

Article

Post-Dominion: Reconfigurations of Human–Earth Relations in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

This paper investigates how religious narratives are transformed under the conditions of the Anthropocene by reinterpreting the biblical mandate of dominion as a condition of post-dominion. The Anthropocene designates a historical situation in which human agency has attained planetary dimensions, thereby seemingly fulfilling the scriptural command to “subdue” the Earth. Yet this fulfillment proves profoundly paradoxical. Human domination over nature increasingly destabilizes the ecological conditions of human existence itself. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological disruption reveal that the logic of mastery rebounds upon humanity, producing forms of self-subjugation through unintended consequences of technological and economic power. The paper argues that the Anthropocene dissolves the classical distinction between nature and culture and confronts religious thought with hybrid ecological realities that mediate human agency and responsibility. By introducing the concept of post-dominion, the paper develops a theological framework emphasizing dependency, restraint, humility, and care as central categories for rethinking religion and ethics in the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene; dominion; post-dominion; religion and ecology; third nature

1. Introduction: Dominion in the Age of the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene confronts religious thought with a profound transformation of the relationship between humanity and nature (Deane-Drummond et al. 2018; Poveda 2020; Conty 2021). Originally introduced to designate a geological epoch shaped decisively by human activity, the concept has rapidly expanded beyond the natural sciences and developed into a broader philosophical, ethical, and theological framework for interpreting the contemporary condition of humanity (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). Climate change, mass extinction, ecological destabilization, and the global penetration of technological systems reveal that human agency has attained a planetary scale. Human beings no longer merely inhabit nature but structurally transform Earth systems themselves (Ellis 2018). This transformation has generated a new situation in which the traditional distinction between nature and culture becomes increasingly unstable (Latour 2017; Noller 2025b).

Within this context, religious narratives concerning creation, stewardship, and dominion acquire renewed significance. In particular, the biblical mandate in Genesis 1:28 to “subdue” the Earth and “have dominion” over living beings has become one of the most controversial theological motifs in environmental discourse. Critics have frequently argued that Judeo-Christian traditions contributed to exploitative attitudes toward nature by legitimizing anthropocentric domination and technological mastery (White 1967). Yet such interpretations often overlook the historical and conceptual transformations that the



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Anthropocene itself introduces into the meaning of dominion. The ecological crisis does not simply expose excessive human power over nature; rather, it reveals the fragility and self-destructive consequences of this very power.

A similar ambivalence can already be found within Judeo-Christian traditions themselves. In *The Lonely Man of Faith*, originally published in 1965, Soloveitchik (1992) distinguishes between two symbolic dimensions of humanity represented by two accounts of creation. “Adam the first” embodies humanity’s creative and technological vocation. He approaches the world through functional, technological and practical-utilitarian questions, seeking to harness and transform nature. Adam the first is distinguished by a “majestic posture vis-a-vis his environment” (Soloveitchik 1992, p. 15). Yet this mastery-oriented posture is complemented by “Adam the second,” who encounters reality not primarily through control but through receptivity, wonder, and existential relation to God. Rather than asking how the world functions, Adam the second asks why it exists and what meaning it discloses. He experiences himself not as sovereign master but as a vulnerable and dependent creature embedded within creation. Soloveitchik’s distinction therefore anticipates an important corrective to interpretations that identify the biblical narratives exclusively with domination. From this perspective, the Anthropocene does not abolish the creative vocation of humanity, but reveals the necessity of rebalancing the mastery-oriented dimension of Adam the first with the humility, dependency, and creaturely discernment exemplified by Adam the second. In this sense, post-dominion can be understood not as a rejection of human agency, but as a recovery of neglected dimensions already present within the biblical tradition itself.¹

This paper argues that the Anthropocene marks a transition from dominion to post-dominion. The concept of post-dominion does not imply that humanity has ceased to exercise power over nature. On the contrary, the Anthropocene demonstrates that human technological and economic systems now influence atmospheric, geological, and biological processes on a global scale. However, this unprecedented expansion of power simultaneously undermines the conditions that sustain human existence. Humanity increasingly becomes vulnerable to the unintended consequences of its own transformative agency (Noller 2023). Climate instability, ecological collapse, and environmental feedback loops reveal that domination rebounds reflexively upon the dominator. In this sense, the Anthropocene destabilizes the classical image of humanity as sovereign master of nature.

The theological significance of this development lies in the fact that the Anthropocene transforms not only ecological reality but also the symbolic and moral frameworks through which humans understand themselves. Religious concepts such as stewardship, creatureliness, humility, and responsibility can no longer be interpreted within a simple opposition between autonomous humanity and passive nature. Instead, humans find themselves entangled within hybrid ecological structures that mediate both action and vulnerability. Nature no longer appears as an external object of control but as a dynamically responsive system that reacts to human intervention in unpredictable ways (Haraway 2016; Barad 2007).

The Anthropocene therefore represents more than an environmental crisis. It constitutes a crisis of anthropological self-understanding. Human beings increasingly encounter themselves within the transformed structures of nature (Noller 2023). Ecological destruction is not merely directed outward toward an external environment; it simultaneously affects the natural conditions of human life itself. The traditional logic of domination thereby becomes reflexive. Humanity does not transcend nature through technological mastery but encounters its own dependency in increasingly mediated and destabilized forms.

This reflexive structure fundamentally challenges modern narratives of progress and technological emancipation. Since the Industrial Revolution, technological development

has frequently been associated with increasing autonomy from natural limitations. The expansion of industrial production, fossil energy systems, and global technological infrastructures appeared to confirm the possibility of human self-empowerment through domination of nature. Yet the Anthropocene reveals the ambivalence of this process. The same technological capacities that enabled unprecedented control over natural processes simultaneously produce irreversible ecological disruptions whose long-term consequences exceed human control.

