

Imago mundi: Justice of peace

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The question of how human beings are to understand their role in creation is of particular interest in our current time of extreme exploitation of the earth and severe environmental degradation. Historically, critiques have been raised against the Judeo-Christian interpretation of the biblical command to subdue the earth and rule over the animals. In all sincerity, the question then needs to be asked what Christian theology has to offer in response to these critiques. Having considered the various interpretations of the meaning of the biblical command to subdue and rule, and with the understanding that the spiritual gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge and an ability to perform work have been bestowed by God on human beings, the proposition that this article offers is an alternative understanding of the role of human beings tendered in terms of 'the justice of the peace'. The Hebrew understanding of peace (*shalom*) is used as a basis; *shalom* does not refer to an absence of war but points to life and maintaining the balance and harmony in creation for life in all its varied forms to prosper. In the context of the *imago mundi*, it is proposed that human beings have been divinely appointed to uphold justice in creation and rule by keeping the peace (*shalom*).

Contribution: The metaphor of 'the justice of the peace', used concomitantly with the verbs 'subdue' and 'rule' within ecotheology, offers a viable alternative to the idea of 'stewardship' of creation. This article focuses attention on possible alternative interpretations of the two verbs, contributing to an understanding of our relationship with creation.

Keywords: *imago mundi*; dominion; stewardship; justice; shalom; balance; life; spiritual gifts.

Introduction

Aristotle (1924:3) contended assertively that humans are curious beings by nature and desire to know and to learn. We wonder about the world we find ourselves in. We wonder about our place in the universe. We question many things we do not understand, and we sincerely seek answers to these questions. One of the pressing questions that stems from the Genesis 1¹ creation account concerning the *imago Dei*, in particular, is how we are to understand our role in creation in light of having been given the tasks to subdue (*kābaš*; Strong's #3533; Strong 2005:1319) the earth and to rule (*rādâ*; Strong's #7287; Strong 2005:322, 1151) over the animals (Gn 1:26–28). This question has become distinctly relevant in these times of environmental degradation of our planet. These biblical texts are some of the often-quoted biblical texts in discussions concerning the ecological crisis. Christians predominantly debate such issues of interest from a Judeo-Christian perspective, with the Bible as the reference point. Here, Brown (2017:230) justifiably tenders the question: '[w]hat, then, does it mean to interpret the Bible in the Anthropocene age, in the light of mounting environmental catastrophe, all caused, directly or indirectly, by human activity?' Considering these questions, one also needs to ask: what, then, does Christian theology offer to provide clarity and answers to these questions?

Critique of Christianity

Addressing the question concerning human beings' place in creation within a biblical framework brings to mind two schools of thought: the one holding the Abrahamic faiths responsible for promoting a despotic attitude towards nature through harsh domination, whilst the other one counters this argument by supporting a more lenient interpretation advancing the notion of stewardship. Lynn White Jr.,² probably one of the most prominent critics of environmental issues,

1. Unless otherwise stated, all scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Revised August 1983, November 1986, Bible Society of South Africa.

2. Lynn White: professor of medieval history, specifically medieval technology, at Princeton University (1933–1937), Stanford University (1937–1943), Mills College (1943–1958) and the University of California (1958–1987).

Note: Special Collection: Theology and Nature, sub-edited by Johan Buitendag (University of Pretoria).

raised allegations against Christianity in his well-documented 1967 publication entitled 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis',³ having accused Christianity of bearing the burden of guilt for the current ecological crisis. White (1967:1205) attributed liability to the Genesis 1:26–28 pericope, which he believed sanctioned the unlimited exploitation of the Earth – in Brown's (2017:230) words, 'allowing ecocide in the name of human dominion'. He forthrightly attributed the prevailing environmental problems to the ideological idea of 'the orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature', in which, as he believed, Western science and technology are rooted (White 1967:1207). Critics of this hypothesis who argue against an exploitative attitude towards creation instead call for a more caring attitude and thus by default support the concept of stewardship over dominion. Notwithstanding his indictment against Christianity, White did not denounce Judaism and Christianity altogether but proposed an alternative worldview in the person and work of Francis of Assisi,⁴ the so-called patron saint of ecologists (White 1967:1207; cf. Buitendag 1985:318, 336; cf. DuBos 2006:57; cf. Pope Francis 2015:9–12; cf. Conradie & Field 2016:118–120). Francis of Assisi is well known for having given up a materialistic lifestyle characterised by opulence and indulgence and living an exemplary life of subservience, recognising that God's household (the whole of Earth) included 'the poor and all the creatures of the earth' (Conradie & Field 2016:118).

