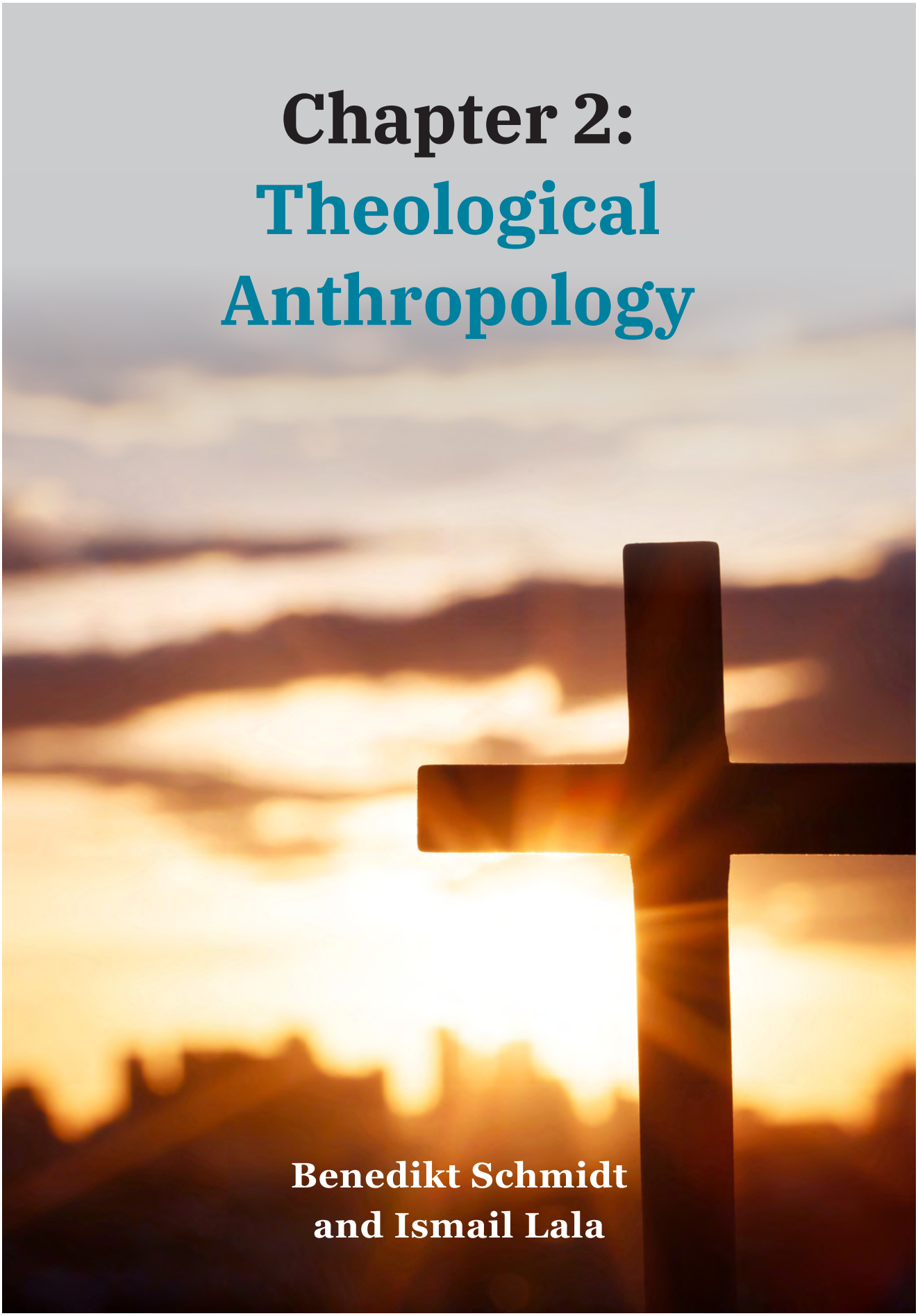
Chapter 2: Theological Anthropology



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1. Introduction

In 2000, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer suggested a new geochronological era: the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Horn 2018; Vogt 2024, 73–108; Gräb-Schmidt 2015, 652–653). The term conveys the idea that, for the first time, humankind appears to be the decisive factor in the shaping of planet Earth. This is remarkable not only from a geological point of view but also with regard to the term "human."[1] "Anthropocene" has a geological, cultural-scientific, and political dimension. Human responsibility thus extends to the ecological system as a whole. To express this metaphorically, humankind is no longer designing individual rooms "in our common home" but is responsible for preserving the house as a whole—and appears to be failing spectacularly in fulfilling this responsibility. "Anthropocene" is a concept of crisis. The current ecological crisis can be interpreted as the failure of humanity in the Anthropocene that they themselves have brought about. Humanity is failing in its care for the balance of the Earth. The model of "planetary boundaries" makes this quantifiable by identifying nine ecological boundaries of the Earth. Exceeding them jeopardizes the stability of ecosystems and thus the survival of humanity. The ecological crisis is the flip side of an anthropological crisis. The Earth becomes dangerous to humans after they have shown themselves to be dangerous inhabitants, as Clive Hamilton (2017) explains in *Defiant Earth* and Bruno Latour (2017) in *Facing Gaia*.

The question is how humans can learn to understand themselves (anew) within the scope of the ecological crisis. Interpretations of self, nature, and the world are intertwined. Two fundamentally different hermeneutic and practical paths seem conceivable (Lucht 2018). On the one hand, the Anthropocene does not call into question the traditional anthropological self-understanding of humans mastering nature. On the contrary, humans are called upon to shape the environment even more comprehensively by technological means. They are the masters of "terraforming," who take the fate of the planet into their own hands and control it. The crisis does not point to too much but to too little consistent control. On the other hand, the alternative path begins with a critique of the human hubris identified in the first path. It is not more control that is required, but a radical readjustment of human self-interpretation within the ecological horizon. This requires an anthropological decentering that no longer sees humankind as a counterpart to but actually as part of nature. The "flight forward" is contrasted with a "self-retraction for the sake of nature and oneself."[2] If the second approach is correct, then the concept of the Anthropocene is not just a sign of an ecological-political crisis, but much more fundamentally an anthropological crisis in the sense of a dominant misunderstanding of the human self and their relation to the environment.

As the current ecological crisis of the Anthropocene edges perilously close to the point of no return (McKay et al. 2022), all resources need to be marshalled in order to galvanize humankind into action. The exploration of religiously grounded solutions must be an integral part of an inclusive paradigm that takes a multifaceted approach to this complex and self-inflicted problem (Raymond et al. 2023). Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (1994, 11) rightly observe:

> Certainly the world religions have been instrumental in formulating views of nature and in creating perspectives on the role of the human in nature. It should be clear, then, that the examination of different religious worldviews may be critical in the task of [...] proposing solutions.

1. Concerning the controversy over the definition of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch from the perspective of the Geological Society cf. Witze 2024, 249f.
2. Höfer 2018, 123–135, shows how both readings refer to the biblical creation narratives: (economic) control of the Earth (Genesis 1) vs (ecological) preservation (Genesis 2).

It is, therefore, to be expected that the interpretations of the theological anthropologies are of fundamental importance for the care and balance of our common home. They provide central—and different—interpretations of how people understand themselves in relation to God and nature.