Religious thought is therefore confronted with a new theological situation. The question is no longer whether humans possess dominion over nature, but how religious traditions can reinterpret human agency under conditions in which domination itself becomes self-undermining. This problem is especially relevant because the Anthropocene transforms the symbolic status of nature. Nature can no longer be understood simply as untouched creation existing independently of human activity. Ecological systems are increasingly shaped by technological mediation, industrial infrastructures, and anthropogenic feedback processes. At the same time, these transformed systems continue to resist complete human control. The Anthropocene thus reveals a paradoxical condition in which humanity becomes both more powerful and more vulnerable simultaneously.

The present paper develops the concept of post-dominion as a theological and philosophical framework for interpreting this condition. Post-dominion describes a historical situation in which the logic of mastery collapses into ecological reflexivity. Human beings remain capable of transforming planetary systems, yet precisely this transformative capacity reveals the limits of sovereignty and autonomy. The Anthropocene thereby calls for a reinterpretation of religious narratives beyond simplistic models of control and exploitation.

Methodologically, the paper combines philosophical anthropology, environmental ethics, and theological hermeneutics. It proceeds from the assumption that religious narratives are not merely static doctrinal systems but dynamic interpretative frameworks that mediate human self-understanding within changing historical conditions. In the Anthropocene, these narratives are transformed because the underlying conditions of human existence themselves undergo structural transformation. The ecological crisis therefore requires not merely new ethical applications but a deeper reconsideration of concepts such as creation, responsibility, and human exceptionalism.

At the same time, the present argument differs from several influential approaches within contemporary Anthropocene discourse. While posthumanist and new materialist perspectives frequently seek to decenter human agency altogether, the concept of post-dominion proposed here maintains that humanity continues to occupy a distinctive position of planetary responsibility precisely because human action has become geologically consequential. Likewise, the paper does not interpret the Anthropocene merely as a critique of anthropocentrism, but as a reflexive transformation of human self-understanding under conditions in which domination increasingly turns back upon humanity itself.

The argument unfolds in four steps. First, the paper reconstructs the theological and historical meanings of dominion within biblical and modern contexts. Second, it examines how the Anthropocene destabilizes the distinction between nature and culture through hybrid ecological structures. Third, it develops the concept of post-dominion as a reflexive condition of human self-subjugation through ecological transformation. Finally, the paper explores how religious thought can contribute to an ethics of restraint, dependency, and care beyond the paradigm of mastery. The central thesis of this paper is therefore that the Anthropocene does not simply invalidate religious narratives of dominion but transforms them internally. Dominion reaches its historical fulfillment precisely at the moment of its collapse. Humanity becomes aware that planetary power does not establish sovereignty over nature but deeper entanglement within fragile Earth systems. Religious thought can

respond to this situation by reinterpreting human agency not in terms of absolute mastery but in terms of mediated responsibility within a shared ecological condition.

Methodologically, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary and hermeneutical approach situated at the intersection of systematic theology, philosophical anthropology, and contemporary ecological thought. While the argument engages with insights from new materialist and posthumanist approaches concerning hybridity, entanglement, and the collapse of rigid nature–culture dualisms, it does not presuppose a strong new materialist ontology. Rather, these perspectives are employed descriptively and hermeneutically in order to illuminate the Anthropocene as a condition of ecological mediation and reflexivity.

Accordingly, the present account maintains a distinctive role for human agency and responsibility. Human beings remain uniquely capable of transforming planetary systems and therefore occupy a particular position of responsibility within creation. The concept of post-dominion developed in this paper should thus be understood not as a rejection of the ecological anthropology, but as an attempt to reinterpret human creatureliness, vulnerability, and responsibility under conditions of hybrid ecological realities.

In this context, the term “theological” does not refer primarily to confessional doctrines or to the systematic elaboration of particular dogmatic claims. Rather, it designates a mode of interpretation concerned with fundamental questions of creation, creatureliness, finitude, responsibility, and humanity’s place within a meaningful order that transcends purely instrumental or technocratic forms of rationality. The argument developed here is therefore theological in a hermeneutical rather than narrowly doctrinal sense. It seeks to reinterpret inherited religious concepts and symbolic frameworks under the conditions of the Anthropocene. In this respect, the paper draws on religious insights concerning humility, dependency, and care, while understanding theology as a reflective practice concerned with the anthropological and normative significance of these insights for contemporary self-understanding.

2. Dominion and the Theological Logic of Mastery

The biblical concept of dominion has historically occupied a central position in theological interpretations of humanity’s relationship to nature. In Genesis 1:28, humanity receives the command to “fill the earth and subdue it” and to “have dominion” over other living beings. This passage has often been interpreted as legitimizing a hierarchical structure in which nature exists primarily as an object of human use and control. Especially within modernity, the dominion narrative became closely connected to technological progress, scientific rationalization, and economic expansion. The rise of industrial civilization appeared to confirm a specifically human vocation toward mastery over natural processes.

Yet the theological meaning of dominion has always been more ambiguous than modern exploitative interpretations suggest. The Hebrew verb *kabash*, commonly translated as “subdue,” does indeed imply forceful transformation, but its meaning cannot be reduced to unrestricted domination. Within biblical traditions, dominion remains embedded within a broader theological horizon in which humanity itself remains created, finite, and dependent upon divine order. Human sovereignty is therefore never absolute. Dominion presupposes creatureliness. Humanity may exercise power within creation, but it does not transcend the ontological limits of being part of creation itself.

Modern technological civilization nevertheless radicalized one side of the dominion narrative by increasingly interpreting nature as a manipulable object available for technical optimization (White 1967; Manemann 2014). The scientific revolution and industrial modernity transformed the theological motif of dominion into a secular paradigm of progress. Nature became conceptualized less as a symbolic or sacred order and more as a field of calculable resources. Technological expansion appeared to dissolve natural limits

and to promise increasing emancipation from dependency upon environmental conditions. In this context, human agency came to be understood in increasingly autonomous terms.