Since then, White's critique has prompted a persisting response from biblical scholars. Brown (2017:230) points out that it was at the time of White's publication that '[t]he dialogue between the Bible and ecology began in earnest [...]'. Key to White's (1967:1207) conclusion is a statement that scholars often overlook when he writes: '[s]ince the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not'. By this, White recognises the importance of revisiting religious traditions to change human behaviour in such a way as to benefit the environment. Zizioulas (2006:273) proposes that ethics is the locus to find '[s]olutions to the ecological problem in our western societies'. Brown (2017:231–232), in accordance with Zizioulas' argument, also argues in favour of the importance of environmental ethics,⁵ pointing out that it has proved insufficient to merely defend the Bible in the face of White's criticism. In this instance, he quite rightly asks the crucial question of what humanity's relationship is to the rest of creation. Humanity's relationship is primarily framed in terms of humanity's place in creation (cf. Palmer 2006:73; Hall 2006:137; Rasmussen 2006:178). Rabie-Boshoff and Buitendag (2021) commented that:

3. One of the most frequently cited sources in ecotheological literature. The first South African theologian to deal with this issue extensively was Buitendag (1985) in his dissertation, especially pages 10–15.

4. Francis of Assisi was canonised and declared a saint by then Pope Gregory IX on 16 July 1228. In 1979, Pope John Paul II declared St. Francis of Assisi as the heavenly patron of ecology by issuing a papal bull (NTU, n.d.).

5. Cf. Aldo Leopold's 'The Land Ethic'. According to him, ethics should be thought of as 'a kind of community instinct in-the-making' (Leopold 1966:239).

[T]he *imago Dei* as the Shadow of God, life itself, may have far-reaching implications in the current understanding of the place of human beings in creation and the meaning of life within the bigger picture of creation and how we as human beings should respond to the living environment with which we share life. (p. 6)

Understanding our place in creation is a determinant factor in understanding our role as *imago mundi*.⁶

It is against this background, and in contemplation of the ecological damage done to the earth⁷ (Brunner, Butler, & Swoboda, 2014:13), that one is continually, and now to a greater extent than in the past, confronted with the critical issue of what the role of human beings truly is in light of what it means for human beings to have been mandated by God to subdue the earth and rule over the animals (Gn 1:26–28). This article presents a brief exploration of this question conducted within an ecotheological framework, with the relational character of creation (cf. Rabie-Boshoff 2016) providing the matrix to this venture (cf. Rabie-Boshoff & Buitendag 2021). For this purpose, the human imaging of God as the Shadow of God and the human likeness to God in respect of the unique gifts⁸ that have been conferred upon human beings to fulfil their God-ordained tasks are considered in the hope that a viable alternative model could be derived at by applying the metaphor of 'the justice of the peace' (cf. Moltmann 1985:30).

Dominion

The human being has been created as a relational being. Indeed, the whole of creation is relational, a distinction that numerous scholars have made (Fretheim 2005:13–22; Rabie-Boshoff 2016:124–125, 127, 133–140). God has established a unique power-sharing relationship with human beings, a privileged relationship characterised by the responsibility of administering creation in such a way that supports the status quo of harmony and balance. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004; Chapter 10, point 451) affirms this by stating:

[T]he Lord entrusted all of creation to their [*humanity's*] responsibility, charging them to care for its harmony and development. This special bond with God explains the privileged position of the first human couple in the order of creation. (n.p.)