This chapter addresses the theological anthropologies from a Christian and a Muslim perspective. Naturally, it cannot make any claims to exhaustivity, given the richness of both traditions. Such an endeavor would be fundamentally misguided and doomed to failure. Therefore, the two sections each focus on particularly relevant sacred texts or authors of the theological tradition. Both sections will revolve around the following central questions:

1. What is humankind's position in relation to God and creation? What does it mean that humans are created in the image of God?
2. What does it mean for humankind to be given "dominion"/"stewardship" over the Earth—within creaturely limits?
3. What are the practical implications in terms of human responsibility?

While the first two questions lay the theological-anthropological groundwork for the divinely ordained responsibility of humankind to take care of the planet, the last question elaborates on the practical implications of this obligation and how it may manifest today. At the same time, these three key questions build a bridge between the previous chapter on theologies of creation and the following two chapters, which address different aspects of ecological conversion, ethics, and potential practical action based on this.

This chapter starts with a presentation of the Christian perspective. After examining the critique of anthropocentrism, it looks at the biblical foundations of theological anthropology. Five themes are examined to show how a reformulation is possible. Instead of anthropocentrism, it establishes anthroporelationality as the central systematic category of a theological anthropology and subsequent Christian ethics as a practice of responsibility. This first part concludes by looking at concrete practices, and presents sufficiency as a way forward. The second part of the chapter explores Islamic perspectives. It begins by explaining the mystical view that all things are loci of manifestation of the Names of God mentioned in the Qur'an. It then elaborates on the special rank of humankind that allows it to become the Perfect Human when it achieves its *raison d'être* of manifesting all the divine Names. This rank can only be achieved if humans fulfill their obligations of stewardship that have been granted by God. This stewardship has a vertical dimension in which humans have a responsibility to safeguard all existents placed under their care by God, and a horizontal dimension in which humans have an ontological affinity with the natural world as they are all loci of divine manifestation. So, the Christian and Islamic perspectives on the three key questions are not so much symmetrical as complementary: While the former analyses various conceptions of Christian theological anthropology, the latter focuses on a significant and far-reaching conception of Islamic theological anthropology by medieval scholar Ibn 'Arabī. The final part of the chapter explores the practical implications of this bipartite stewardship, and concludes by bringing the two traditions into conversation with each other.

2. A Christian Perspective: From Anthropocentrism to Anthropopractice

2.1. Anthropocentrism: A Critique of Christianity

One of the reasons cited for the ecological crisis is the dominant understanding in Western culture of humans as the rightful—and divinely appointed—rulers of nature: anthropocentrism. It is characterized by the central position of humans and a purely instrumental understanding of nature that does not attribute any intrinsic value to it. Humans are ontologically separated from the rest of nature and superior to it. From a moral point of view, humans alone are the bearers, addressees, and contents of the ought (Höhn 2001, 78). This becomes clear in the writings of late medieval philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626) when he writes: "Let man recover that right over nature which belongs to him by God's gift" (Bacon 2000, Book I, Aph. CXXIX).

Critical voices do not see Bacon's view as an isolated case, but rather locate anthropocentrism at the core of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is, as it were, integral to its very structure with the creation narratives (see chapter 1 "Theologies of Creation"). Criticism of anthropocentrism is then essentially criticism of religion. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) made prominent statements in this direction as early as 1944 in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Lynn White's (1967) short contribution, according to which the Christian understanding of the image of God as a mandate for the technological subjugation of the world paved the way for an unrestricted domination of nature, has had an even greater impact. A more recent example in the same vein is Bron Taylor (2009, 10–12), who distinguishes between nature-related religions (green religions) and nature-based religions (dark-green religions). The former include monotheistic religions in particular, whose sacralization of humans promotes an anthropocentrism accompanied by a domineering attitude toward nature.

Anthropocentrism is justified with one of the identity-forming texts of Jewish-Christian culture, namely the creation narrative of the Priestly Scriptures:

> Then God said, Let us make *man in our image, after our likeness*. And let them *have dominion over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So, God created *man in his own image, in the image of God* he created him; male and female he created them. And 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26–28)[3]

There is no doubt that this key text of biblical anthropology has left a historical trail of consequences which see in it an ontological superiority of human beings, which empowers them to live out the "*dominium over the earth*" (Schaefer 2023). In this view, the other works of creation have only an instrumental value for humans. Francis Bacon's anthropocentrism thus appears to be merely a consistent formulation of Judeo-Christian identity. Overcoming the ecological crisis would then require overcoming Christian theological anthropology instead of building on it in a positive way.

3. Emphasis added. The biblical quotations are based on the English Standard Version.

Contrary to this linear narrative based on the texts of Genesis up to today's ecological crisis, Catholic moral theologian Michael Rosenberger convincingly demonstrates in his study *Crown of Creation?* that the sacred texts of Judaism do not suggest such an interpretation (Rosenberger 2024, 101–136).[4] Rather, in its early days, the Christian church adopted anthropocentrism from the Stoic philosophy of the environment. From Greco-Roman culture, the idea of the irrationality of animals ("*aloga*") and the ontological natural order with man at the top ("*scala naturae*") was adopted and used as an interpretation for the biblical accounts of creation. The "image of God" is now interpreted as ontological superiority based on human rationality. Another dramatic theological consequence is the assumption that humans alone strive for salvation and can attain it. The environment is excluded from the work of redemption (Rosenberger 2024, 277). Not the Jewish roots but the Hellenistic culture of antiquity thus became the defining framework of the Christian relationship between humankind and nature. This became concrete, for example, in the abandonment of the Jewish commandment of slaughtering animals according to religious rites, whereby a religious practice expressing ritual reverence for the animal became secular slaughter.

This caesura in the supposedly linear narrative of Jewish-Christian anthropocentrism opens up the space for rereading the biblical texts of Christian theological anthropology. The question is whether their interpretation can open up a Christian self-understanding beyond an imperialist anthropocentrism (Schaefer 2023).

2.2. Anthropology: A Biblical-Theological Perspective

From a systematic perspective, Christian theological anthropology links the question that human beings are "hearers of the word" (Rahner 1994) with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, who is the human corresponding to God in an unsurpassable way (Pröpper 2011, 59–76).[5] As a systematic endeavor with a claim to validity, theological anthropology necessarily refers back to biblical anthropology but is not congruent with it. The transition from statements of biblical to theological anthropology is a complex hermeneutical undertaking, which is also accentuated differently in different denominations. In the context of care and balance of our common home, the transition of biblical statements to theological anthropology is particularly important. This applies in particular, as can be seen from the criticism of Christian anthropocentrism, to the creation narratives. Through the bridge of theological anthropology, the biblical texts are then also able to become significant for Christian ethics. This section discusses five central biblical-anthropological themes on the basis of exegetical studies, before grouping them systematically in the next section.