The Anthropocene intensifies this logic to an unprecedented degree. Human action no longer transforms isolated regions or ecosystems alone but intervenes in planetary systems themselves. Industrialization, fossil capitalism, digital infrastructures, and globalized technological networks have generated forms of planetary agency that alter atmospheric composition, oceanic systems, and biodiversity on a geological scale. Humanity has effectively become a geophysical force (Crutzen 2002). The Anthropocene therefore appears at first glance as the historical fulfillment of dominion. Never before has human power over nature been so extensive.

At the same time, however, this fulfillment reveals the internal contradiction of the dominion paradigm. The expansion of control simultaneously generates uncontrollable consequences. Climate change, ecological destabilization, and global environmental feedback loops demonstrate that human intervention into Earth systems cannot be fully mastered or predicted. Human beings increasingly lose oversight over the long-term consequences of their own technological capacities. Dominion thus becomes paradoxical: the more humanity transforms nature, the more humanity becomes dependent upon unstable systems it can no longer fully regulate.

This paradox destabilizes the classical theological distinction between active humanity and passive nature. In modernity, nature was often conceived as an external object opposed to human freedom and culture. The Anthropocene dissolves this opposition (Latour 2017). Ecological systems now bear the structural traces of human action, while human societies themselves become increasingly shaped by ecological reactions. Nature and culture no longer appear as separate domains but as hybrid and mutually mediating structures. Human intervention into nature returns reflexively to humanity itself (Barad 2007; Noller 2025b).

This reflexivity is crucial for understanding the theological transformation of dominion in the Anthropocene. Environmental destruction is not merely destruction of an external environment. It increasingly threatens the material conditions of human existence itself (Noller 2023). Rising temperatures, collapsing ecosystems, and resource crises reveal that humanity cannot escape its own embeddedness within ecological systems. Human power therefore becomes self-affecting. The dominator encounters the consequences of domination within the very conditions of human life.

The dominion narrative thereby undergoes a fundamental inversion. In premodern theological interpretations, dominion was limited by divine transcendence and human finitude. Modern technological civilization increasingly interpreted dominion as a project of emancipation from natural dependency. The Anthropocene, however, demonstrates that the attempt to transcend ecological dependency through technological control produces new and intensified forms of dependency. Human beings become dependent upon increasingly unstable technological and ecological systems whose complexity exceeds complete human comprehension.

This development also transforms the moral structure of responsibility. Traditional models of ethics often presupposed relatively direct relationships between action and consequence. In the Anthropocene, however, human actions produce diffuse, temporally delayed, and globally distributed effects. Carbon emissions generated in one region affect ecological systems worldwide. Technological infrastructures produce unintended environmental consequences that persist for centuries. Moral agency therefore becomes mediated through vast planetary systems that complicate attribution of responsibility and control.

Religious thought is particularly challenged by this transformation because many classical theological categories presupposed a relatively stable distinction between nature and human action. Stewardship models, for example, often imply that humans manage or care for a natural order external to themselves. Yet in the Anthropocene, humans increasingly inhabit environments already transformed by technological mediation. The object of stewardship is no longer untouched nature but hybrid ecological systems shaped by centuries of anthropogenic intervention.

This situation also affects theological anthropology. The modern ideal of autonomous subjectivity becomes increasingly unstable under anthropogenic conditions. Human beings do not stand outside ecological systems as sovereign observers or managers. Rather, they are materially and existentially entangled within dynamic networks of dependence. The Anthropocene therefore undermines strong conceptions of human exceptionalism without dissolving human responsibility altogether. Humanity remains uniquely capable of transforming planetary systems, but precisely this capacity reveals the limits of autonomy and control.

The theological significance of this condition lies in its exposure of human vulnerability. The Anthropocene reveals that power does not eliminate dependency but often intensifies it. Technological mastery generates new forms of fragility because highly interconnected systems become vulnerable to disruption, feedback, and unintended consequences. Human civilization increasingly depends upon infrastructures and ecological conditions that cannot simply be reconstructed once destabilized. Dominion thus turns into exposure.

This reflexive transformation can be understood as the transition toward post-dominion. Post-dominion does not abolish human power but transforms its meaning. Humanity continues to shape Earth systems profoundly, yet this shaping no longer confirms illusions of sovereignty. Instead, planetary agency reveals the impossibility of complete mastery. The Anthropocene exposes the illusion that humanity could occupy a position external to nature. Human beings encounter themselves within the transformed structures of the Earth system and discover that domination always includes self-implication.

The theological challenge of the Anthropocene therefore consists not merely in criticizing exploitative forms of domination but in rethinking the meaning of agency itself (Noller 2025a). Religious narratives can contribute to this task by recovering neglected dimensions of dependency, finitude, humility, and care that were marginalized within modern narratives of technological progress. Dominion can no longer be interpreted primarily through categories of control and expansion. Instead, the Anthropocene calls for forms of responsibility adequate to a condition in which human action continuously returns upon humanity through ecological mediation.

The transition from dominion to post-dominion thus marks a profound shift in theological self-understanding. Human beings remain agents capable of transforming the planet, yet they increasingly recognize that this transformative power does not establish separation from nature but deeper entanglement within it. The Anthropocene reveals that the logic of mastery ultimately collapses into a logic of vulnerability. Religious thought must therefore reinterpret dominion not as sovereign control over passive matter but as situated responsibility within fragile and self-affecting ecological relations.

3. The Anthropocene and the Collapse of the Nature–Culture Distinction

One of the most decisive philosophical consequences of the Anthropocene is the destabilization of the classical distinction between nature and culture. For centuries, Western thought largely relied upon a conceptual opposition between a natural world existing independently of humanity and a cultural sphere constituted by human freedom, rationality, and technological activity. Nature appeared as the external realm that humans

inhabited, transformed, or interpreted, whereas culture represented the domain of meaning, agency, and civilization. The Anthropocene increasingly renders this distinction untenable (Latour 2017).

