

To defend and promote life, to show reverence and love for it, is a task which God entrusts to every man, calling him as his living image to share in his own lordship over the world: 'God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Gen 1:28).

The biblical text clearly shows the breadth and depth of the lordship which God bestows on man. It is a matter first of all of dominion over the earth and over every living creature, as the Book of Wisdom makes clear: 'O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy... by your wisdom you have formed man, to have dominion over the creatures you have made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness' (Wis 9:1,2-3). The Psalmist too extols the dominion given to man as a sign of glory and honor from his Creator: 'You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea' (Ps 8:6-8).

As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question – ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to 'human ecology' properly speaking – which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. In fact, 'the dominion' granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse,' or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to 'eat of the fruit of the tree' (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity.

*Evangelium Vitae, Section 42 (1995)*