1. There is no doubt that the verses quoted above, Genesis 1:26–28, with their language of the "image of God," are one of the most important biblical foundations for Christian theological anthropology (Janowski 2023, 424–431; Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 103–167). It is embedded in the narrative context of the creation of human beings on the sixth day of creation together with the land creatures (cf. Genesis 1:24–31). There is now an exegetical consensus that the image of God is not to be understood in an ontological sense, as has long been assumed, but in a functional-performative sense. Humans are the

4. On the fundamental ambivalence of religious ideas with regard to the relationship between man and nature, see Knapp 2023, 13–26. For a critical ecofeminist analysis of the logic of domination (dominations of nature, animals, women, and the poor), see Warren 2000. Ecofeminism has underscored the central importance of what it means to be a relational being as a human being.
5. Even though the formulation of Thomas Pröpper's *Theological Anthropology* contains several attributes more strongly associated with the Catholic tradition, it was developed by Pröpper in close cooperation with Protestant theologians—especially Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

representative image and stewards of God on Earth. In the sense of a universalization of the ancient oriental idea of kingship, every human being is now described as an "image of God." This is the case insofar as they assume responsibility for the created world as God's custodian and preserve the good order created by God (Janowski 2023, 427). This does not mean an unrestricted right of disposal or the call to exploit and utilize fellow creatures, but rather to maintain care and balance of our common home. From here, the *dominium over the earth*, the power of dominion in Genesis 1:28, also opens up anew: the two central Hebrew verbs "*kabash*" and "*radah*" (also in verse 26)—commonly translated as "subdue it, and have dominion over"—refer to the task assigned to human beings by God to cultivate creation and to take responsible care of it. In this way, they realize their likeness to God in a *good* and rightly understood *dominium over the earth* and *animal kingdom*. This is not imperialistic anthropocentrism: "In this sense, we are allowed to be cultural beings, but only in ways that are compatible with our purpose as stewards and with the legitimate claims of other living beings" (Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 143; translation by the authors).[6] Under the promise of God's blessing, all creatures are promised a prosperous life.

Even if humans are neither the Lord of creation—that is God—nor the crown of creation—that is the Sabbath (cf. Genesis 2:2–3)—they are nevertheless the only creature in the image of God. This entails a special greatness and responsibility, but also the possibility of transgression and damage to creation. In a special way, humans are God's dialogue partners, in that God constitutes humanity as such by addressing it (cf. Genesis 1:29). Humans can now respond to God and praise him for his creation and for themselves as the image of God. The Old Testament scholar Christof Hardmeier translates Genesis 1:31 accordingly: "And God looked at everything he had made. And God saw that it was good. 'And there! Very good (it is)!'" (Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 151; translation by the authors). An attitude of gratitude and admiration is expressed here.

2. While Genesis 1:26 singles out the human being as the image of God from the works of creation and focuses on their particularity, the biblical accounts of creation as a whole embed humans as *creatures* in an all-encompassing creative environment and co-world (Janowski 2023, 337–339, 368–373). Like no other term, "Adam" stands for this, not as a proper name but as a designation of human beings as "earthlings": they are not only *imago Dei* but also *imago mundi*. In relation to God, humans are connected to all other living beings, indeed to all of nature, by the fact that they are mortal and finite creatures. In this sense, biblical anthropology is neither cosmocentric nor anthropocentric, but theocentric (Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 46). Everything is related to God. For this reason, nature also receives a special appreciation and is far removed from being merely a dead, useful object. Without following animistic ideas, every part of creation refers to the Creator: "In the topos of *the world being filled with God*, this kind of world experience is given a theological interpretation that is characteristic of the relationship between the Old Testament and nature" (Janowski 2023, 339; translation and emphasis by the authors). Interpreting the world as a place of encounter with God is also evident in several so-called psalms of creation, such as at the beginning of Psalm 104:

6. Hardmeier and Ott also argue against the exegetical mainstream for an inclusive reading of Genesis 1:28: the promise of blessing and the mandate to rule are not only directed at humans, but also refer to the land animals; see Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 129–142. Otherwise, they would be denied the blessing of multiplying themselves. Only Genesis 1:26 refers to humans alone. If this reading is convincing, it represents a further important limitation of the anthropocentric reading of Genesis 1:28.

> Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind; he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire. (Psalm 104:1–4)

In this structure, humans are *both* a small and limited creature among many and yet an image of God. They occupy a fragile position in the work of creation, in which it is important for them to properly understand and live out their relationship with God and their fellow creatures.[7] There is no model of opposing valuations in the background: anthropocentric valorization of humans as and through the devaluation of fellow creatures would be the contrasting model.

3. The biblical accounts of creation paint a realistic picture and are aware of the loss of God's originally good creation. *Sin, contingency*, and *precariousness* are part of our world. The divine commission in the garden narrative "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15) tells of a harmonious, paradisiac creation, which, however, is precisely not the world in which humans find themselves. An idealistic interpretation of stewardship, which ties in directly with Genesis 2:15 and thus seeks to open up an alternative to the narrative of the Priestly Scriptures, is forbidden by the biblical texts (Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 110).[8] This is because the garden narrative leads us into a world as humans know it with death, toil, conflict, and struggle. The preservation of paradise and the responsible—but still precarious and conflict-ridden—concern for a post-paradisiac creation are not the same thing. This connection can also be described as "structural sin," into which every individual is born even before they can decide to act in one direction or the other (Knapp 2023, 105–110). However, the biblical stories paint a rather pessimistic picture of humankind. Because humans can be self-seeking, domination-seeking, and greed-seeking, they can become a catastrophe for themselves and fellow creatures (see Genesis 2:6–7). Detachment from the relationships of creation and harming oneself and others goes hand in hand. According to Genesis, an imperialistic domination of fellow creatures does not correspond to God's will, but it is the realistic state of a world that is also sinful.
4. Nevertheless, the biblical accounts of creation do not end with catastrophe, but with a *perspective of hope* opened up by God (see Genesis 6–9). After Adamic humanity has failed as the bearer of responsibility, it is given another chance with Noah as the living image of God (Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 311–316). He represents a life in healthy relationships with God and his fellow creatures: the ark is *the* symbol of the community of destiny of humans and animals. At the end of the flood narrative, there is no return to paradise, but there is a renewed promise of God's blessing. And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them:

> Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon

7. In an article, Schaefer (2023) unfolds this connection under the headings: "The sacramentality of creation," "The goodness of creation," "The beauty of creation," and "The kinship of creatures."
8. A critical view of an understanding of humans as stewards is also skeptical of an emphatic reading of humans in the Anthropocene as controllers of the entirety of the Earth's system. This goes beyond a realistic attribution of responsibility; see Manemann 2014, 89–108; Horn 2018, 66f. Gräb-Schmidt 2015, 678f., also argues in favor of a limited scope of responsibility.

> everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Genesis 9:1–3)

The famous vision of a "perfect creation" and the universal peace that goes with it is only known in the Bible as an eschatological vision (Janowski 2023, 247–249):

> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6–9)

This utopia can only be brought about by God and requires not only a conversion of humans, but also of dangerous animals—it is neither an anthropocentric nor a physiocentric, but a theocentric project.