The reason for this collapse lies in the planetary scale of anthropogenic transformation. Human technological activity no longer affects merely isolated environments or local ecosystems but reshapes Earth systems structurally. Atmospheric chemistry, ocean currents, climate dynamics, biodiversity, and geological processes now bear the imprint of industrial civilization. Human beings have become agents within processes once regarded as independent natural forces (Chakrabarty 2009). Yet this transformation does not imply that nature disappears into culture. Rather, both become entangled within hybrid systems that can no longer be clearly assigned to either category.

This hybridization is especially visible in contemporary ecological phenomena. Climate change, microplastic contamination, deforestation, and biodiversity loss are neither purely natural events nor purely artificial constructions (Weston et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2023). They emerge through the interaction of technological infrastructures and ecological processes. Human intervention becomes sedimented within natural systems that continue to operate according to their own dynamics (Noller 2025b). The Anthropocene therefore generates structures that are simultaneously anthropogenic and nonhuman (Haraway 2016; Barad 2007). Human agency becomes inseparable from ecological feedback mechanisms that exceed intentional control.

The philosophical significance of this development is profound because modern conceptions of subjectivity and freedom were closely linked to the separation of humanity from nature. Human autonomy was frequently understood in opposition to natural determinism. Technological progress appeared as a process through which humanity increasingly emancipated itself from natural limitations. The Anthropocene destabilizes this narrative by revealing that technological transformation does not abolish ecological dependency but reorganizes it in more complex forms.

This condition can be described as a transition toward hybrid ecological existence (Noller 2023). Human beings no longer encounter nature as an untouched external reality but increasingly inhabit environments already transformed through technological mediation. At the same time, these transformed environments react back upon humanity in unpredictable and often destabilizing ways. Ecological systems become historically mediated, while human history itself becomes ecologically conditioned (Morton 2013). The Anthropocene thereby introduces a reflexive structure into the relationship between humanity and nature.

Theological interpretations of creation are deeply affected by this transformation. Traditional theological cosmologies often presupposed a relatively stable distinction between creation as divine order and human culture as the sphere of historical action. Nature could therefore function as a symbol of permanence, transcendence, or divine wisdom in contrast to the instability of human history. In the Anthropocene, however, creation itself appears historically transformed through human intervention. Ecological systems increasingly bear the traces of industrialization, technological infrastructures, and global economic networks.

Yet the Anthropocene does not simply secularize or desacralize nature. On the contrary, it intensifies awareness of the fragility and contingency of Earth systems. Creation in this context, however, should not be reduced merely to ecosystems understood at a geological scale. The Anthropocene also unfolds against the background of evolutionary time and the immense diversity of living beings that have emerged through long histories of biological development. Species, populations, and forms of life constitute irreducible dimensions of creation itself. Human intervention therefore affects not only climatic and geophysical

processes but also the evolutionary trajectories and conditions of countless living kinds. Post-dominion thus concerns humanity's relation to the plurality of life as such.

Human beings increasingly recognize that the conditions supporting life are neither infinitely stable nor fully controllable. Ecological disruption reveals the vulnerability of both humanity and the planet. In this sense, the Anthropocene reintroduces experiences of finitude and dependency that modern technological civilization attempted to overcome.

The collapse of the nature–culture distinction also transforms the meaning of responsibility. Classical environmental ethics frequently operated within a framework in which humans acted upon nature as an external object. The Anthropocene reveals instead that human action occurs within systems that humans themselves inhabit and depend upon. Ecological destruction therefore simultaneously becomes self-destruction. Humanity increasingly encounters itself within environmental crises because these crises affect the very conditions of human existence.

This reflexive structure can be understood more precisely through the concept of third nature (Noller 2023, 2025b). Third nature refers to hybrid formations in which first nature, understood as biological and ecological processes, and second nature, understood as technological and cultural structures, become inseparably intertwined. Third nature is neither purely natural nor purely artificial. It designates ecological realities structurally transformed through human agency yet continuing to operate according to partially autonomous dynamics.

Examples of third nature can be found throughout the Anthropocene. The ozone hole, anthropogenic climate systems, industrial agriculture, plastic sedimentation, and digitally mediated environments all exemplify forms of ecological hybridity (Noller 2025b). Such phenomena cannot be reduced either to human intentionality or to independent natural processes. They emerge through reciprocal mediation between technological systems and ecological structures. Human agency becomes embedded within material processes that subsequently shape human existence in return.

This hybrid condition also has anthropological implications. Human beings themselves increasingly inhabit technologically mediated forms of life that blur distinctions between natural and artificial existence. Digital infrastructures, biotechnologies, pharmaceutical systems, and algorithmic environments reshape perception, embodiment, and social interaction (Floridi 2014). Humanity becomes integrated into networks of mediation that transform both external environments and internal forms of self-understanding. The Anthropocene is therefore not only an ecological condition but also a transformation of human existence itself.

Religious thought must respond to this transformation because many inherited theological concepts presuppose stable ontological distinctions no longer easily maintained. The categories of creation, stewardship, and human exceptionalism require reinterpretation under conditions in which humanity participates directly in planetary processes. Nature can no longer function simply as the passive object of moral obligation or divine command. Instead, ecological systems appear as dynamic structures within which humanity itself is implicated.

The concept of stewardship becomes especially problematic in this regard. Stewardship models often imply a managerial relation in which humans supervise nature while remaining external to it. Such models risk reproducing anthropocentric assumptions of control even when they advocate ecological responsibility. The Anthropocene reveals instead that humans are not external managers of Earth systems but vulnerable participants within them. Ecological crises therefore cannot be solved through technocratic management alone because the underlying problem concerns the structure of human self-understanding itself.

