Catechetical Material on Creation
For High School Students

OPENING

Then God said: subdue and have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28).

High School students read, hear, and reflect on this scriptural text in their classroom discussions. But do they really understand what “subduing and having dominion over the earth” means? What does Genesis 1:26-28 mean as a moral obligation for human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God, redeemed by Christ and sustained by the Spirit?

This catechetical material is a supplement to the lesson on creation. It is designed to help High School students to understand more deeply the responsibility of human beings towards creation. This catechetical material will discuss the following important points:

I. God the Creator
   a. Creates Human Beings in His Image and Likeness
   b. Gives Human Beings Dominion Over Creation
II. Christ as the Redeemer
   a. Reconciles All Things
   b. Calls All To A Servant-Like Stewardship
III. The Holy Spirit the Breath and Sustainer of Creation
   a. Animates Human Beings to Respect Life
   b. Cries Out in Us in Faith, Hope and Love

CONTEXT

High School students are familiar with various school and government initiatives which promote ecological conservation and protection. Examples of these environmental programs are Plant-A-Tree, Clean and Green, Clean and Go, and I Care. Groups of students from different schools nationwide even volunteered and involved themselves in the Department of Education’s program for the environment, the Young Earth Savers Movement or YES. There is also the Earth Hour, an annual international event created by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) that asks households and businesses to turn off their non-essential lights and electrical appliances for one hour. The Earth Hour is intended to raise awareness towards the need to take action on climate change. Many companies and households all over the world support this event.

In addition to the awareness of organizations and movements regarding the environment, there is really a growing concern for the need to take care of the environment due to the experience of natural calamities. Examples of these calamities are Typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng, the El Niño and La Niña phenomena, and the climate change that the earth is experiencing at present.
The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) letter, “What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?”¹ tells about the beauty of our country before and the deterioration we now see all around us because of human activity. The letter states that the root of the problem is the exploitation mentality of many Filipinos, a mindset which infects and poisons our relationship not only with one another but also with our land and seas.

If we are going to look at and reflect on what is happening in our country today, it is obvious that we are experiencing environmental problems. Mine tailings are dumped into Calancan Bay in Sta. Cruz, Marinduque; throwing of chemicals and human wastes in the seas and rivers; coal mining in South Cotabato and Northern Surigao; illegal loggings in Agusan and Aurora; dynamite fishing in Eastern Visayas— to name a few. These social problems have exacerbated the effects of many natural calamities.

Among our high school students, we also see indifference in their care of and concern for the environment. This is manifested by the way they do not care for their own things or for the property of the school. In most schools, vandalism of school properties is a growing problem. Garbage inside the campus is still a main concern even with existing school programs for environmental cleanliness.

Given this situation, there is a need for High School students to understand more deeply what true stewardship is based on Christian faith perspective. This understanding will help the students genuinely commit themselves to the call of responsible stewardship.

EXPOSITION

I. God the Creator

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims its builder (Ps 19:2).

When children begin with their religion class in the preschool or grade school the first image of God which is presented to them is that of a Creator. He is the maker of everything in the world. Young children are taught that this world that God created is good and it was given to all of us to be our home. Since it is our home we have to take care of it. As these young children grow up they develop a deeper understanding of God as Creator.

As creator it means that God puts and sustains everything in existence (cf 351). The world and everything in it comes from him and all depend on him. He creates because he wills to share his divine life and goodness with his creation.

The Catholic doctrine of creation further teaches us that the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—act together as One God in creation, hence, we can say God the Father creates through His Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Thus St. Paul said in 1 Cor 8:6, “Yet for us there is one God the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist.” The letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians asserts and affirms that the Triune God is the source and destiny of all creation.

A. Created Human Beings in His Image and Likeness

The Scriptures assert that human beings are created in the divine image of God, *God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him* (Genesis 1:27). They are endowed with intellect and free will. Sacred Scripture further teaches that human beings are able to know and love their Creator, and has set by Him over all earthly creatures (cf. Gen 1:26, Wis 2:23) that they may rule them and make use of them while glorifying God (cf. Eccles. 17:3-10). The psalmist pray in great awe for God's love for the human person, *what are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?* (Psalm 8:4).

We are part of God’s creation and we share his divine life and goodness. God placed us at the center and summit of all his creation. We are capable of knowing, choosing and of freely giving ourselves and entering into a communion with other persons and the rest of creation. So we have the great privileged position within creation. We have the God–given responsibility to care for creation.

B. Granted Human Beings Dominion Over Creation

In the story of creation, it is clear that God gives us dominion over the earth, *let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air* (Gen. 1:26). However, some of us think that since we have been given dominion over all creation we are given the privilege to do anything we want with the whole of creation. This misunderstanding means to have power to do anything we like and want over created things. This narrow understanding is a license to do what I want. This not the biblical meaning of dominion but a self-centered notion called domination.

