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Mixed Farming by Covenant Renewal

Part 1: On Reconstructing Agriculture

by Angus R. McGillivery

For the Christian there is an equal ultimacy of thought and practice, of saying and doing, of lip and life, of preaching and sacramental practice. As a result, any discussion of the restoration of Christian civilization may not simply consist of how Christian doctrine differs from its challenging counterfeit and antithetical adversaries in the areas of theology and understanding — be it dogmatics, economics, politics, or aesthetics; it must also include an examination of *practice*. ¹

This essay on the reconstruction of agriculture is a report on a work in progress: the *practice* of a mixed farm's production process at this point *in time*. The first part of this series paints in broad brush strokes some important preliminaries to a consideration of such a practice, and in particular, to a Biblical pattern of productive activity taking place *over time*. The second part enhances and highlights some of the re-creation patterns and covenant sequences that give this agricultural structure of production its distinctive sabbatical hue.

Change, Ethical Continuity, and Dominion

Declining productivity and diminishing returns are a prelude to change. They herald the limits of scarcity and announce that the limits of productivity of a particular production process have been reached. When, for instance, a farm's soil fertility and soil structure reaches its productive limit, adding more complementary factors of production, such as more fertilizers, will not prevent output per unit of input from declining. Indeed, if the soil is depleted and extended beyond its limits, such additions will just intensify the decline in fertility and kindle the threat of soil exhaustion and land degradation. To replenish and to restore the soil, and to sustain the agricultural use and development of the land, it is imperative that changes are made to the farm's structure of production so that the factors of production — land, labour, and capital — are recombined in an economically optimum production mix.²

Since it is ethics, not productivity nor profitability, nor demand and supply, nor growth and development as such, that determines the legitimacy of such recombinations, the restructuring of productive activities should be in conformity to Biblical revelation. For it is ethical conformity to God's infallibly inscripturated revelation which over time produces the continuity of growth and development that enables rising productivity and increasing returns to be realized. Indeed, it is ethical conformity which enables change to occur within a framework of historical continuity: the ethical continuity of covenantal dominion.³

Historically, the progressive and rhythmical patterns of declining agricultural and pastoral productivity and restructured production processes have led to the development of modern mixed farming structures of production in which arable agriculture and animal husbandry are combined in a structure of production which is analogous to the complex and diverse structure of production that characterizes a modern capital-using, market-oriented economy. Since we live in a personal and theocentric world, a mixed farm's structure of

 See further, Gary North, Moses and Pharaoh, ch.12: "Continuity and Revolution" and Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch.8: "Dominion and Sanctification".

^{1.} James B. Jordan, ed., The Reconstruction of the Church. Christianity and Civilization, No. 4 (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), p. vii. Emphasis in original. For the "challenging counterfeit and antithetical adversaries" in the area of agricultural reconstruction, see, e.g., Graham Dunkley, The Greening of the Red: Sustainability, Socialism and the Environmental Crisis, Australia: Strategies for Renewal (Leichhardt, New South Wales: Pluto Press Australia Ltd. in association with the Australian Fabian Society and Socialist Forum, 1992) and Geoffrey Lawrence, Capitalism and the Countryside: The Rural Crisis in Australia (Leichhardt, New South Wales: Pluto Press Australia Ltd., 1987). Cf., Gary North, Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, (1968), 1989) and E. Calvin Beisner, Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Boos, 1990). Note also, Stephen Geard, "The Dominion of Man", Probe, No. 43, March 1992; R.J. Rushdoony, "The Revival of Paganism in the Green Movement", Calvinism Today, Vol. II, No. 2, April 1992, pp. 6-8; and Guy Barnett, "The green movement's philosophy, strategy and tactics and how it influences international business transactions - an Australian perspective", a paper derived from presentations made to the American Bar Association of St Louis and Cincinnati, United States, on the 24th and 27th January, 1992, respectively: Guy Barnett and Associates, 81 Salamanca Place, Hobart, 7000, Tasmania, Australia.