5. Beyond the central themes of a biblical anthropology from the Old Testament, whose interpretation has become groundbreaking for Christian theological anthropology, reference must also be made to the New Testament. However, it is decidedly sparse with regard to the environment and what surrounds human life. In the context of today's ecological crisis, the theological concept of *incarnation* has proven to be particularly significant. John 1:14 states: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Depending on the interpretation, incarnation determines a different valuation of the relations of humans to the rest of creation. The common interpretation speaks of God becoming human and sees this as a special appreciation of humankind. Combined with an ontological interpretation of the *imago Dei*, this could lead to a qualitative differentiation of human beings from the rest of creation and an anthropocentric reduction of salvation. Michael Rosenberger (2024, 20, 36, 352), on the other hand, points to a reading that focuses on God becoming flesh. In Jesus Christ, God then becomes first and foremost not a human being, but a creature, and honors creation as a whole. Divine redemptive action involves the whole of creation.

Overall, these five themes of biblical anthropology open up a perspective that points in a different direction from the criticism of Western anthropocentrism. Thus, on the basis of the source texts of Christian identity, it is possible to develop a constructive systematic approach to theological anthropology, which is what the next section does.

2.3. Anthroporelationality: A Crucial Systematic-Theological Category

The biblical themes presented above locate people in a structure full of tension:

- Humans are part of creation (*imago mundi*), but occupy a special position within it (*imago Dei*).
- They are the bearers of responsibility, but not the absolute rulers.
- They are supposed to ensure good order, but repeatedly fail in practice.

– They are supposed to contribute to God's perspective of hope without being able to bring it about themselves.
– Fellow human beings and fellow other living entities are God's good creation, but are permanently corrupted by the power of sin.

Theological anthropology thus essentially has a relational structure: human beings are embedded in a network of relationships with God, other fellow human beings, other creatures, and themselves. And conversely, the misconception in human self-understanding consists precisely in misunderstanding these relationships, falling out of them, breaking away from them, or shaping them in a harmful way.

Therefore, instead of anthropocentrism, anthroporelationality should be the systematic key category of theological anthropology. This follows on from a concept put forward by the Catholic systematic theologian Hans-Joachim Höhn (2001, 88–91), and taken up by Catholic social ethicist Markus Vogt (2024, 18–19, 288–297) in his groundbreaking work on Christian environmental ethics, which is also ecumenical (Scheliha 2018, 35–43). Anthroporelationality focuses on the relational integration of human beings. They are participants in various (natural) networks without being at their center. In this way, the intrinsic value of nature can be appreciated, instead of being disqualified as an inferior object of use for humans. At the same time, the special position of humans is maintained, which is reflected in their "solidarity in co-creation" (Höhn 2001, 103; translation by the authors). The systematic theologian and ethicist Jame Schaefer (2023) speaks of an "ethical imperative to live companionally." Alongside relationality, responsibility, and advocatory, solidarity thus takes center stage in a theological anthropology that sees itself as anthroporelational. It combines ecological and social issues and differs from physiocentric or biocentric approaches which understand humans as an indiscriminate part of nature. As a *theological* anthropology, it also integrates the reference to God: on the one hand, humans stand before God as creatures together with the rest of creation; on the other hand, the reference to God for human beings is essentially conveyed via the works of creation. In this sense, the model of anthroporelationality assumes a mutually positive influence in the growth of this integrated reference to God.

Despite this optimistic perspective that anthroporelationality-focused Christian theological anthropology is open to environmental ethics, the overall picture must not ignore the agonal character of nature—including humans—which is also attested to in the Bible (Scheliha 2018, 38–41; Janowski 2023, 430–431; Pfleiderer 2016, 60–67). In the end, questions of the order of values, in which the rest of nature oscillates between an intrinsic and instrumental value for humans, cannot be ignored. In theological anthropology, it is not so much the epistemic and formal dimension as the material dimension of anthroporelationality that is in conflict (Gräb-Schmidt 2015, 658–659; Rosenberger 2024, 21–23). There is no question that theological anthropology can only be developed from the epistemological perspective of humans, and that only they can be the addressees of ethical responsibility. A more difficult and notorious point of contention in the philosophical and theological anthropological and cosmological foundations of environmental ethics, however, is the question of which entity has which value.[9] The concept of anthroporelationality will always have to be mediated anew depending on the situation. Both classical anthropocentrism, which knows no intrinsic value of nature, and an approach of universal dignity, which ascribes an end in itself not only to human beings but to all living things (biocentrism) or all sentient beings (pathocentrism), formulate one-sided evaluations.

9. Angelika Krebs' division into instrumental, eudaimonistic, and moral intrinsic values is helpful; cf. Krebs 1999. These fundamental debates cannot be discussed in detail here. Wustmans 2015, 15–58, provides an adequate summary.

2.4. Anthropopractice: An Endorsement of Sufficiency

In consumption and waste, the dark side of the Anthropocene becomes quantitatively visible. The littering of the planet not only expresses a lack of appreciation for the natural environment, but also represents a phenomenon of social injustice in the form of waste exports. So far, it has not been possible to pursue economic development without increasing consumption and the use of natural resources (Vogt 2024, 365–398; Vogt 2022, 553–577). The way in which consumption takes place, resources are wasted, and waste is produced among the wealthy is an expression of a lifestyle and economic system in which an inadequate anthropocentrism in the above sense manifests itself. Here, the realization of the lives of the few takes place in direct proportion to the detriment of the many, nature, and future generations.

In contrast, a theological anthropology oriented toward anthroporelationality is able to bring "solidarity in co-creation" (Höhn 2001, 103; translation by the authors) into play and promote a renewal of the understanding of self, fellow creatures, and the environment. In concrete terms, this means first and foremost a change in values that takes up the idea of sufficiency systemically, in the sense of a post-growth economy, and individually, in the sense of an ecologically conscious consumer attitude (Vogt 2024, 131, 383–384; Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 276). This requires a willingness to abandon an "imperial way of life," to say goodbye to the ideology of endless growth, and to drastically reduce the consumption of goods. According to Markus Vogt, the relationship between economy and ecology, which currently tends to be in conflict, must be defined in such a way that the bioeconomy is aligned with the principle of sustainability and sustainability is not reinterpreted as green growth (Vogt 2022, 559–560; Höfer 2018). Only in this way is it possible to appreciate the intrinsic value of nature. If this value is successfully recognized once more—and a theological anthropology that takes up the idea of creation can make a significant contribution to this—a change in attitude can take place and treat the environment (as creation) with gratitude instead of viewing it as a storehouse of raw materials for experience-oriented, ever more abundant consumption. The Sabbath as a biblical imperative can provide orientation for interrupting the logic of increase (Hardmeier and Ott 2015, 158–159, 326–329). A Christian ethic that ties in with theological anthropology will thus show on the one hand that humanity's responsibility consists in caring for fellow living entities, human and more-than-human, by giving "space to nature for its own sake through self-limitation of the *dominium over the earth*" (Scheliha 2018, 43; translation by the authors). On the other hand, it will point out that the normative model of a successful life does not consist in the material satisfaction of desires but in good relationships with the environment and fellow human beings and—if the religious world view is shared—also with God (Schmidt 2024, 46–51). With regard to consumption and waste, good anthropopractice is based on the model of sufficiency. Theological anthropology thus forms the hinge between the theologies of creation and theological ethics. It establishes a future-oriented self-image of human beings as anthroporelational creatures, with significant practical implications for the ways humans consume and deal with waste.