In Psalms 8 and 104, the psalmist praises God for the great works God has done as Creator (cf. Job 38–41). In Psalm 8, the psalmist touches on this relational aspect, considering the human being concerning God and the created world. The

6. This expression dates to the 14th century. The *Imago Mundi* ('Image of the World'), written in 1410 by the French bishop and scholar Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420), is one of the most important geographical works of the late Middle Ages. Focused on geography and cosmography, this encyclopaedic work was one of the most consulted treatises of the time and was used by Christopher Columbus to develop his ideas about the viability of navigating the Atlantic to reach the Indies. See: <https://www.facsimilefinder.com/facsimiles/imago-mundi-facsimile>.

7. This paper follows the distinction made by Brunner et al. (2014:13) for 'earth' and 'Earth'. The word 'earth' refers to the land, water, soil and atmosphere of our planet, as well as the ground beneath our feet and the air we breathe, whilst 'Earth' is used for Creation, which includes all living creatures.

8. These tasks have been identified by Rabie-Boshoff and Buitendag (2021:5) as being wisdom, understanding, knowledge and the ability to perform tasks.

psalmist accentuated two distinctive features of the human being – their elevated position and their corresponding function of exercising dominion (Ps 8:5, 6). These same features can also be traced back to Genesis 1:28. However, Bauckham (2006:48) points out that in Psalm 104, the human being is placed amongst other creatures rather than over them. The psalmist's words are telling in this regard when he writes that the human being is merely 'one of the many kinds of living creatures for whom God provides'.

Interpretation of Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8 has led many scholars to assume that Genesis 1 has an anthropocentric⁹ focus, with human beings having been given free licence to use and abuse creation at free will. The impetus for this assumption is rooted in the interpretation of the two Hebrew verbs, *rādā* [have dominion] and *kābaš* [subdue] in Genesis 1:26 and 28, which have elicited considerable scholarly debate over the years and have contributed in a significant way in determining environmental attitudes. Despite different views being held on the meaning of both verbs, the verb *kābaš*, with its oppressive connotations, has attracted less debate than the verb *rādā*. Although connotations like 'dominion' and 'subjection' are possible, Murray (1992) believes that:

[B]oth words have been understood too crudely by those who say that they both connote violent subjection without implying limits on how human beings may treat other creatures. (p. 99)

The critical question here is what kind of force is implied? Is it a powerful destructive force like a ruthless militant king, or could it perhaps refer to an authoritative yet creative force like a benevolent guardian? It is noteworthy that in the context of the passage, both verbs are tied up with the *imago Dei* and the likeness of God (Gn 1:26–28), as well as God blessing both human beings and all the living creatures 'that move on the ground' (vs 28). John Calvin (1578) describes this blessing well, albeit in the language of stewardship:

Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits to be marred or ruined by neglect. Moreover, that this economy, and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us; let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. (p. 77)

Hiebert (2000:136) recognises that despite the immense impact which the dominion image had in the history of the church and in the contemporary Christian response evoked by the environmental crisis, it has often been discussed by scholars giving little thought to the context that gave rise to it (cf. Bauckham 2006:33–49). Simplistically, Rae (2006:303) explains that the root of the problem is to be found in the fact that the word 'dominion' is traditionally being interpreted as 'domination' (cf. Bouma-Prediger 2001:67–86), and the command to 'subdue the earth' is perceived as a licence to do

with the earth whatever we want (cf. Moltmann 1985:23–32).¹⁰ The discussion of human authority centring on Genesis 1:26–28 and Psalm 8 repeatedly describes human dominion *over* creation. Bauckham (2006:32) insists, however, on taking the view of 'human dominion *in* creation' (own emphasis added in italics). He believes that it is essential for Christians mainly to redeem 'a lively sense of human creatureliness'. Moltmann (1985:29), on the other hand, coming from a surprisingly different angle, argues that 'the specific biblical concept of "subduing the earth" has nothing to do with the charge to rule over the world', but that it is rather a dietary commandment to human beings to eat seeds and fruit, and animals to eat green plants. Brueggemann et al. (1994:346), in turn, talk of caregiving by human beings to the earth, being neither exploitative nor malevolent in our actions.