^{2.} See further, Gary North, The Dominion Covenant: Genesis. An Economic Commentary on the Bible, Vol 1. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, Revd. 2nd edn., 1987), ch.21: "The Law of Diminishing Returns" and Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion Versus Power Religion (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), ch.7: "The Optimum Production Mix." On the significance of including capital as a factor of production see, Roger W. Garrison, "A Subjectivist Theory of a Capital-using Economy" in Gerald P. O'Driscoll, Jr and Mario J. Rizzo, The Economics of Time and Ignorance (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), PP. 160-187. Garrison's methodological individualism should be critiqued in terms of methodological covenantalism; see esp., Gary North, The Dominion Covenant, ch.4: "Economic Value: Objective and Subjective". For an Australian application, and for the Biblical economics that undergirds this essay, see, Ian Hodge, Baptized Inflation: A Critique of "Christian" Keynesianism (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986).

production will demonstrate the inescapable relationship between ethics and dominion.⁵ Furthermore, since dominion is covenantal,⁶ a mixed farm's structure of production will render visible the covenant sequences that God patterned for man to imitate as His covenantally subordinate image bearers.⁷ Even corrupted structures and processes of degeneration and degradation reveal God's "rite for life" ⁸

Changes to a farm's structure of production should, therefore, enhance and comprehensively extend the dominion covenant and its corollary, the ecological covenant; and they should thereby implement the progressive and comprehensive growth of the New Covenant Kingdom under the Old Creation. 10

Ethics and the Production Processes

The renowned agricultural production process or sequence of productive stages known as a rotation is an exemplification of such considerations. In his sociological research on the interrelations between social change and the structure of modern farming in England, Howard Newby considers the structure of mixed farming from the perspective of production processes. He finds that "English farming represents a patchwork of farming methods and ways of life" quilted together by the practice of rotation; Newby comments:

Basic farming axioms like the rotation of crops represented not only methods of production but almost moral principles from which the farmer ventured at his peril. In one sense all agriculture was a rotation since farmers were aware of the necessity to adopt a symmetrical pattern of farming which would automatically replenish the land with whatever nutrients were taken from it. This applied as much to pasture as to tillage, although the most famous rotation the 'Norfolk four-course' - was developed in the eastern counties to form the basis of the cereals-and-sheep high farming which predominated down to the First World War and beyond. Rotations like this were an integral part of farming lore and many landlords insisted upon their use by their tenants. 11

Even though Newby conceives morality as just an integral part of, rather than the foundation of, the cultural patterns of dominion typified by this particular agricultural production process, he cannot escape — and commendably acknowledges — that moral principles are institutionally expressed or enacted in production processes, such as agricultural rotations. ¹² Such processes are either in conformity to or in rebel-

lion to the absolute, objective standards of God's written revelation to man. They speak of the inescapable relationship between ethics and dominion and thereby witness to whether "men are either self-consciously under God and over nature, or else . . . self-consciously in rebellion against God and under nature." ¹³

Such a view of man's ethical relation to God's creation brings the practice of farming into focus as an ethical laworder process of production rather than a natural law-order process of production:

If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land. (Leviticus 26: 3-5; NASB)

An ethical view of production processes and cause-and-effect relations also enables a farmer's calling to be comprehended in terms of man's covenantal authority *over* nature in a world of covenantal law; rather than in terms of man being a facilitator *under* nature assisting the "laws of nature" to achieve an autonomous "balance of nature" in an amoral, chance-oriented, timeless world. Furthermore, such a view also enables a farmer to more self-consciously comprehend and then practically apply the implications of the primacy of the covenantal relationship between God and man which entails the primacy of God's moral law over "natural law". Indeed, because nature is not normative, it cannot be a standard; hence: "these laws which govern nature are not therefore laws of nature but laws *over* nature". Is

Moreover, because nature displays God and acts as God's curse or wrath-prosecuting agent to covenantally disobedient humanity, ¹⁶ the primacy of God's moral law also entails that "Nature fights man or co-operates with man in terms of mankind's ethical battle against God or co-operation with God. . . . If mankind rebels against God, then nature will rebel against mankind". ¹⁷ A farmer's covenantal obedience to God's moral law is, therefore, an agricultural imperative; for God's moral law and His covenantal law-order are both an ethical foundation of agricultural theory and practice and a tool of agricultural dominion. ¹⁸ They enable a farmer to apply the covenant to creation and transform it in light of Christ's *comprehensive* redemption. ¹⁹

5. Gary North, The Dominion Covenant.

6. Rev. Ray R. Sutton, That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

McAuliffe, Theology of Work, and Biblical Management, audio tapes distributed by Foundation for the Advancement of Christian Studies, P.O. Box 241, Engadine, NSW., 2233; and Dr. Louis and Kimberly Schuler, "A Review of the New Trinity Hymnal: Part 1", Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship, No. 16, August 1991.