3. A Muslim Perspective: Theological Anthropology of Ecological Conservation in the Thought of Ibn ʻArabī

3.1. Background

When looking at theological anthropology in the Islamic tradition, the main challenges arise from the interpretation of what the term "theological anthropology" means, and who is best poised to render an account of the representative view from the Islamic tradition. Naturally, both these questions are inextricably intertwined, for what the term means can only be delineated through what the voice(s) chosen to represent the Islamic tradition think(s) of it. There are two ways to meet these challenges: to give an overall account of the spectrum of opinions on what this term means in the Islamic tradition, and give a general outline of the term and its implications vis-à-vis the Islamic tradition, or to choose a powerful voice from the tradition who has something meaningful to say on this topic without making any claims as to the generalizability of it in the tradition. Since this is an introductory chapter on theological anthropology, conventional wisdom would dictate that the former option be given precedence. However, the latter will be adopted here. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, the idea that the Islamic tradition can be reduced to a single "mainstream" or "orthodox" view is itself problematic. What view would one classify as "mainstream"? What about the differences between the Sunni and Shi'ite views? When did these identities even coalesce and become defined categories? What about the myriad internecine differences between these broad groups (Nawas 2016)? Indeed, what group *wouldn't* classify itself as maintaining the "orthodox" position? The tradition is far too rich, the *Weltanschauung* of its proponents far too multifaceted to make such a bold claim. The next reason has to do with personal preference: when one is forced to choose, is it better to give a general topography of the debate (assuming that this is even possible), or to attempt to elucidate the nuances of one view that has broad appeal among a large proportion of the members of the tradition? Given the aforementioned inherent problems with the former, and the superficiality that is an ineluctable corollary of the approach, the latter has been chosen.

It is for these reasons that theological anthropology is presented here as it pertains to ecological conservation in the thought of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʻArabī (d. 638/1240). Ibn ʻArabī is regarded by many as one of the most significant thinkers in the Islamic tradition (Knysh 1999; Landau 2008). Rather uniquely, he is held in high esteem in both the Sunni and Shi'ite traditions, which is another reason for his selection for this study (Corbin 2008; Ghurāb 1981; Shekarabi, Eslami, and Vakili, 2015). In addition, there are few premodern thinkers who have a comprehensive outlook that can be adequately applied to ecological conservation through the prism of theological anthropology. Yet Ibn ʻArabī's ideas, as what follows demonstrates, readily lend themselves to this endeavor. This is particularly the case because of his assertion that all things are loci of manifestation of the "most beautiful Names of God" (*al-Asmā' al-ḥusnā*).

3.2. Ibn ʻArabī and the Most Beautiful Names of God

The Qur'an declares that "to God belong the most beautiful Names, so call upon Him with them" (Qur'an 7:180). Traditionally, Muslims list ninety-nine "most beautiful Names" (*al-Asmā' al-ḥusnā*) of God based on the Qur'an. Yet Ibn ʻArabī argues that the true number is infinite because the Names represent the relationship that God has with the universe and, in that sense, there is no limit to the Names of God (Izutsu 2005, 99–100; Qayṣarī 1955, 64). The Names that the Qur'an does mention demonstrate the dual nature of God:

on the one hand, completely transcendent; on the other, comparable to the creation (Harris 1989). The transcendence of God is imparted by His Names of majesty (*jalāl*), such as "the Mighty" (*al-ʿAzīz*), "the Compeller" (*al-Jabbār*), or "the Avenger" (*al-Muntaqim*). These are generally associated with God's justice and are emphasized by legal scholars. In contrast, the comparability of God is communicated through His Names of beauty (*jamāl*), such as "the Compassionate" (*al-Raḥmān*), "the Merciful" (*al-Raḥīm*), or "the Gentle" (*al-Laṭīf*). These convey God's mercy and are stressed more in the Sufi tradition (Harris 1989; Murata 1992, 9–10). Ibrahim Özdemir expatiates on this aspect, which is particularly seen in the respectful treatment of animals, in the thought of the contemporary Turkish scholar Said Nursi (d. 1960). Nursi was influenced by his Sufi predecessors like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Ibn Arabī, and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) (Özdemir 2022).

The duality of God's transcendence and comparability is perfectly encapsulated for Ibn ʿArabī in the Qur'anic proclamation: "There is nothing like Him; He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (Qur'an 42:11). Ibn ʿArabī notes that there are two adjectives of comparability for "like" (*ka* and *mithl*). To circumvent semantic redundancy that would contravene Qur'anic inimitability, Ibn ʿArabī clarifies that the literal meaning of the verse is: "There is nothing like His likeness." That God has a "likeness" intimates His comparability, while the negation of such a likeness is proof of His transcendence. Further, the attributes of hearing and seeing also demonstrate God's comparability as other beings have these traits (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 182). Arguably the most successful disseminator of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings and an enormously influential scholar of the late-Timurid period,[10] Nūr al-Dīn al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492), adds that the faculties mentioned in this verse also showcase God's transcendence because they underscore that it is only God who truly hears and sees (Jāmī 2009, 436). Therefore, both parts of the verse transmit not only God's comparability but also His ultimate transcendence.

In his ultra-literalistic linguistic dissection of the verse, which is concordant with his general modus operandi (Morris 1987), Ibn ʿArabī affirms the existence of God's "likeness" in the universe. This is the Perfect Human (*al-Insān al-kāmil*).

3.3. The Perfect Human

God's "likeness" can only be humankind according to Ibn ʿArabī because it is only humans who have the capacity to be loci of manifestation of all of God's "most beautiful Names." Ibn ʿArabī explains that this was the reason God created the entire universe:

> When God, be He praised, wanted, through His most beautiful Names, which cannot be tallied (*lā yablaghhā al-iḥṣā'*), to see their essences, or, if you want, you could say that He wanted to see His essence (*ʿayn*), [He created] a comprehensive being (*kawn jāmiʿ*) that would encompass the matter in its entirety (*yaḥṣar al-amr kullah*) because it was characterized by existence (*muttaṣifan bi'l-wujūd*), and through it His secret would be manifested to Himself (*yaẓharu bihi sirrahu ilayhi*). For seeing something itself through itself is not like seeing it itself in something else (*amr ākhar*) that is like a mirror for it … so Adam was the very polish of that mirror (*jalā' tilk al-mi'āt*) (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 48–49).

In this renowned passage, Ibn ʿArabī divulges that God created the universe because He wanted to see the essences of His most beautiful Names, or His essence. The reason Ibn ʿArabī says that you could say God wanted to see the essences of His Names, or you could say

10. This is the period in which the Turkic-Mongol dynasty that had controlled Persia and Central Asia had lost much of the former but retained the latter (Chittick 2007, 512; Rizvi 2006, 59–60).

God wanted to see His essence, is not due to equivocation but to diversity: in one sense the essences of the Names are God's essence since the most beautiful Names are God's Names and He *is* them. But in the other, God is *not* the most beautiful Names because God is absolutely transcendent and, ultimately, beyond the ken of human comprehension that seeks to limit Him, even if it is through non-restriction (Izutsu 2005, 99–102). It is only the former that is the reason for the creation of the universe because it is only the most beautiful Names that are manifested in the cosmos, not the absolute divine essence.