Dominion is a God–given authority of human beings to take good care of all creatures and everything God has made. This authority and power to care must be understood in the context of our loving relationship with God, the one who gives us dominion over creation. Therefore, we who are created in God's own image and likeness must fully reflect God in the way we see, relate to and treat one another and the rest of God’s creation. Our attitudes and actions towards creation ought to mirror,
represent and manifest God’s loving will, which is to cultivate and take care of it (cf Gen. 2:15).

II. Christ is the Redeemer

The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...all things were created through him and for him... to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven (Col. 1:15-20). Through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, God created the world, hold everything together, and reconciles all things.

St. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians 5:15, provides a deeper understanding of the consequences of this claim of Jesus Christ on the world. There it states that He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again. This has a remarkable consequence: namely, because in Christ we have become adopted children of God.

As adopted children of God we must be influenced by the Spirit of God dwelling in us and not by our own selfish desires. We must use our spiritual faculties, our intellect and will, to elevate the practice of our talents, energies and desires in discovering and cultivating the richness of the earth. For example, we can use our intelligence, talents and energies to save a lot of plants and animals from extinction. We can also continually find ways how to improve health situations so that better and longer life will be enjoyed by both humans and animals.

Our loving service should reflect God’s love for creation. We have to look after creation and be held responsible for it in behalf of God. The way we relate with creation and benefit from its goodness should be based on God’s design on how He wishes them to be used as manifested in their very nature in which they were created.

A. Reconciles All Things

In Christ, God reconciles the whole creation with himself who entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation (cf 2 Cor 5:18). Jesus’ Paschal Mystery – his passion, death and resurrection reconciled all creation to God, to each other and to oneself. “Paschal” denotes a “passing over” from and through death to new life (cf CFC 1700). His Paschal Mystery brought forth new life to all people and to all of creation. Christ’s redemption has an environmental dimension. The health of one part of creation is related to the health of all.2 Our experience of “rising from the death to a new life” in terms of our relationship with our environment is manifested when we die to our indifference, selfishness and greed and develop a new attitude in caring for and loving God’s creation.

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2 Per Larsson, Your Will Be Done On Earth..., Ecological Theology for Asia, Christian Conference of Asia, (Shatin, N. T., Hong Kong, 2004), 57.
There is a need to care for the beauty of creation and this must be accompanied by a concern for the balance of the ecosystem, the interdependence of organisms within the environment, because our earth is inevitably exposed to serious environmental damage which has consequent harmful effects on human beings. Thus we must be aware that we are all connected to each other, even with the smallest creatures made by God. Indeed, we need to be in harmony with the rest of God’s creation by taking care of creation, with all the richness and fullness of life. Any harm we do to creation will also have an effect on us because we are one with creation. This mutuality is the “interrelatedness theme of creation.”

Hence, it is appropriate that we treat other creatures and the natural world not just as a means to human fulfillment, but also as God’s creatures – worthy of our respect and care. As our Savior, Christ calls and empowers us to follow in his loving service to others and to creation – to be life-givers and joy-bringers (cf CFC 586).

**B. Calls Us To A Servant-Like Stewardship**

The letter of St. Paul emphasizes the self-emptying love of God, *have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross* (Phil 2:5-8).

Taken in the context of the life of Jesus Christ, this passage helps us understand our responsibility towards the Lord’s creation and interpret for us the dominion material in Genesis 1:26-28 by bringing us to see this dominion means service rather than as a license to abuse creation. What, then, is dominion in biblical and Christian terms? What does it mean to subdue the earth?

In the biblical expectation, human beings are called to “serve creation,” which means that our “dressing, tilling, tending and using of its goodness” are done as acts of loving service to creation as sharing in the divine life and goodness of the Triune God, our Creator. Thus, *stewardship is loving service* to creation in behalf of our Creator.

Our experience in keeping our own backyard clean should not be our only concern; instead we should show our concern for the whole community’s condition. When we see garbage being thrown anywhere this should prompt us to seek action – an information campaign for the whole community to properly dispose of its garbage, informing higher authorities about this problem and being vigilant on how to preserve the cleanliness of these important land and water passages. An act of loving service to our environment is when we limit our use of non-recyclable materials such as plastics or disposable things and make use of materials which are environment friendly or recyclable. Other acts of loving service to creation would also include: supporting or

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even joining movements/organizations which aim to care and preserve our environment, concern and kindness to animals and plants, limiting the use of things which will continuously destroy our ozone layer such as air-conditioning units, supporting advocacies which protect important lands, water and other life-forms, and supporting laws which protect and preserve our environment. These actions are done because of our renewed understanding of stewardship as loving serving to God, others and to our environment.

As creation serves us, so we, human beings, ought to provide the same service as expressed in the biblical language “service with” which means to “conserve”. Thus, human beings and the rest of creation serve each other in mutuality. Stewardship is reflecting God’s love for the world, God’s law for creation, and God’s justice for the land and creatures that we authentically subdue the earth.

As disciples of Christ we have to follow Jesus. He did not despise or disregard creation, but rather came as servant to heal and redeem it. Human dominion over the earth should be like Christ’s dominion: a servant-like stewardship. When we follow Jesus, we follow a caring servant.