To rule (*rādā*)

There are two ways of interpreting the word *rādā* – on the one hand, 'to rule with authority', nonetheless with responsibly, and on the other hand, 'to rule over' by treading down without any care for that which is ruled over. According to Strong (2005:322, 1151), *rādā* (to rule over) has a strong negative connotation, meaning precisely to 'tread down, to disregard, to conquer, subjugate, violate, to bring into bondage, force, keep under, subdue, bring into subjection', all of which means 'to rule with force' and not 'rule with authority' (cf. 1 Ki 5:16; Ps 68:27, 110:2; Ezk 34:4). The same idea, however, is also conveyed by the word *mālak* (Strong's # 4427; Strong 2005:1151), which refers to the rule of a king over his subjects, but more so by the semantic equivalent *māšhal*, meaning 'to rule, to have dominion, to reign' (Strong's #4910; Strong 2005:1151; cf. Jdg 14:4). Brunner et al. (2014:121) point out that Genesis 1 and 2 'do not have to be read in ways that perpetuate systems of domination'. The idea of descending or going down, meaning to lower oneself – a benevolent act – is also associated with the word *rādā*. In this context, Bauckham (2006:47) focuses attention on the paradox that exists between the word 'dominion' and how it works out in practice about Adam's role of 'serving and preserving the garden' in Genesis 2:15 and Noah's role in the 'conservation of all species' in Genesis 6–8. Legitimate dominion is not about 'mastery and control', he says, but about human beings being authentic in their relation to other creatures and recognising their 'fellow-creatureliness with regard to the one Creator'. It is creatureliness, he says, that 'levels us all before the otherness of the Creator' (Bauckham 2006:49).

The notion of 'legitimate dominion' is, for example, evidenced in Genesis 1:22, with God pronouncing God's blessing over all living creatures and not only on human beings (Gn 1:28). Seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees were given to human beings, and all green plants were given to animals as food (Gn 1:29) with no injunction to kill any living creature for food. This changed after the Flood when God permitted Noah and his sons to kill animals for food (Gn 9:3). However,

9. Rasmussen (2006:178) writes, 'The discussion of stewardship as a fitting model for the needed cosmology will no doubt go on a long while before any resolution on anthropocentrism surfaces, in either secular or religious circles'.

10. Moltmann (1985:23–32) discusses what he calls 'the crisis of domination', explaining the impact of power on Creation through the lens of a scientific search for knowledge.

one divine condition was attached to this: humans are not allowed to eat any animal with 'its lifeblood still in it' (Gn 9:4), which reinforces the fact that God is the life-giver and that all life belongs to God. This condition is a special allowance by God and not a licence to exercise dominion by brute force.

To subdue (*kābaš*)

Kābaš [to subdue] is less commonly used than *rādā*, but its meaning of subduing the Earth is no less harsh than that of *rādā*. It means to 'bring into bondage, force, keep under, subdue, bring into subjection' (Strong 2005:1319). In contrast, however, Brunner et al. (2014:105) differ with this interpretation, pointing to harshness, and unequivocally state that if there is 'a destructive power differential' in question about humanity's relationship to the Earth, it does not involve subjugation (*kābaš*). McFague (2000:41), coming from a Christological perspective of abundant life, speaks of 'the practice of restraint, diminishment, the death of unlimited desire, and control of ecological selfishness' when referring to the subduing of the earth and the relationship that exists between human beings and the Earth. In the context of abundant life, the idea of subjugation is to be traced to an act of benevolence rooted in peace (*shalom*), with no harshness or force implied. When subduing the Earth with benevolent authority, it would be in line with its nature and not against its nature (harsh and forceful).

