

The Genesis of our domination of the Creation



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

A reader in Ohio dropped me a note suggesting an idea for a column (thankfully not another “suggestion” to read the Bible, assuming I haven’t opened one).

Well, this reader thought I should write something on the first chapter of Genesis, specifically on the verse where the Creator instructs mini-creators to: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over ... every living thing.” The reader urged me to relate this divine command to “population growth and impact on the environment.” Sure, no problem.

Except, we have a big problem to begin with – from the very beginning. The “genesis” of our problem is that our problems become everyone’s problems – something that impacts “every living thing.” We can’t take the mythological creation story literally or historically, but we can try to understand it as a story people created to make sense of their world and their place in the universe. In our time, we can see these myths as stories where Time doesn’t really matter much. Yet, taking the verse quoted here from chapter one, we immediately want to know what it means to “fill the earth,” “subdue it” and “have dominion.” It seems to me, and perhaps to you, this has been used not only to care nothing for filling the world with an excessive number of the human species, but to give us “free rein

to reign” – to rule over everything else as lords of the land, sea and sky. Even the Lord, in chapter three, says that if these new breathing beings eat of the tree of knowledge, they will be “like God.” When the crafty serpent carefully crafted by the Lord – with a creepy human voice! – brings about the curse of sin on the two-legged lords, the command to propagate begins to spread the curse not only in human seed but in the ground itself: “cursed is the ground because of you.” The freshly-made lords of the land have already made a mess of it, but although they ate of forbidden fruit, they can still be fruitful to add, divide and multiply.

At one time, there may have been as many as 100,000 grizzly bears in North America, and now there are several thousand. There has been a plan in the works for years to re-introduce them in the West where they were killed off over the last several hundred years (even in California where a grizzly is stitched into the state flag). The source of most resistance is what we might expect: fear. Some legitimate fearfulness, and some based in imaginative myth. People don’t seem to care much for growth in population when it comes to fellow creatures we fear. We may ask ourselves whether we should really be most concerned with the ceaseless expansion of our own species. Our proliferation impacts all of us far beyond the potential for more bears, wolves, sharks or serpents, talking or not.

It may seem strange to bring up bears when the topic is the unbearable number of human mammals, but that’s the point: even in Genesis, we’re all interrelated, from the beasts and birds to the plants and those who plant. The question is, what have we planted, and is it

enough, or too much? Is the harvest of our labors truly creating an abundance of life, or causing the greatest threat to life – ours and the rest of living things? Is this a dire warning of the end? Are we actually the ones ushering in the “End Times” – the extinction of all species?

We are the dominant critters, so we can congratulate ourselves for successfully filling the earth. And yet, we are the most dangerous Kings and Queens, ruling over all other life with godlike power, assuming authority to kill off or grant life to whatever we choose. Isn’t it great to be gods! But what about responsibility? Even the Lord of Genesis had regrets. Do we? Some in the church, synagogue, mosque and temple speak of our duty to be “stewards” of the earth, but how has our stewardship worked for us, and for our co-inhabitants of the planetary mud-ball? Have we created a new Garden of Eden of this small, spinning stone in space, or a waste dump for our progeny?

Maybe we’ve imagined for a very long time, that we had “all the time in the world” to correct any mistakes or stumbling blunders. No wonder the dream of a golden garden in the galaxy, a heavenly haven where we can start over again, persists. Why worry about more soiled souls overrunning the accursed ground, when a paradise awaits in a vast, dirt-less land above (with no animals to fear)?

Perhaps what should “dominate” our thinking, and believing, is more thoughtfulness.

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