III. HOLY SPIRIT AS BREATH AND SUSTAINER OF CREATION

A. Animates Human Beings to Respect Life

The most basic activity of the Holy Spirit is God’s creative power giving existence now to all living things. The Holy Spirit is symbolized by the mighty wind sweeping over the waters in the Genesis creation account, in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the water” (cf Gen. 1: 1-2), and in Genesis 2:7 as the breath of life, the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being (cf Gen. 2:7). The first human persons were vivified when God blew into their nostrils “the breath (Spirit) of life,” making them living beings. The Spirit is the source of life, the breath of creation. Within all creation, it is especially in the human person that the Spirit is especially active.

The human person has a special kind of life that comes from God (breath of life). The center of interest and the first object of divine activity therefore is human person. And all things on earth should be related to human persons as their center and crown.

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5 Ibid.
6 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, Catechism for Filipino Catholics 1285 (Manila: CBCP, 1997).
We go now to what St. Paul had said to the Romans: *The Spirit itself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God* (Romans 8:16), thus liberates us from our being self-centered, for reaching out to others in loving service, as Christ commanded. This loving service – giving food to the hungry, forgiving one’s enemy, and so on, extends also to the rest of creation. This is possible only through the Holy Spirit sent by Christ and the Father.

All creation has value and is good in the sight of God, who is the Creator. Therefore, every creature shares in the divine goodness and beauty, *and God saw that it was good* (Genesis 1:25b).

We owe our existence at its most fundamental level to God. God is our creator and recreator, the One who gives and renews our life, moment by moment, at its most basic, physical level. And so does everything else in creation also live, moment by moment, by the breath of God. The Spirit of God is his power to create and renew his creation. He is still sending out and filling human beings and the world with his breath of life. As long as God gives life, creation continues to live.

**B. Cries Out in Us in Faith, Hope and Love**

The climax of creation is found in our worship, *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth* (John 4:24). It is in worship that we express our faith, hope and love for God.

In faith for we express it in our prayers - our belief in God who is the ultimate origin, *source of life and sole owner of all things and our existence* (cf Ps. 24:1). We profess that God created very good and valuable foundations of life, but life was separated from him because of sin, yet redeemed by Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

In hope for we trust that God will restore order and beauty to humanity and the rest of all creation, which is suffering from human’s selfishness, greediness and egoism. Creation will be restored and made new by God through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

In love we express our thanksgiving to God’s faithfulness and selfless love manifested in his creation. We continue to express this love for God as we continue to care for his creation. Our worship of God will find meaning in our loving service to God, others and to creation.

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9. Per Larsson, *Your will be done on earth...*, (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2004), 102.
INTEGRATION

**Doctrine:** God is our Creator who created us out of love and for us to share in His divine life and goodness. Our Christian faith teaches us that the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – act together as One God in creation, hence, we can say God the Father creates through His Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

**Worship:** The call to true and responsible stewardship is celebrated and nourished in the Eucharist. This call is lovingly remembered when we pray to the Father, through Jesus in the Spirit, *Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.*

QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. **Why is God our Creator?**

   God is our Creator because He is the source of everything. The world and everything in it comes from Him and everything depends on Him.

2. **What is the implication of being created in the image and likeness of God for our Christian life?**

   Being created in the image and likeness of God is the Christian basis for our inalienable dignity and social responsibilities (cf. PCP II 296). This dignity is the ultimate basis of our very human self-worth and the reason why every person should be respected and treated with dignity.

3. **When do we show dominion over all material things?**

   We must understand dominion in the context of our relationship with God, the One who gives us dominion over creation. All of us to whom God gives dominion must fully reflect God in the way we relate to the rest of God’s creation – mirroring, representing, reflecting, and imaging God’s will and purpose and God’s relationship with creation.

4. **How do we manifest stewardship as Service?**

   Stewardship as service is manifested by our care and concern for our environment which should be a reflection of God’s love to the world.

5. **How can we follow Jesus’ stewardship?**

   Jesus Christ, the Lord of Creation, is calling us, the new creation, to use our natural faculties, talents, energies and desires to discover and cultivate the richness of the earth.
We must use the gifts of creation with respect for the original good purpose for which they were given.

6. How is the Spirit at work in creation?

God keeps creatures alive by His creative breath (Spirit) and we hope that all creation will be restored and made new by God through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

As Christ teaches us we pray:

\textit{Eternal Spirit,}
\textit{Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,}
\textit{Source of all that is and that shall be,}
\textit{Father and Mother of us all,}
\textit{Loving God, in whom is heaven:}
\textit{The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!}
\textit{The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the earth!}
\textit{Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!}
\textit{Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.}
\textit{With the bread we need for today, feed us.}
\textit{In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.}
\textit{In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.}
\textit{From trials too great to endure, spare us.}
\textit{From the grip of all that is evil, free us.}
\textit{For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever.}
\textit{Amen.}

-From the New Zealand/Maori Anglican liturgy\textsuperscript{11}

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\textsuperscript{11} Sallie Mcfague, \textit{The Body of God}, the ending part of the chapter of Christology: The Body of God, 158.