Stewards of creation

In the Greek context of the New Testament epistles, the word *oikonomía* (Strong's #3622; Strong 2005:1303) refers to a servant or enslaved person who, as chief caretaker, attends to the affairs of an estate's owner. The modern term 'steward' can be traced to the Greek word *oikonomía*, which originated from the Greek root word *oikonoméō* (Strong's #3621; administrator or steward¹¹). The Anglo-Saxon word *stigwaerden* (sty ward; sty – a place where pigs were kept; ward – warden, keeper, overseer), forms the etymological root of the English word 'steward' (Brunner et al. 2014:149–151). There seem to be no Hebrew equivalent for these two Greek terms, and both words are, at best, approximations in the English language. At its core, the Greek concept of *oikonomía* starts with the household (*oikos*; cf. Conradie 2011:115–122), meaning 'management or administration of a household' (cf. Lk 12:42; 16:12; Brown 2017:232). Apart from the usage of the term *oikonomía* in various New Testament contexts (for example, the management of small businesses [cf. Lydia, Ac 16:14], more significant concerns like cities, states and even religious institutions like temples), the term in a broader sense could also be used about the ordering of things such as the universe (Reumann 2014:19, 30; cf. Lesham 2016:226–228). Brunner et al. (2014:149) propose that various other terms may be used in translation, such as 'commission' (Col 1:25; 1 Cor 9:17), 'plan' (Eph 1:10) and 'divine training' (Tm 1 1:4).

11. See Luke 16:2–4, 8; Titus 1:7; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:17; 1 Peter 4:10 (ed. Radmacher 1997).

Early in the new millennium, Berry (2006:8) introduced the idea of stewardship as the relationship of humans to creation. According to him, the modern concept of 'steward', with a responsibility of care for creation, was appropriated during the Renaissance and the Reformation periods. Historically, the term 'stewardship' showed an upsurge during the 1950s and 1960s when the churches started campaigning for more resources, primarily financial, but also in terms of time and talents, as Palmer (2006:66) alludes to. She noticed that it was during the 1960s and 1970s when 'awareness of environmental problems sharply increased' that the term became widely accepted and used within many churches. The introduction of a neologism, 'ecodomy' (edification), has gradually become part of the current ecological parlance, which Buitendag (2019; Buitendag & Simuț 2020:1) describes as follows:

[W]e need new visions for 'household politics' (*oikodomia*) on the one hand and a reinterpretation of the traditional 'aliens in a foreign land' (*paroikia*) on the other hand. The constructive and immanent thrust of ecodomy communities must incorporate the element of critical non-conformity. (p. 5)

At the time, critique was already being raised against using the terms 'steward' and 'stewardship'. Northcott (2006:215), for example, indicated that the concept of stewardship was critiqued by modern theologians such as Page, Fern and Scott, including Palmer, who associate it with 'the managerial arrangements of private property regimes'. In this regard, Palmer (2006:67) discerns that the critical determinant when the term is used about the relationship between human beings and the natural world is the notion that in this context, 'the language in which this is embedded is usually associated with money'. Berry (2012:179) admits that apart from questions that touch on the ethical value of the model itself, it is for the same reason questionable whether it is such a 'biblical image as its proponents claim it to be, particularly in terms of the relationship of humans to creation'. Whilst he recognises that relationship forms the foundation of stewardship and that this particular relationship generally manifests itself through positive interactions, for instance, caring for the environment, he points out that the idea of 'stewardship' and that of being a 'steward' may evoke negative connotations ('traits') for some, such as 'subservience and hierarchy, absentee landlords and exploitation' (Berry 2006:1). Despite her critique of the use of this term, Page (2006:97) does consider stewardship to be an excellent biblical model, especially in the sense of its usefulness in describing the relationship between humans and the rest of creation, but warns that this model, like any other model, should be used with caution. In the same vein, Palmer (2006:63) warns that in the search for a conceptually descriptive alternative to the concept of 'stewardship', there needs to be an awareness to the danger of falling prey to latch on 'to already existing, familiar concepts'. She agrees with Berry that it is often assumed that the concept has a biblical foundation, thus carrying 'particular authority', which she indicates is uncertain (Palmer 2006:64). Moreover, she says, 'the actual term "steward" is never used in association with nature',