These most beautiful Names are the "connections" (*nisbah*) through which God has a relation to His creation (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 105). After all, "the Compassionate," "the Compeller," and all other Names need an object to which the compassion, the mercy, and all other divine attributes may be directed (Jandī 2007, 292). This is why "the comprehensive being" has to be "characterized by existence" in the sensible world. The early modern popularizer of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas, ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731) (Lane 2001; Sukkar 2014), elaborates that one of God's most beautiful Names is "the Manifest" (*al-Ẓāhir*), which means that this Name, and all other Names, must be manifested in the phenomenal world through contingent beings (Nābulusī 2008, 1:57–58).

This "comprehensive being" is able to "encompass the matter in its entirety" due to its potentiality to manifest all the most beautiful Names in contradistinction to other contingent beings. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 736/1335?), a commentator of Ibn ʿArabī's work who is credited with linearizing the latter's esoteric thought (Lala 2019), resolutely declares that this comprehensive being is the Perfect Human (*al-Insān al-kāmil*) (Qāshānī 1892, 8) because of his essence that "combines all the Names" (Qāshānī 1892, 11). If the physical presence of Adam in the Qur'an was temporally the first to carry this out, the essence of Prophet Muḥammad was ontologically the reason for it (Qāshānī 2005, 536–537). On account of his temporal precedence, Adam is the "polish" that "enables" God to see the manifestation of His Names in the mirror of contingent beings, so that He is no longer "a hidden treasure" (*kanz makhfiyy*) (Ibn ʿArabī n.d., 3:260).

The capability to manifest all the most beautiful Names, which is the preserve of the Perfect Human, is the reason humankind is the steward (*khalīfah*) of God, who is given dominion over the world, as mentioned in the Qur'an.

3.4. Humankind As God's Steward

Human beings have been identified as God's stewards in the Qur'an, which entails keeping their duty to the natural world, as mentioned in numerous works on Islamic ecology (Haq 2003, 121–154; Nasr 2003, 97). The Qur'an says that God said to the angels, "I am going to appoint a steward on earth" (Qur'an 2:30). Subsequently, He created Adam and then "taught Adam all the names" (Qur'an 2:31). While *prima facie* this seems like an epistemological superiority with which God imbues Adam, Ibn ʿArabī argues that it is an ontological one (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 50). Jāmī clarifies that Adam is only mentioned because He is the father of humankind, but that the rank of stewardship belongs to all his progeny (Jāmī 2005, 71). Further, "teaching Adam the Names" signifies that God "arranged within his natural disposition … every Name of beauty (*jamāl*) and majesty (*jalāl*)" (Jāmī 2005, 71). This is the meaning of the well-known prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) that "God created Adam in His form (*ṣūrah*)" (ʿAbd al-Razzāq 1983, 9:444; Bazzār 1988–2009, 15:161; Ibn Ḥanbal 2001, 12:275; Ibn Ḥibbān 1988, 12:420; Muslim n.d., 4:2017), says Ibn ʿArabī (Jāmī 2005, 74). However, the question as to how the "form" (*ṣūrah*) can be represented in the phenomenal world remains unanswered.

"Form" means "appearance" (*hay'ah*), elucidates Jāmī, but that can only be applied to "physical bodies" (*ajsām*), which is clearly not the case here since God is beyond spatial circumscriptions (Jāmī 2005, 74). In this context, then, "form" signifies "attribute" (*ṣifah*) because attributes are only "manifest in external reality (*al-khārij*) with the outer form"; thus, God created Adam with His attributes (Jāmī 2005, 74). It is these attributes that are alluded to in the Qur'an as teaching Adam the Names.

Despite being created in the form of, or with the attributes of God, God's teaching Adam the Names implies that his ontological superiority still needed to be activated. Put otherwise, being imbued with the attributes of God was a potentiality that was placed within Adam, and, by extension, his progeny, as previously mentioned. It is only those who manage to actualize their potentiality and achieve the rank of the Perfect Human who are God's true stewards. Fulfilling this potentiality requires becoming fully cognizant that one's essence is the divine Names, which is why Ibn 'Arabī never tires of mentioning the prophetic tradition: "Whoever knows themselves, knows their Lord," repeating it five times in the summation of his thought, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Ibn 'Arabī, 2002), and around eighty times in his multivolume magnum opus, al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah (Ibn 'Arabī, n.d.), even though it is regarded as weak by some traditionists (Albānī 1992, 1:165; Haytamī n.d., 290; Safīrī n.d., 24:12).

Qāshānī reminds us that those who achieve this potential and become loci of divine manifestation still only manifest the most beautiful Names in their contingent forms, which means that God's absolute existence (*wujūd muṭlaq*) is expressed in the form of "relational existence" (*wujūd iḍāfī*) (Qāshānī 1892, 8–9). But this is not the only delimitation that humankind's perspicuous manifestation of the divine Names in the rank of the Perfect Human imposes, for lest we forget, God's true essence is beyond comprehension; the Perfect Human becomes a locus for the Names of God only, not the true essence of God (Qāshānī 1892, 8–9). Nevertheless, the rank of the Perfect Human represents the fulfillment of the divine purpose behind creation. And it is achieved through a two-way relation: a relation of servanthood (*'ubūdiyyah*) vis-à-vis God, and a relation of lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) to the rest of creation.

Jāmī writes that it is only because Adam has "an aspect of lordship through which he is connected to God, be He praised, and an aspect of servanthood through which he is in conformity to the creation" that "God made him a steward of His creation" (Jāmī 2005, 79).

In other words, Adam and his progeny are all servants because they are absolutely dependent on God, but they are lords because they have dominion over the rest of creation. In this sense, humans are the intermediary (*barzakh*) between God and the creation (Bashier 2004; Ḥakīm 1981, 194; Qūnawī 2013, 12). Additionally, the lordship that humans enjoy over all other things, which is part of the reason for the rank of stewardship, has a dualistic aspect itself: a vertical relation of power where humans subjugate other existents, and a horizontal relation where humans support other existents (Jāmī 2005, 79). There is a complementarity between Ibn 'Arabī's definition of lordship that is a fundamental component of stewardship and the crucial systematic-theological category of anthroporelationality discussed above.

3.5. Vertical Stewardship of the Perfect Human

A human "is called a 'lord' because they are the steward, and due to their form that is the best form," says Jāmī (2005, 79). The role of stewardship, and the dominion that humankind has over all things in the world, is therefore intimately connected with their form, which is to become a locus of manifestation of all the most beautiful Names, as the foregoing has shown. To know the self, which is the primary conduit for knowing God, and fulfilling the lofty potentiality of humankind, can only be achieved by inculcating the reality of all the most

beautiful Names within the self. This is what it means to know the self, and thereafter, to know God. Ibn ʿArabī seems to be referencing the tradition that exhorts humans to "be perfumed by the traits of God (*takhallaqū bi akhlāq Allāh*), even though, as before, it is deemed to be a weak narration by traditionists (Suyūṭī 2006, 83). In the vertical relation that humans have to all other existents, this entails discharging the obligation of just lordship over nature, just as God exercises just lordship over all things. This mirrors the aforementioned Christian theological anthropology that is anthroporelational.