This insight also challenges simplistic oppositions between technological optimism and ecological pessimism. The Anthropocene cannot adequately be interpreted either as the triumph of human mastery or as the complete collapse of civilization. Both positions remain trapped within dualistic assumptions separating humanity from nature. The Anthropocene instead reveals the ambivalence of human agency. Technological capacities expand human power while simultaneously generating new forms of vulnerability and dependency. Human action becomes globally consequential precisely because humanity remains ecologically embedded.

The theological significance of this condition lies in its exposure of human finitude within structures of planetary interdependence. The Anthropocene demonstrates that humanity cannot transcend ecological conditions through technological power alone. Every attempt to dominate nature returns through feedback processes that affect humanity itself. Human beings increasingly discover that they are neither sovereign rulers nor passive victims of nature but participants within fragile and dynamic systems of mediation (Latour 2018).

The collapse of the nature–culture distinction therefore prepares the conceptual transition toward post-dominion. Once humanity recognizes that domination over nature simultaneously transforms the conditions of human existence, the logic of mastery becomes unstable. Human agency can no longer be understood as unilateral control over external reality. Instead, agency becomes reflexive, mediated, and self-affecting. The Anthropocene thus discloses a new theological and philosophical situation in which humanity must rethink its place within creation beyond the paradigm of sovereign dominion.

Post-dominion emerges precisely from this realization. The Anthropocene reveals that human beings do not stand above ecological systems but remain entangled within them. Nature is no longer merely what humans dominate; it becomes the medium through which human action returns upon humanity itself. Ecological transformation thereby becomes a form of collective self-encounter. Religious thought can contribute to understanding this condition by articulating forms of humility, restraint, and responsibility adequate to a world in which the boundaries between nature and culture have become fundamentally unstable.

4. Post-Dominion and the Reflexivity of Human Power

The Anthropocene reveals a paradox at the center of modern human self-understanding: humanity becomes most vulnerable precisely at the moment of its greatest technological power (Manemann 2014; Noller 2023). Industrial civilization has achieved an unprecedented capacity to transform planetary systems, yet this very transformation increasingly destabilizes the conditions of human existence itself. The logic of domination thereby turns reflexive. Human beings encounter the consequences of their own agency within the ecological structures upon which they depend. This reflexive condition constitutes what can be described as post-dominion.

Post-dominion does not signify the disappearance of human power over nature. On the contrary, it presupposes the immense expansion of anthropogenic influence characteristic of the Anthropocene. Human activity shapes climate systems, geological formations, biodiversity, and global ecological processes to such an extent that humanity functions as a planetary force. Yet this expansion of power simultaneously undermines the modern conceptions of sovereignty. The more humanity attempts to dominate ecological systems, the more humanity becomes exposed to the uncontrollable consequences of its own interventions.

This paradox distinguishes the Anthropocene from earlier historical forms of environmental transformation. Human societies have always modified natural environments to some degree through agriculture, urbanization, and technological development. What characterizes the Anthropocene, however, is the scale and structural depth of these transformations. Human intervention no longer affects merely local ecosystems but modifies

Earth systems globally and irreversibly. Humanity has entered a condition in which there is no longer a stable external nature untouched by anthropogenic influence (Latour 2017).

Yet this does not imply that humanity has achieved complete control over planetary systems. Quite the opposite. Anthropogenic transformations generate complex ecological feedback loops that exceed human predictive and managerial capacities. Climate systems respond nonlinearly to industrial emissions (Crutzen 2002). Biodiversity loss destabilizes ecological resilience in unforeseeable ways. Technological infrastructures create systemic dependencies vulnerable to disruption. Human civilization increasingly depends upon conditions that it simultaneously destabilizes.

The concept of post-dominion therefore describes a historical situation in which domination becomes self-affecting. Humanity no longer simply acts upon nature from an external position of control. Instead, human action returns through transformed ecological systems that shape human existence in return. Environmental destruction becomes a form of mediated self-destruction. The Earth system no longer passively absorbs human intervention but actively responds to it through processes that increasingly constrain human possibilities (Lovelock 2000).

This reflexivity fundamentally transforms the theological meaning of power. Classical concepts of dominion often presupposed asymmetry between active humanity and passive nature. Human beings exercised agency, while nature functioned as object, resource, or environment. In the Anthropocene, this asymmetry collapses. Ecological systems become historically transformed through human action, yet these transformed systems simultaneously confront humanity as dynamic forces that cannot simply be reduced to human intention.

The theological implications of this development are profound because post-dominion destabilizes anthropocentric narratives of exceptionalism. Human beings remain uniquely capable of transforming planetary systems, but this capability no longer confirms sovereign transcendence over nature. Instead, planetary agency reveals humanity's embeddedness within fragile structures of dependency. The Anthropocene demonstrates that technological power cannot eliminate ecological vulnerability because human existence itself remains materially conditioned.

This condition also transforms the temporal structure of responsibility. Modern industrial civilization frequently operated according to short-term models of technological progress and economic growth. The consequences of ecological transformation were either ignored or displaced into an indefinite future. The Anthropocene increasingly collapses this temporal distance. Climate disasters, ecological instability, and resource crises reveal that environmental consequences are no longer abstract future possibilities but present realities shaping contemporary life.

At the same time, anthropogenic effects continue to unfold across immense temporal scales. Carbon emissions persist for centuries. Biodiversity loss may become irreversible. Radioactive waste and plastic sedimentation produce material traces extending far beyond individual human lifetimes. Humanity therefore confronts forms of responsibility exceeding traditional moral frameworks centered on immediate action and consequence. Human agency acquires geological temporality (Chakrabarty 2009).