8. See further, James B. Jordan, Through New Eyes, ch.10 and "Studies in Genesis One: God's Rite for Life", The Geneva Review, No. 21, August 1985, p.3. For a succinct summation of Jordan's study on "God's Rite for Life" see, David Chilton, The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 478.

9. See Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant*, ch.14: "The Ecological Covenant".

10. See further on this most important theme, Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., House Divided: The Break-Up of Dispensational Theology (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), Part II; David Chilton, Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987); Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), esp ch.11: "The Kingdom Is Now!" and Appendix D: "This World and the Kingdom of God" by Greg L. Bahnsen; Peter J. Leithart, "What is the Kingdom of God?", Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper no.8, December 1990; Gary North, Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), Part 1: "God's Covenantal Kingdom" by Gary North.

11. Howard Newby, Green and Pleasant Land? Social Change in Rural England (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1980), p.84f.

- 12. See further on the moral and religious foundations of culture, Rousas John Rushdoony, the One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1978), esp., ch.XIV and Appendix; and Gary DeMar, "The Transformation of Culture", The Geneva Review, No.21, August 1985, pp. 1-2.
- 13. Gary North, Is the World Running Down?, p. 46. Note also p. 135.

14. Gary North, The Dominion Covenant, p. 35f.

15. Rousas John Rushdoony, Law and Liberty (Vallecito, CA.: Ross House Books, 1984), ch.5: "Law and Nature", at p. 24. Note also Rushdoony's discussion on the relationship of man to law in his Politics of Guilt and Pity (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1978), Part II, ch.6.

16. See further, James B. Jordan, "The Meaning of Clean and Unclean", Studies in Food and Faith No. 10, Biblical Horizons, January 1990.

17. Gary North, Is the World Running Down?, p. 186. On the inescapability of historical sanctions see, Gary North, Millennialism and Social Theory (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990. On the need to wrestle in Christ against God's good prosecuting agents and judgements see, James B. Jordan, "Diet From Adam to Moses", Studies in Food and Faith No.8, Biblical Horizons, January 1990, p.13. Note also Gary North, The Dominion Covenant, ch.20:" Contingency Planning".

18. Gary North, Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

19. See further on the nature, implications, and applications of Christ's redemption, Gary North, Is the World Running Down? ch. 9: "Resurrection and Reconstruction"

^{4.} See further, J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880 (London: B.T. Batsford, 1978) and Roger W. Garrison, Op. cit.

^{7.} See further, James B. Jordan, Covenant Sequence In Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989) and Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988); Ray R. Sutton, That You May Prosper; and Dr. C. van der Waal, The Covenantal Gospel (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990. For practical applications of creation and covenant sequences see, eg., Joseph R. McAuliffe, Theology of Work, and Biblical Management, audio tapes distributed by Foundation for the Advancement of Christian Studies, P.O. Box 241, Engadine, NSW., 2233; and Dr. Louis and Kimberly Schuler, "A Review of the New Trinity Hymnal: Part 1". Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship. No. 16. August 1991.

Comprehensive Redemption, Liturgy, and History

When a farmer is confronted with the need to restructure his production process, he should then construe his covenantal service in terms of working out the implications of Christ's comprehensive redemption in the actual, historic circumstances in which God in His sovereign purpose has placed him.20 This will involve patience to await God's time to acquire the wisdom that "comes from years of experience mixed with faithful righteous living under the revealed law of God."²¹ Such wisdom should indicate that whilst the Bible is indeed a covenantal book for all of life, it is also "centrally concerned with matters of redemption and worship, for these are the foundation stones of all the rest of culture". 22 And given that the "most important moral laws are the laws per-taining to worship, how men interface directly with God"23, a farmer's covenantal faithfulness under the revealed law of God should demonstrate a covenantal application of dominion that emphasizes the centrality of worship.24 A farm's production process should, therefore, be expressive of "the inseparable connection between liturgy and history".

Such a perspective brings into focus the redemptive, liturgical dimension of agricultural reconstruction. Whilst Christ's redemptive work "restores man to his original calling and purpose, and guarantees that man's original mandate to exercise dominion under God over the whole earth — will be fulfilled", ²⁶ we need to be mindful that the "coming of the New Covenant does *not* restore the original world. Rather, we find that the work of Christ brings the first creation to its fulfilment, and inaugurates a new one." ²⁷

Covenant Renewal and the Sabbath

Since the "foundation of dominion under Christ is rest in Christ", "Redeemed man's work begins with rest, in full assurance that God's providence will sustain him and prosper him." Rest is foundational to dominion and provides a framework of historical continuity for agricultural reconstruction. Indeed, the practice of mixed farming involves the management of change or historical discontinuity within a framework of historical continuity.