Ibn ʿArabī explains that when God said He raised Enoch (Idrīs) to "an elevated position" (*makān ʿaliyy*) (Qur'an 19:57), it meant that He made him the steward over all things because this is an "elevation of position" (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 76). He goes on to state that while Enoch achieved this elevated position, only those from humankind who carry out responsible stewardship can achieve that rank and become Perfect Humans (Qayṣarī 1955, 547). The question is: what exactly is responsible stewardship? Ibn ʿArabī elucidates this through the example of the man who was given unparalleled dominion over the natural world: Solomon (Sulaymān) (Qur'an 38:35). The true reality of Solomon's dominion over the natural world, says Ibn ʿArabī, was that it was dictated by extreme "compassion" (*raḥmāniyyah*) (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 151).

An important early commentator of Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ*, Mu'ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. 700/1300?) (Dagli 2016, 95–104), details what Ibn ʿArabī means by compassion permeating the reality of Solomon:

> God imbued him [Solomon] with complete and perfect subjugation (*al-taskhīr al-kullī al-tāmm*), authority and dominion, and a universal ability to act however he pleased toward all species of beings, from all kinds of angels, *jinns*, men, birds, predators, and all animals, to plants and minerals. (Jandī 2007, 445)

Jandī explains that Solomon's inner reality was divine compassion because God gave him dominion over the natural world that was unmatched by anyone before him, or since. However, that was not the only reason. He goes on to say that God gave him the ability to exercise this dominion "in the most complete, best, most perfect, and most universal way, so the attribution of the wisdom of compassion became appropriate for him" (Jandī 2007, 445). It was on account of the type of dominion, therefore, which was exercised in the best and most perfect way, that Solomon's reality is also one of compassion. Put otherwise, both the scope and the style of Solomon's dominion was characterized by compassion. While the former referred to the divine compassion that he was shown due to the immense sovereignty that he was given, the latter was an expression of the compassion he showed others.

The central role compassion plays in discharging the divine obligation of dominion is showcased by the prominent role Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba, plays in the chapter of Solomon (Lala 2023). Ibn ʿArabī intimates that Bilqīs was an instantiation of divine compassion because she averted war, thereby saving her people (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 154–155). The vertical stewardship in which humankind exercises "complete and perfect subjugation" (*al-taskhīr al-kullī al-tāmm*) over all things is thus only through saving and valuing the life of all things. This is because all things in existence are loci of divine manifestation, and it is only through allowing their potentiality to manifest the divine Names that the potentiality of the self to manifest all the Names is realized (Qayṣarī 1955, 979). While it may be through vertical stewardship by saving others that this potentiality is actualized, as it was for Bilqīs, it could also be through horizontal stewardship in which humankind protects all things in the natural world because there is commonality between them as loci of the most beautiful Names.

3.6. Horizontal Stewardship of the Perfect Human

Ibn ʿArabī affirms that "the aim is [always] seeking equilibrium (*iʿtidāl*)" since "equilibrium exhorts to equality (*sawā'*) in everything" (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 171–172). This is a universal rule in which one thing does not exceed its bounds and transgress the rights of others. Nor does this only refer to other humans or even animals. For inasmuch as all things are loci of divine manifestation, all things are equally worthy of protection. Ibn ʿArabī writes, "There is nothing that is not alive, for there is nothing but that it hymns the praises of God, but we do not understand their praises, except through spiritual unveiling (*kashf*). Only that which is alive can praise, so everything is alive" (Ibn ʿArabī 2002, 170).

Referring to Qur'an, 17:44, that states, "the seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them glorify Him. And there is not a single thing that does not hymn His praises, but you do not comprehend their praises," Ibn ʿArabī asserts that only something that is alive is able to praise God, and since the Qur'an affirms that all things praise God, all things must be alive, even though their modality of living is different to ours, and so, therefore, must be their praise. In fact, ʿAlā' al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Mahā'imī (d. 835/1432), a philosophical expositor of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings from the Indian subcontinent (Chittick 2007, 520), resolutely declares that all things praise God "not just verbally, as people think" (Mahā'imī 2007, 517).

It is through their very existence that all things praise God because God pervades all existence (Qayṣarī 1955, 987). In other words, it is because all things manifest the divine Names that they praise God. Mahā'imī explicates that to exist is to be alive because "life is the first of the attributes of existence" (*awwal ṣifāt al-wujūd*) (Mahā'imī 2007, 516), and to be alive is to manifest the Names. Thus:

Existence = Life = Manifestation of Names = Praise of God

It is this ontological praise of God to which the Qur'an refers. Humankind has an affinity with all other things in nature because just as they are loci of divine manifestation, so is humankind. Indeed, since the Perfect Human manifests all the divine Names that are disparately manifested by other things, "it is a receptacle for all existents" (Jāmī 2005, 79). Therefore to damage any part of creation is not only to damage a unique form of praise of God (Mayer 2023), it is also to damage an aspect of the Perfect Human. This is reminiscent in Christianity of the Perfect Human according to Rosenberger (2024) being fundamentally a creature, and only secondarily a human in Christ, which reflects *creational*, not only human, redemption (see above).

Humankind is, in this sense, a combination of all other things in nature. It is on account of this that it is dubbed a "comprehensive being" by Ibn ʿArabī (2002, 48). By virtue of the ontological association of manifesting the divine Names that exists between them, humankind has an obligation to protect what is like it in essence. The horizontal stewardship is thus not hierarchical with a higher form of creation protecting the lower, but like protecting through their mutual "likeness." There is naturally a tension between the absolutism of universal dignity to which Ibn ʿArabī's conception of vertical and horizontal stewardship beckons humankind and the realism of balance that he advocates as an ecological means. Ibn ʿArabī thus concedes that in practical terms, vertical and horizontal stewardship entails graded universal dignity in which the transgression of bounds is circumvented. It is to these practical considerations that we now turn.

3.7. Practical Implications of the Stewardship of the Perfect Human

There are three basic principles that may be derived from Ibn ʻArabī's conception of vertical and horizontal stewardship, and which may be applied practically. These principles are often co-implicative and mutually symbiotic:

1. Compassion
2. Perfect subjugation
3. Equilibrium and balance

Ibn ʻArabī argues that the most important element of responsible stewardship is compassion. It was compassion that characterized the responsible stewardship of Solomon. Compassion is the pervading force in the vertical hierarchy of God–human–nature. Put otherwise, just as God is compassionate to us, we should be compassionate to all of nature. The prophetic tradition puts it more succinctly: "The Compassionate has compassion on those who are compassionate; have compassion on those on earth, He who is in heaven will have compassion on you" (Sijistānī 2009, 7:298; Tirmidhī 1975, 4:323). This is what it means to "be perfumed by the traits of God," for the most important trait, according to Ibn ʻArabī, is compassion. This is the one Name under which all the other most beautiful Names are subsumed, as Izutsu points out:

> There is a difference of ranks among the divine Names, and … a higher Name virtually contains in itself all the Names of lower ranks. If such is the case, then … there must be in this hierarchy the highest, i.e., the most comprehensive, Name that contains all the rest of the Names. And, in fact, according to Ibn ʻArabī, there is such a Name: "Merciful" (*Raḥmān*). (Izutsu 2005, 116)

It is the life-giving ontological mercy to which Izutsu refers. Bilqīs is emblematic of this mercy in saving the lives of her people. Saving the lives of all things—both animate and inanimate—therefore is the fundamental expression of mercy and compassion.

