST Review* 23, no. 1 (June 2021): 144–152.

[92] Sharon Stein et al., "From 'Education for Sustainable Development' to 'Education for the End of the World as We Know It,'" *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 54, no. 3 (February 23, 2022): 274–287; Jason Hickel, "The Contradiction of the Sustainable Development Goals: Growth versus Ecology on a Finite Planet," *Sustainable Development* 27, no. 5 (September 2019): 873–884; Helen Kopnina, "The Victims of Unsustainability: A Challenge to Sustainable Development Goals," vol. 23 (Presented at the International journal of sustainable development and world ecology, Great Britain: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 113–121; Hilary Hove,

system and order that has largely contributed to the ecological decline rather than its interruption and reformulation/reconceptualization, sustainable development goals, while worthy and effective to some degree, according to these critiques might not be the best set of principles or values to consider in ecological hermeneutics.

EVALUATION OF THE THREE READINGS: RECOVERY, RESISTANCE, REVISION. A QUEST FOR A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE?

After a modest review of the various schools of thought within the field, it can be said that contemporary ecological biblical hermeneutics expanded from the EBP's ideology-critical approach to integrating ecolonial and global systemic approaches. It can also be noted that Horrell's contribution of the categorization of these various methods and approaches within the field still holds true even for the later contributions and expansions.

It would seem that later proponents of ecological biblical hermeneutics take the trajectory taken by the Earth Bible team, that is, toward readings of resistance in favor of ecological values, such as Nilsen and Solevåg's proposal of using the Earth Charter, and Nilsen and Ibita's use of the UNSDGs as possible heuristic keys in using the Bible. However, Nilsen, Solevag, and Ibita's expansion can be argued as an expansion of readings of revision since they do not place the locus of authority that leans more towards secular values by using the Earth Charter and UN SDGs, but rather, they are, in Segovia's terms, "a verbalization of context."[93] Especially in

"Critiquing Sustainable Development: A Meaningful Way of Mediating the Development Impasse?," *Undercurrent* 1, no. 1 (September 2004): 48–54.

[93] See Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from This Place : Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

works of Ibita where sound use of both diachronic and synchronic methods are employed, exegesis of biblical texts in readings of revision has been found to be what Horrell describes as a balance between avoiding the unsustainable position of presenting the text as simply "what the Bible says" and reading the text based on an external locus of authority.

As the trajectory of recent developments in ecological hermeneutics is more interdisciplinary and robust, there is an opportunity to further strengthen Horrell's proposition to appeal to those within the Christian tradition. In the same grain, Horrell's identification of possible interpretative lenses has borne a framework for arriving at such lenses. It involves gleaning first various themes and motifs from the Biblical texts which would then be connected with doctrinal themes found in the Christian tradition and that which evokes a certain dimension of ecological concerns found in our contemporary context.

THE SABBATH AS A RESPONSE TO ECOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Taking cue from the need to respond to ecological/environmental violence on the one hand, and the need to identify a Biblical theme which can further the development of ecological biblical hermeneutics, one possible theme to investigate is the biblical Sabbath. If we are to actualize what Horrell, Southgate and Hunt as well as Conradie are proposing, that ecological hermeneutics must be engaged in both readings of retrieval and suspicion, of recovery and resistance, with the crucial role of the interpretative key at the heart of its process, then Sabbath tradition as an interpretative key is worthy to be explored. As Richard Lowery aptly articulates, biblical sabbath traditions offer healing wisdom, critical challenge, and a word of hope for our stressed-out, overworked, spiritually starving world trying to come

to terms with the ecological consequences of the passing era of fossil fuels. In the emerging world, sabbath consciousness may be the key to human survival, prosperity, and sanity.[94]

Why the Sabbath in response to ecological/environmental violence? The Sabbath, according to W. Bruggemann, is both an act of resistance and an alternative. It is an act of resistance "because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods."[95] It is an alternative because "[t]he alternative on offer is the awareness and practice of the claim that we are situated on the receiving end of the gifts of God."[96] On the Sabbath, we need not work nor produce to be worthy of God's gifts, it is simply grace to be received and enjoyed, as much as we ourselves too are gifts whose worth is not measured by productivity. In short, the Sabbath allows a pause, a respite from the relentless use and production of resources which has often led to violence between and among humans.