Because of the long-term predictability of God's sanctions in New Covenant history applied in terms of Biblical law, discontinuities in history are providential means for continuous and comprehensive reconstruction in history. They enable covenant-keeping farmers "to serve the realm of nature analogously to the way that Noah served it" and thereby affirm covenantal continuity in history. They also further the

progressive dominion of the earth and the compound growth of the New Covenant Kingdom under the Old Creation; and they make it possible for the practice of farming to be an agricultural expression of applied covenantal postmillennialism.

Moreover, rest also serves as one of agriculture's operational first principles and should shape the sequence of productive stages that form a farm's structure of production. Since the Sabbath is not restored but transformed in the New Covenant, with the consequence that we no longer worship on the Sabbath day, but rather, sabbath on the day of worship the Lord's Day, we need to be mindful of the significant change in the application of the Sabbath and note that "to continue to observe the Sabbath in the old way is to deny that Christ has finished Adam's work. It is to deny that the new creation has come (Col.2:16f)."³² Furthermore, since the Lord's Day is defined by worship and judgement, our rest and consequent performance of our Adamic duties under the New Covenant but in the Old Creation must be patterned to conform to God's revealed sequence of covenant renewal. Hence, the task of agricultural reconstruction involves the covenantal responsibility of transforming the land by means of covenant renewal and thereby bringing what is already created and revealed from glory to glory (2 Cor.3:18).

The task of agricultural reconstruction, like the work of transformation in general, is however, "not the same as the eschatological transfiguration of all things, which God alone will bring to pass. Nor does it involve mixing heaven and earth. Rather it involves remaking earth after the patterns of the heavenly blueprint." Such blueprints must once again be grasped and applied to agriculture so that,

The pastures of the blessed Are deck'd in glorious sheen.³⁴

A Biblical View of Agriculture

It is, therefore, imperative for farmers to come to terms with and to develop a Biblical understanding and view of agriculture and learn to see God's world and a farmer's covenantal, cultural duties and responsibilities "through new eyes". God's law and His covenantal law-order; the cultural victory of His covenantally faithful people; the Bible's visual imagery (symbolism) and repeated patterns (typology); and God's creation-covenant sequences all express differences of emphasis, focus, locus, sequence, and structure. But they are, nonetheless, "perspectives" on one another and on the whole of God's world view and His creation . They thus form a covenantal unity, or in Van Til's terminology, a "system of

and Appendix C: "Comprehensive Redemption: A Theology for Social Action"; and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

20. On the importance of historical constraints and an understanding of historical circumstances for both action and exposition, see North, *The Dominion Covenant*, ch.18: "Competitive Bargaining"; ch. 19: "The Uses of Deception"; ch.20: "Contingency Planning"; and James B. Jordan, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis", in Gary North, ed., *Tactics of Christian Resistance. Christianity and Civilization*, No. 3 (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983), pp. 38-80

21. James B. Jordan, "Rebellion . . .", p. 73.

22. James B. Jordan, The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21-23 (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 10.

23. James B. Jordan, "Reconsidering the Mosaic Law: Some Reflections - 1988", Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper No.4, 2nd Edn., 1989, p. 15.

24. See further, James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, ch.10: "Breaking Bread: The Rite of Transformation". Note also Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch.7: "Dominion by Covenant", esp. pp. 124-127 for a helpful discussion on worship and the application of the cultural mandate.

25. David Chilton, Paradise Restored, p. 215. Original in emphasis.

26. Ibid., p. 25.

27. James B. Jordan, The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1986), p.113. Emphasis in original.

28. Gary North, The Dominion Covenant, ch.5: "God's Week and Man's Week", at p. 77.

- 29. See Gary North, Millennialism and Social Theory.
- Gary North, The Dominion Covenant, p. 147. See further, James B. Jordan, "Who Rules the Land? The Meaning of the Noahic Covenant: Part 1", Biblical Horizons, No.19, November, 1990 and Part II, Biblical Horizons, No.20, December, 1990.