Practically, this coincides with the principle of "compassionate conservation," which has been championed by evolutionary biologist Marc Bekoff (2010, 2013). Bekoff argues that the first imperative of compassionate conservation is "to do no harm" (Bekoff 2013, xxi). It is to save, not kill. This entails discarding utilitarian conservation where species welfare is deemed to be the only guiding principle. As Ramp and Bekoff observe, "the focus on species welfare and anthropocentric views of nature has been an impediment to scientifically validating the inclusion of individual welfare in conservation" (2015, 324). Perfect subjugation is one that is guided, not by anthropocentric utilitarianism, but by compassion; it is one in which every life matters. This is as true for domestic animals as it is for wild animals, especially those deemed to be pests and "trash." The term "trash animal" is used to describe "an animal as worthless, useless, and disposable, none of which are inherent qualities of an animal itself; rather, it defines an animal's relationship to humans or attitudes about how humans understand the way an animal fits into our worldview" (Nagy and Johnson 2013, 4).

In the anthropocentric view, these animals upset the equilibrium and balance of nature (Ramp and Bekoff 2015, 323), yet as Ibn ʻArabī's principles of compassion and perfect subjugation demonstrate, every life is sacrosanct and thus the lives of "trash animals" are the basis of divine balance, not an impediment to it. If the aim is always to achieve equilibrium and balance, it must also therefore be to save every life. However, Ibn ʻArabī's principle of compassion, perfect subjugation, and balance is not absolutist; he concedes that another fact

of ecological balance and equilibrium is graded universal dignity. Ibn ʿArabī states that one of the divine Names that is manifested in creatures of the world is "The Abaser" (*al-Mudhill*). It is through this Name that God subjugated animals to humankind, and part of that subjugation is the permissibility of eating the meat of many animals (Chittick 2009). However, subjugation for Ibn ʿArabī is a bilateral relation in which the subjugated exerts just as many rights on the subjugator as the subjugator does on the subjugated. Put otherwise, even though animals are subjugated to humankind, they have the right to protection and good treatment from it (Chittick 2009). Any violation of that bilateral relation means that humankind is not acting out of compassion, which results in a loss of balance. In addition, Ibn ʿArabī maintains that it is *only* humankind that violates this relation and not animals. Animals are innately aware of humankind's duplicity, which is why they seek to escape from it—a fact that simultaneously showcases the rule that the subjugator is more in need of the subjugated (Chittick 2009). In the final analysis, it is only humankind that fails to fulfill its role of compassionate stewardship through a perfect subjugation that maintains balance and does not exceed bounds, which is why in many respects animals are superior to humankind (Chittick 2009).

Influenced by Ibn ʿArabī, Said Nursi strenuously highlights the significant purpose of each and every one of God's creatures, even if their purpose is unknown to us. A case in point is his treatise on flies, which elaborates on how humans have misunderstood the vital role these creatures play, not only in God's cosmic plan, but also in the establishment of ecological balance in the natural world in their capacity as "public health officials" (Özdemir 2022). Sarra Tlili affirms that "the Qur'an, perhaps more than other scriptures, … lends itself to an eco-centric reading, whereby the entire creation is cherished" because "the entire creation worships God" (2012, 252). It is the valorization of all forms of creation through which theocentricity is underscored in the Qur'an. This is Ibn ʿArabī's conception of true stewardship.

In the foregoing, the principles of Ibn ʿArabī's stewardship have been applied to compassionate conservation as a practical guide to its application. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that these principles are operative in all facets of socio-ecology; as such, they are just as important to the protection of our natural environment as they are to the protection of animals (Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin 2003). Fundamentally, Ibn ʿArabī's principles demand a complete reevaluation of our entire attitude and approach to the natural world, much in the vein of *The Case of Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn* written by the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*) in which animals disclose human injustices against them. Even though humans manage to defend themselves and win the case, the epistle forces a reevaluation of *a priori* assumptions vis-à-vis human superiority (Goodman and McGregor 2009).

4. Muslim and Christian Perspectives in Dialogue

Following the three guiding questions formulated in the introduction, the Christian and Muslim perspectives have brought to light a picture of theological anthropologies in which the relationality of the human being is at the center. Human beings as creatures of God are embedded in a horizontal and vertical network of relationships. They are part of nature and yet occupy a prominent position within it. Responsibly taking this into account is expressed in the concept of the image of God. It is not simply an ontological determination, but rather a task that God has assigned to human beings: they have a potential within them that needs to be developed. This applies both to themselves ("the perfect human") and to the shaping of relationships with their fellow human beings and the world around them. "Dominion"/"stewardship" stand for this connection. Even if they have often been misunderstood in the past as hegemonic concepts of domination, it is important to bear in

mind that these are practical concepts that lay the theological-anthropological foundation for a theological ethics of responsibility ("solidarity in co-creation"). Therein lies the greatness of humankind ("manifestation of all the most beautiful names"), but also its possibility of failure ("creaturely limits"/"sin").

The crucial systematic-theological category of anthroporelationality, thus, compels a redefinition of "dominion"/"stewardship" in Christianity and Islam. For both traditions affirm the bi-relationality of the stewardship that humankind is afforded. If the greatness of humankind lies in justly discharging the duty of compassionate stewardship, then its propensity for failure lies in its failing to fulfill that role. Further, it is only humankind that fails to achieve its potentiality; animals know God and fulfill their duty to God and to those to whom God has subjugated them. Humankind, through its excess, fails to achieve the balance that is a fundamental component of its stewardship. This has been demonstrated in concrete, practical terms on the Christian side as an endorsement of sufficiency in the context of consumption and waste. On the Islamic side, the three principles of Ibn ʿArabī were applied to compassionate conservation.

Facing the current ecological crisis therefore goes hand in hand with humankind coming to itself as it exists in the eyes of God. In other words, the structure of relationships in which human beings are embedded according to Muslim and Christian theological anthropology is based on a proportional relationship: care and balance of our common home is care for the needs of our fellow human beings and care for ourselves in reference to God. But this care necessarily entails a balance that can only be achieved through sufficiency and just stewardship. In practical terms, neither the Christian perspective nor the Muslim one demands moral absolutism. For as Isaiah 11:6–9 imparts, the ideal of the wolf dwelling with the lamb, of the leopard lying down with the young goat, and the lion with the calf is not an achievable model in this life. Ibn ʿArabī makes the same point when he declares that intrinsic to subjugation is the permissibility of consuming some animal meat. Yet this does not mean humankind can discharge its stewardship in any way it sees fit. Anthroporelationality, which is the central systematic category of a theological anthropology and a subsequent Christian and Muslim ethics as a practice of responsibility, demands that humankind maintains balance through sufficiency in the context of consumption, especially of animals, and waste. The dualistic relation of just subjugation enables humankind to become cognizant of the rights subjugated animals have on it. Excess in any form—whether that is in consumption or the poor treatment of animals that results from excess consumption—violates the subjugator/subjugated relation as the imperative of good treatment is forfeited. In the final analysis, humankind should know its worth, says Ibn ʿArabī (Chittick 2009), and that means knowing the worth of animals and the environment.

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