Brueggemann sees the Sabbath as a counter against and as a resistance to an economic system that enslaves people and the planet with an inexhaustible frenzy to produce and consume. For him, the Sabbath is a resistance to the tyranny of a socioeconomic system that operationalizes the slavery and work system of Egypt and "its confiscatory gods who demand endless produce and who authorize endless systems of production that are, in principle, insatiable."[97] He adds that,

[94] Richard H. Lowery, "Biblical Sabbath as Critical Response in an Era of Global Pandemic and Climate Change," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 80, no. 5 (2021): 1375.

[95] Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, New Edition, with Study Guide. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), iii.

[96] Ibid., xiv.

[97] Ibid., 2.

> [t]he limitless pursuit of consumer goods (and the political, cultural, and military requirements that go with it) in the interest of satiation necessitates over-production and abuse of the land, and the squandering of limited supplies of oil and water. Thus, the environment is savaged by such restlessness; the ordering creation is skewed, perhaps beyond viability. It is long forgotten that rest is the final marking of creator and creation.[98]

By ceasing from work and resting, the practice of Sabbath resists this kind of system which takes hostage not only humans laboring at its mercy but also the environment where both are treated as commodities to be produced and consumed. This concept of the Sabbath counters the violence humans inflict directly on non-human creation, and eventually upon themselves. From the lens of the Sabbath command, this present order is subverted and resisted by seeing things as gifts from a God who is not an anxious taskmaster who demands endlessly but as a Sabbath-resting God and a Sabbath-commanding God who frees people, and planet from the slavery of endless labor and production, from anxiety and greed.

Reading Genesis 1:28 then using this proposal of using the biblical Sabbath as lens, it can be asked of the text whether such task to subdue and having dominion over creation leads to a restful kind of existence for both humans and non-humans. Can the understanding of the blessing to be fruitful and multiply mean not only a quantitative increase for both humans and non-humans but also a qualitative fruitfulness of both human and non-human life? Likewise, the Sabbath resists destructive anthropocentrism where humans are seen to be the pinnacle of God's creation which is often used as justification for human license to abuse and misuse nature.

[98] Ibid., 15.

For Deane Drummond, the Sabbath decentralizes humans as the sole crown of creation and instead turns our attention to the ultimate purpose of creation which is to give glory to God.[99] She points out that the Sabbath is a reminder of the covenant relationships of human beings and the non-humans with God and that it points to a future of redeemed creation.[100] Given this insight Genesis 1:28 can be read as a text which challenges how human and non-human relationships are to be construed. Such relationship cannot rest on the extreme position of subjugation of the non-human and absolute overlordship by humans, nor can it settle for its polar opposite where the non-human is idealized and idolized and, therefore, can no longer serve human good. In this interpretation, humans are seen as an important part of God's creation but never its center. Non-humans are regarded not as expendable elements but neither are they absolutely severed from humans.

A renewed vision for the climate crisis caused by ecological/environmental violence will require rethinking of our role as human beings and our relationship with the environment. Such worldviews and beliefs are, in part, still influenced and shaped by the Biblical text and our interpretation of it. The Sabbath can serve as an important pillar of forming or rediscovering an ecological ethos that counters violence against the ecology, in this case as an interpretative lens for ecological biblical hermeneutics. How this may be further explored will be developed in a future paper as this conclusion serves as an initial reflection on its potential. Thus, the task to deepen the understanding of and appreciation for the biblical Sabbath, and subsequently recover its value for the Christian faith remains.

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[99] Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (London: Darton, Longman + Todd, 2008), 96.

[100] Ibid., 96.

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