Religious thought possesses particular resources for interpreting this transformation because theological traditions have long reflected upon finitude, dependency, and the limits of human control. The Anthropocene reactivates these themes under new historical conditions. Modern technological civilization often interpreted progress as emancipation from natural limitations and vulnerabilities. Post-dominion reveals instead that every expansion of power simultaneously intensifies forms of exposure and dependency.

This insight can be clarified through the concept of creatureliness. Within theological anthropology, creatureliness signifies the finite and dependent condition of created beings. Human beings do not possess autonomous self-grounding existence but remain contingent upon conditions they neither create nor fully control. Modern technological culture frequently marginalized this dimension of existence by emphasizing autonomy, productivity, and mastery. The Anthropocene reintroduces creatureliness as a concrete ecological reality. Humanity becomes aware once again that it cannot exist independently of planetary systems.

Yet post-dominion does not simply advocate a return to premodern conceptions of nature or passive resignation before ecological crisis. The Anthropocene cannot be escaped through romanticizations of returning to untouched nature because no such pure external nature remains available. Human history has become materially inscribed within Earth systems themselves. Post-dominion therefore requires neither technological triumphalism nor romantic primitivism but a transformed understanding of human agency under conditions of ecological entanglement.

This transformed understanding also affects political and ethical thought. The modern ideal of unlimited economic expansion increasingly appears incompatible with planetary boundaries. Ecological crises reveal that technological progress cannot indefinitely compensate for environmental degradation. Human freedom itself becomes dependent upon maintaining ecological conditions that industrial civilization threatens to undermine. Post-dominion therefore calls into question economic and political systems organized around permanent acceleration and extraction (Hornborg 2015).

The reflexive logic of the Anthropocene also reshapes experiences of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Ecological crises are not merely external threats confronting humanity from outside civilization. They emerge through the structures of civilization itself. Climate anxiety, ecological grief, and apocalyptic imaginaries express not only fear of natural catastrophe but awareness that humanity has become implicated in destabilizing the conditions of its own future. The Anthropocene thereby transforms existential self-understanding (Haraway 2016).

Religious narratives frequently function as symbolic frameworks through which societies interpret experiences of vulnerability, catastrophe, and moral responsibility. In this context, post-dominion can also be understood as a theological challenge to narratives of human self-deification. Modern technological civilization often approached nature as infinitely available for optimization and exploitation. The Anthropocene reveals the limits of this logic by demonstrating that the Earth system cannot be reduced to passive material for human projects.

This does not imply that humanity should abandon technological activity altogether. Human beings cannot cease transforming nature because existence itself necessarily involves forms of ecological intervention. The crucial question concerns the normative orientation of such intervention. Post-dominion therefore calls for forms of agency characterized not by illusory conceptions of total control but by reflexive awareness of dependency, vulnerability, and unintended consequences.

Theological concepts such as humility, restraint, and care become newly significant within this context. Humility no longer signifies merely individual moral modesty but recognition of humanity's situatedness within complex ecological systems. Restraint becomes necessary because technological capacities exceed the ability to predict or regulate their long-term consequences fully. Care replaces domination as a model of responsibility because humans increasingly recognize that ecological systems cannot simply be mastered without simultaneously endangering themselves (Francis 2015).

Post-dominion therefore transforms the meaning of stewardship itself. Stewardship can no longer imply managerial sovereignty over passive nature. Instead, it must acknowledge the reciprocal and self-affecting character of ecological relations. Humans care for conditions upon which they themselves depend. Responsibility becomes fundamentally reflexive because every ecological intervention simultaneously concerns humanity's own future.

The Anthropocene thus marks not the end of human agency but its radical reinterpretation. Humanity remains capable of shaping planetary systems, yet this capacity no longer confirms modern conceptions of autonomy grounded in domination, sovereignty, and transcendence understood as emancipation from dependence and natural limits. Instead, the Anthropocene reveals the fragility of such aspirations. Human beings increasingly discover themselves as finite participants within dynamic Earth systems that respond to human intervention in unpredictable ways. Dominion reaches its historical culmination precisely at the moment of its collapse into reflexivity.

Yet this collapse does not imply that transcendence itself becomes a mere illusion. Rather, post-dominion entails a transformation in how transcendence is understood. Transcendence no longer signifies escape from nature or superiority over creation, but emerges through the reflexive awareness of creaturely dependence and conditioned existence. Human beings encounter themselves as situated within relations that they neither create nor fully control. In this sense, vulnerability and dependency are not opposed to transcendence but become privileged sites for its disclosure. Post-dominion therefore points toward a form of creaturely self-transcendence grounded in humility, responsibility, and attentiveness to the conditions that sustain life.

Post-dominion names this transformed condition. It describes a world in which power no longer guarantees sovereignty but instead reveals vulnerability, interdependence, and ecological entanglement. Religious thought can contribute critically to understanding this condition by challenging narratives of unlimited mastery and by articulating forms of responsibility grounded in humility, creatureliness, and care. The Anthropocene thereby becomes not only an ecological crisis but also a theological moment in which humanity must reconsider what it means to inhabit creation responsibly under conditions of planetary transformation. Far from abolishing transcendence, this moment invites a renewed understanding of transcendence as the reflective awareness of humanity's dependence within a meaningful order that exceeds the logic of domination.

5. Religious Narratives After Dominion: Humility, Dependency, and Care

The transition from dominion to post-dominion fundamentally transforms the role of religious narratives in the Anthropocene. If modern technological civilization interpreted the biblical mandate of dominion primarily through categories of control, progress, and expansion, the ecological crises of the Anthropocene increasingly expose the limitations of such interpretations. Religious thought is therefore confronted with the task of rearticulating central theological concepts under conditions in which human agency has become planetary, reflexive, and self-affecting.