concluding that the so-called relation of the idea of 'stewardship of nature' to the Bible is misplaced and 'may be largely mistaken' (Palmer 2006:65–66). Her clear warning sounds when she writes 'stewardship of the natural world ... remains profoundly anthropocentric and un-ecological, legitimating and encouraging increased human use of the natural world' (Palmer 2006:75). Within this vast array of voices, a considerable number of theologians, amongst them Ernst Conradie (2011:8), have added their voices to the discussion, calling for a 'renewed vision', 'an opportunity to Christianity for renewal and reformation' in the context of ecotheology.

Decentring of human beings

The main critique raised against the use of the terms 'steward' and 'stewardship' is that this model elevates human beings to an undesirable position over creation (Moltmann 1985:30). By using the term 'dominion', Moltmann (1985:29) calls attention to the 'correspondence between human beings and God' as 'creator and preserver of the world' – a correspondence that finds meaning in the biblical description of humanity as *imago Dei* (cf. Bauckham 2006:47¹²). He explicates that in the context of God having given both humans and animals the right to live 'from the fruits of the earth', humans have not been given a divine directive to rule in power and flaunt power over death, but instead have been given authority to rule in peace fulfilling the role of a 'justice of the peace' (Moltmann 1985:30¹³).

Justice of the peace

From a Jewish perspective, the world is preserved by upholding three values – truth, justice and peace. Both justice and peace, together with the idea of the 'Integrity of the Earth', were appropriated by the World Council of Churches (WCC).¹⁴ In 1997 in Japan, the WCC articulated the term 'justice' as:

[B]eing responsible for one's actions ... being held responsible for the suffering [one] causes to others ... being held accountable for abuse of power ... an equitable sharing of the Earth's resources. (Hall 2006:467–468)

It 'demands truth' and 'requires honesty' (Hallman 2000:467). As Hallman (2000:468) sees it, God's justice is strict yet gracious and compassionate. Biblical justice is concerned with all those who are oppressed in some way, both human and nonhuman. Justice signifies the attainment and restoration of balance – in other words, peace. It cannot be attained in an environment where it is engaged only one-sidedly; it must be achieved within a holistic framework where all parties are considered without any biases. The

12. Bauckham (2006:47), in reference to Genesis 2:15, demonstrates 'Adam's role of serving and preserving the garden. He also provides a brief explanation of the Old Testament 'understanding of kingship' and the New Testament 'representation of divine lordship as service and authority in God's kingdom and service'.

13. Rasmussen (2006:179) refers to a decentring of human beings in the context of 'humankind [as] partner to otherkind'.

14. The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Programme was developed by the World Council of Churches (WCC; Hall 2006:129).

biblical witness points to this. In Psalm 72:3 and 7, the psalmist shows that prosperity is closely related to righteousness and that prosperity will be brought about when righteousness rules, resulting in the deliverance of the needy, afflicted, weak and oppressed (Ps 72:12–14). This is linked to the expectation that the land will prosper (Ps 72:16). Psalm 85, on the other hand, is about sin and restoration (vs 2). In verse 10, the psalmist speaks of righteousness (justice) and peace in one breath, putting them on par.

Conversely, and unlike the Western idea of peace, peace is not merely an absence of violence or war in Jewish thought. Peace, in Judaism articulated as *shalom*, is more than that and refers to 'a *state of affairs*', according to Ravitzky (n.d.); as he describes it, it is 'one of well-being, tranquillity, prosperity, and security – circumstances unblemished by any sort of defect. *Shalom* is a blessing, a manifestation of divine grace'. It is characterised by wholeness or completeness where all relationships, vertical and horizontal, are in harmony. Ravitzky furthermore notes that the absence of war implies 'an orderly, prosperous, and tranquil state of affairs', and that in several scriptural passages like Zechariah 8:16 and Malachi 2:6, the word peace 'refers to a value, and is used in the sense of equity, or loyalty'.