31. See James B. Jordan, The Law of the Covenant, p.182.

32. James B. Jordan, The Sociology of the Church, p. 114. See further on the meaning and the application of the Sabbath, Gary North, the Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), ch.4: "Sabbath and Dominion"; Appendix A: "The Economic Implications of the Sabbath"; Tools of Dominion, ch.27: "Sabbatical Liberty"; and ch. 33: "Sabbath Rest vs. Autonomy".

33. James B. Jordan, Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship, No. 11, Nov. 1990, p.3 (in parenthesis).

- 34. Bernard of Cluny, 12th cent; trans. by John Mason Neale, 1818-66, Hymns Ancient and Modern: For Use in the Services of the Church (London: William Clowes & Sons Ltd., (1861) 1922), Hymn 228, v.2: "Jerusalem the Golden". This hymn is based on the heavenly blueprint of Rev. 21:10ff. See further on Biblical blueprints and the 2 Corinthians 3:18 theme of transformation and glorification, James B. Jordan, Through New Eyes.
- 35. See Further on a "perspectival" approach to Biblical understanding and application, John M, Frame, Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1987); and Vern S. Poythress, Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology: (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academic Books, 1987). A perspectival approach is an implication and extension of Cornelius Van Til's emphasis on the interdependence of Biblical doctrines and the concept of the Christian "system of truth",; see further, John M. Frame, "the Problem of Theological Paradox", in Gary North, ed., Foundations of Christian Scholarship; Essays in the Van Til Perspective (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1979), Part Three, ch. XII:

truth" which farmers must covenantally apply in their present day to their historic circumstances; for the meaning of God's revelation and creation is covenantally related to its application.³⁶

Consider the applicability of, for instance, the Tribute Offering to agriculture. Peter Leithart has written concerning this offering that it

reminds us that our calling, like Adam's, is to glorify, develop, improve, transform this world, so that we can offer it back to God for his delight and pleasure. God made the world good, but He wants it to be made better; he made the world glorious, but expects mankind to work to transform it from glory to glory. God expects us not to bury our talents, but to increase them. Thus, the tribute offering embodies a theology of progress. When history ends, man will be expected to present to God a world transformed by human effort and skill, a world more glorious than the original creation. The tribute offering is an eschatological offering.³⁷

Peter Leithart goes on to relate the Tribute Offering to environmental concerns; he comments:

As we have seen, it points to the Adamic calling to develop and transform the world. Man's calling is not to preserve the pristine condition of creation. It is true, of course, that the Bible teaches that man should use the creation wisely and carefully. The dominion command does not justify short-sighted pillaging and raping of God's earth. But much of contemporary environmentalism assumes that man's only legitimate role in "nature" is that of Preserver. Ultimately, this stance is based on an idolatry of nature. The Bible's protest against this idolatry is woven into the details of the sacrificial system.³⁸

It behoves us to be attentive to such details and perspectives; for as God's image bearers, we are to think and act God's thoughts after Him. 39

A mixed farm's structure of production should, therefore, not only bear witness to the inescapable relationship between ethics and dominion and progressively demonstrate that "God's covenantal law-order inevitably leads to the external cultural triumph of God's covenantally faithful people"; 40 it should also demonstrate the re-creation and covenant renewal sequences that God patterned for man to apply historically as God's agents of transformation; 41 and it should thereby covenantally ratify and render visible to a watching world the restoration and transformation brought about by the comprehensive application of Christ' redemption in history. The practice of mixed farming by covenant renewal should thus be a practical application of "The Greatness of the Great Commission". 42

(To be continued)

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Theology, pp. 294-330, esp. pp. 303-305.

^{36.} See further on theology as application, John M. Frame, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God.

^{37.} Peter J. Leithart, "The Ecology of the Tribute Offering", Biblical Horizons, No. 35, March 1992, pp. 3-4, at p.3.

^{38.} Ibid., p. 4

^{39.} For the necessity of reasoning analogically so that our interpretations are reinterpretations of God's revealed interpretation, see Cornelius Van Til, A Survey of Christian Epistemology, Vol. 2 of In Defence of Biblical Christianity (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., (1932) 1969), esp ch. XV: "The Method of Christian Theistic Epistemology". See also the helpful discussion by John M. Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox", esp. Part III: "The Analogical System", pp. 310-330.

^{40.} Gary North, Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 50.

^{41.} See esp. James B. Jordan, Through New Eyes, ch.11: "Man: The Agent of Transformation."

^{42.} See Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., The Greatness of the Great Commission.