This transformation does not render religious narratives obsolete. On the contrary, the Anthropocene reveals the continuing significance of symbolic and theological frameworks for interpreting human vulnerability, responsibility, and finitude. Ecological crises are not merely technical problems requiring technological solutions; they are also crises of meaning and self-understanding. They concern how humanity interprets its place within the world, how it conceives power and responsibility, and how it imagines the future of life on Earth. Religious traditions remain influential precisely because they shape these interpretative horizons.

Within this context, theological concepts such as humility, dependency, creatureliness, and care acquire renewed relevance. These concepts challenge the anthropocentric assumption that humanity can establish complete sovereignty over ecological conditions through technological mastery. The Anthropocene demonstrates instead that human beings remain embedded within fragile systems of interdependence that cannot simply be controlled or optimized indefinitely.

Humility becomes especially significant in this regard. In premodern theological traditions, humility was often interpreted as recognition of human finitude before divine transcendence. Modernity increasingly displaced this perspective through narratives of scientific progress and technological emancipation. Human beings came to understand themselves less as dependent creatures and more as autonomous agents capable of reshaping the world according to rational planning. The Anthropocene destabilizes this self-image. Ecological crises reveal that humanity does not occupy a position outside or above nature but remains vulnerable to processes it cannot fully regulate.

This renewed significance of humility does not imply anti-scientific resignation or rejection of technological capacities. Rather, humility in the Anthropocene signifies epistemic and ethical awareness of the limits of prediction, control, and intervention. Human beings increasingly recognize that ecological systems possess forms of complexity exceeding complete managerial oversight. Technological solutions often generate unintended consequences that produce further crises. Humility therefore becomes a condition for responsible action rather than passive withdrawal from action.

Closely connected to humility is the theological concept of dependency. Modern industrial civilization frequently interpreted dependency as a deficiency to be overcome through technological progress and economic development. Human freedom appeared as increasing independence from natural constraints. Yet the Anthropocene reveals that dependency cannot be eliminated because human existence remains materially grounded within ecological systems. Air, water, climate stability, biodiversity, and planetary habitability are not external resources detachable from human life but constitutive conditions of existence itself.

Religious traditions can illuminate this condition because many theological anthropologies understand dependency not merely negatively but as constitutive of creaturely existence. Human beings are finite, relational, and vulnerable beings whose lives depend upon conditions they do not create autonomously. The Anthropocene translates this theological insight into ecological reality. Humanity becomes aware that its technological and economic systems remain dependent upon planetary processes that industrial civilization increasingly destabilizes.

This ecological dependency also transforms the meaning of moral responsibility. Under conditions of post-dominion, responsibility can no longer be conceived simply as external management of nature (Jonas 1984). Human beings do not protect an environment wholly separate from themselves. Rather, ecological responsibility concerns maintaining the shared conditions of life within systems of mutual entanglement. Environmental destruction affects humanity because humans are inseparable from the ecological structures they transform.

Theological narratives of care become especially important in articulating this reflexive form of responsibility. Care differs fundamentally from domination because it presupposes vulnerability, reciprocity, and limitation. One does not care for what one fully controls. Care emerges precisely where fragility and dependency are recognized. In the Anthropocene, ecological systems increasingly appear not as passive objects of manipulation but as vulnerable conditions requiring forms of attentive and restrained interaction.

Care also possesses temporal significance. Modern technological civilization frequently privileged short-term productivity, efficiency, and growth. Ecological responsibility, by contrast, requires orientation toward long-term planetary conditions and future generations. Religious traditions often contain precisely such temporal perspectives because they situate human existence within broader historical and eschatological horizons. The Anthropocene intensifies the need for these expanded temporal frameworks because ecological transformations unfold across generations and geological timescales.

This temporal dimension also reshapes religious understandings of hope and apocalypse. Environmental crises have generated widespread apocalyptic imaginaries characterized by fears of ecological collapse, civilizational breakdown, and planetary catastrophe. Religious traditions have historically developed symbolic languages for interpreting catastrophe and existential threat. Yet the Anthropocene transforms these narratives because ecological apocalypse no longer appears solely as transcendent divine judgment or external natural disaster. Humanity increasingly experiences itself as implicated in producing the conditions of crisis.

This situation creates theological ambiguity. On the one hand, apocalyptic narratives may intensify fatalism or justify passive resignation before ecological collapse. On the other hand, they may function critically by exposing the unsustainability of dominant forms of life and by interrupting narratives of endless progress. The Anthropocene therefore requires reinterpretations of eschatology that neither deny ecological crisis nor surrender to deterministic despair.

Post-dominion provides a framework for such reinterpretation because it emphasizes reflexivity rather than absolute catastrophe. The Anthropocene does not signify the complete end of human agency but its transformation under conditions of ecological entanglement. Human beings remain capable of action, but they increasingly recognize that every action occurs within systems of interdependence that cannot be mastered completely. Hope therefore shifts from ideologies of technological salvation toward practices of ecological responsibility, solidarity, and restraint.

This shift also affects the meaning of creation. Traditional theological accounts often interpreted creation as a stable natural order grounded in divine intentionality. In the Anthropocene, however, creation increasingly appears historically transformed through human intervention. Yet this transformation does not abolish the theological significance of creation. Rather, it reveals creation as dynamic, vulnerable, and relational. Human beings participate within creation not as external rulers but as historically situated agents whose actions reshape the conditions of life itself.

The concept of creatureliness becomes crucial here because it prevents both anthropocentric triumphalism and ecological nihilism. Human beings remain distinctively capable of transforming planetary systems, yet they remain creatures embedded within those systems. Post-dominion therefore rejects both illusions of total human sovereignty and conceptions of complete human insignificance. Humanity occupies an ambiguous position characterized simultaneously by power and vulnerability.