In consideration of both the justice, peace and integrity of creation (JPIC) and the Judaic ideas of justice and peace, the valid question for today is whose version of justice and peace should be upheld in order for humanity not to create distorted definitions of both. Stenmark (2003:165–166), writing about contextualism and its reaction against 'the strong emphasis on universality and common human reason characteristic of the Enlightenment tradition and modernity', quite rightly poses the question, 'whose truth, rationality, science, religion, ethics or gender?' Stenmark strongly believes that there needs to be a critical emphasis on both the contextual and the 'whose' aspects when dealing with these kinds of generalisations. Bookchin (2022:48–49) refers to the pre-Socratic notion of 'cosmic justice (*dikaisyne*)', which is a concept of justice that 'extends beyond personal and social issues to nature itself'. This kind of justice is understood as 'one with nature itself and which "could no more leave the earth than the earth could leave the firmament"'. This idea resonates with Moltmann's (Loc. 1769–1779) understanding that 'the most important element in justice without justice for the natural environment' is that human beings will not 'be able to find justice for nature without social justice'. Defining both notions of justice and peace turns out to be a complicated exercise which cannot be dealt with adequately within the limitations of this article. The author is of the opinion that it requires an independent and in-depth research effort in order to probe the essence of both notions with reference to ecotheology.

What then will justice and peace mean to God in practice? Biblical teaching holds that only one God is the Creator of everything. Fundamental to this understanding is that

everything belongs to God (cf. Ps 24:1). Creation is epitomised by harmony and balance, and it is interrelated to everything else, as demonstrated by the psalmist in Psalm 104. Rabie-Boshoff and Buitendag (2021:5) have proposed that humanity as *imago Dei* should be considered as God's Shadow and that human beings have been created in the likeness of God in terms of having been endowed with the unique spiritual gifts (qualities) of wisdom, understanding, knowledge and an ability to perform work (cf. Pr 2:6, 7). These gifts or qualities are not bestowed on humans to further their selfish, power-driven agendas. Still, they are conferred to empower humans to fulfil God's purposes (cf. Ware 2002:79) specifically. The idea proposed by Rabie-Boshoff and Buitendag (2021:6) that 'the *imago Dei* points to life as a representative image of God' lends impetus to the concept proposed herein that the human being as the *imago mundi* could be perceived as the one keeping peace in creation, in other words, maintaining the equilibrium and harmony between all living creatures in such a way as to nurture and promote life and assure that equity prevails. *Imago mundi*, like *imago Dei*, also evokes the idea of a 'movement with a goal' (cf. Migliore¹⁵ 2004:147; Rabie-Boshoff & Buitendag 2021:6). Isaiah hints at this goal (Is 11) when the 'Root of Jesse' (vs 10) will be the one on whom '[t]he Spirit of wisdom ... the Spirit of understanding ... the Spirit of knowledge' will rest (vs 2); the One who will be called 'Prince of Peace' (Is 9:6), whose government will be characterised by endless peace and justice and where righteousness will be upheld 'from that time on and for ever' (vs 7). Revelation 21–22 presents us with a glimpse of the world to come that will be governed as such.

In the context of *imago mundi*, it is thus proposed that human beings have been divinely appointed to uphold justice in creation and rule by keeping the peace (*shalom*). The powerful ability to imagine and invent new possibilities sets humanity apart from other living creatures. The innate drive of being curious about the world allows us to wonder about and explore the world we find ourselves in. This behaviour adds to our knowledge and understanding of the environment and will enable us to eliminate any uncertainty we might have about the world. In contemplation of *shalom*, may we never lose our curiosity about the mystery of life and this marvellous planet we call home.

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Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

15. Migliore (2004:147) verbalises his understanding of the *imago Dei* as follows: 'being created in the image of God is not a state or condition but a movement with a goal: human beings are restless for a fulfilment of life not yet realised'.

Author's contributions

A.C.R.-B. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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