This ambiguity also transforms religious ethics. Classical ethical models often presupposed relatively stable distinctions between human subjects and natural objects. In the Anthropocene, these distinctions become unstable because ecological systems increasingly contain anthropogenic dimensions while human societies become ecologically conditioned in unprecedented ways. Ethics therefore becomes ecological self-ethics. Humanity acts not upon a radically external world but within systems that mediate human existence itself.

Religious thought can contribute critically to this transformation because theological traditions often resist reductive conceptions of rationality centered exclusively on calculation and efficiency. Ecological crises reveal the insufficiency of purely technocratic

approaches because the underlying problem concerns the orientation of civilization itself. Questions of meaning, value, and responsibility cannot be resolved solely through technological optimization. They require interpretative frameworks capable of addressing human self-understanding within planetary conditions.

The Anthropocene therefore creates not only environmental challenges but hermeneutical challenges. Humanity must reinterpret its narratives, symbols, and concepts in light of ecological reflexivity. Religious traditions remain significant because they provide resources for articulating dependency, finitude, responsibility, and care beyond modern conceptions of limitless domination. Post-dominion names the condition under which these reinterpretations become necessary.

In this sense, the Anthropocene can also be understood as a theological moment of self-confrontation. Human beings increasingly encounter themselves within ecological crises because planetary transformation reflects the structures of industrial civilization itself. The Earth system becomes a medium through which humanity perceives the consequences of its own historical development. Religious narratives can illuminate this condition not by offering simplistic solutions but by revealing the ethical and existential dimensions of ecological entanglement.

The transition toward post-dominion therefore calls for a transformation of religious imagination. Humanity must learn to understand itself not as sovereign master of passive nature but as vulnerable participant within dynamic and fragile systems of life. Theological concepts such as humility, dependency, creatureliness, and care provide critical resources for articulating this transformation. They point toward forms of ecological responsibility grounded not in conceptions of absolute control but in recognition of shared vulnerability within a responsive and increasingly unstable Earth system.

6. Conclusions: Beyond Mastery in the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene confronts humanity with a historically unprecedented condition in which human agency has attained planetary dimensions while simultaneously undermining the ecological foundations of human existence. This paper has argued that the theological and philosophical significance of the Anthropocene lies not merely in the expansion of human power over nature but in the reflexive transformation of this very power. The modern paradigm of dominion reaches its historical culmination precisely at the moment of its destabilization. Humanity increasingly recognizes that domination over nature cannot produce absolute sovereignty because ecological transformation continuously returns upon humanity itself through forms of vulnerability, dependency, and systemic instability.

The concept of post-dominion was introduced in order to describe this reflexive condition. Post-dominion does not imply the end of human agency or the disappearance of technological power. Human beings remain capable of reshaping planetary systems on an unprecedented scale. Yet this transformative capacity no longer confirms narratives of autonomy and mastery. Instead, the Anthropocene reveals that every attempt to control ecological systems simultaneously intensifies humanity's entanglement within them. Human beings do not transcend nature through technological civilization but encounter themselves within increasingly hybrid and self-affecting ecological structures.

This transformation fundamentally destabilizes the classical distinction between nature and culture that shaped much of modern thought. Nature can no longer be conceived as a passive external object standing opposite human freedom and technological activity. Ecological systems increasingly bear the traces of anthropogenic intervention, while human societies become materially conditioned by ecological feedback processes. The Anthropocene therefore discloses a world of hybrid mediation in which humanity and Earth systems are inseparably interconnected. Human agency becomes ecological self-agency

because environmental transformation simultaneously reshapes the conditions of human existence itself.

Within this context, religious narratives acquire renewed relevance. The ecological crisis is not only a technical or political problem but also a crisis of anthropological and moral self-understanding. Questions concerning dependency, responsibility, finitude, and vulnerability move back to the center of human reflection. Religious traditions remain significant because they provide symbolic and ethical resources for interpreting precisely these dimensions of existence. The Anthropocene therefore does not simply invalidate theological concepts such as dominion, stewardship, or creation. Rather, it transforms their meaning under conditions of planetary reflexivity.

The paper has suggested that concepts such as humility, creatureliness, dependency, and care become increasingly important in this situation. Humility no longer signifies passive resignation before transcendence but recognition of the limits of prediction, control, and technological intervention.

Dependency ceases to appear merely as a deficiency and instead becomes visible as a constitutive condition of ecological existence. Care replaces domination as the central ethical orientation because humans increasingly recognize that the systems they transform are simultaneously the systems upon which they depend. Responsibility therefore becomes reflexive and relational rather than sovereign and unilateral.

At the same time, post-dominion avoids both technological triumphalism and romantic anti-modernism. The Anthropocene cannot be overcome through illusions of returning to a pure and untouched nature because human history has become materially inscribed within Earth systems themselves. Nor can ecological crises be solved solely through further expansion of technological control. Post-dominion instead points toward a transformed understanding of agency grounded in restraint, mediation, and ecological situatedness. Human beings remain agents, but they are agents within fragile planetary conditions that exceed complete managerial oversight.

The theological importance of the Anthropocene thus lies in its disclosure of a new form of creaturely existence. Humanity increasingly encounters the limits of sovereignty not because human power diminishes, but because power itself reveals deeper structures of ecological dependency. The Earth system becomes a medium through which humanity perceives the consequences of its own historical development. Ecological crises therefore function as forms of collective self-confrontation. The logic of mastery ultimately collapses into a logic of vulnerability.

Post-dominion names this transformed condition of human existence. It describes a world in which humanity can no longer understand itself as sovereign ruler standing outside creation, but only as a historically situated participant within dynamic and unstable systems of life. Religious thought can contribute critically to this transformation by challenging narratives of limitless domination and by articulating forms of responsibility adequate to planetary interdependence. In this sense, the Anthropocene does not mark the end of theology but the emergence of a new theological horizon in which human beings must learn to inhabit the Earth beyond the paradigm of mastery.

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