

WORSHIP, SERVE OR CULTIVATE? AN EVALUATION OF TRANSLATION OPTIONS FOR GENESIS 2.15

Adorar, servir ou cultivar? Uma avaliação das opções de tradução
para Gênesis 2.15

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ABSTRACT

The meanings of the words **דבא** and **רמש** in Gen 2.15 are very significant in understanding the role of humans in the created order. Are humans to liturgically “worship and obey” God as their primary function in the created order? Did God intend for humans to “serve and protect” the created order to preserve it for the *eschaton*? Or, is the role of humans in the created order to “cultivate and keep” it, stewarding the earth for God’s glory? This essay examines three common translation options for Gen 2.15, arguing “cultivate and keep,” which is historically the most common view, is the most consistent with the text and context of Gen 2.15.

Keywords: Cultivate. Environment. Ethics. Ecotheology.
Stewardship.

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RESUMO

Os significados das palavras **דבא** e **רמש** em Gn 2.15 são muito significativos na compreensão do papel dos seres humanos na ordem criada. Os seres humanos são liturgicamente “adoradores e obedientes” a Deus como sua principal função na ordem criada? Deus quis que os humanos “sirvissem e protegessem” a ordem criada para preservá-la para o *eschaton*? Ou, é o papel dos seres humanos na ordem criada «cultivá-la e mantê-la», servindo a terra para a glória de Deus? Este artigo examina três opções comuns de tradução para Gn 2.15, argumentando que «cultivar e manter», que é historicamente a visão mais comum, é a mais consistente com o texto e o contexto de Gn 2.15.

Palavras chave: Cultivar. Meio Ambiente. Ética. Ecoteologia. Mordomia.

INTRODUCTION

In recent scholarship, three main options are recognized for the appropriate translation of the words **דבא** and **רמש** in Gen 2:15. Each of the three options has some warrant found in the text and context of Scripture, and in the theology of the interpreters. Debate over this passage is important because, a foundational text for the understanding of the human condition before the fall, Gen 2:15 is particularly important for the development of anthropology, eschatology, and environmental ethics. As Mark Liederbach and Seth Bible rightly argue, “The interpretation and meaning of those words [**דבא** and **רמש**] and this passage [Gen 2:15], it is safe to say, are universally recognized by those in the environmental-ethics discussion as hinge points upon which much of the Christian perspective on creation turns.”² The three potential translations of

² Mark Liederbach and Seth Bible, *True North: Christ, the Gospel, and Creation Care* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2012), 57.

this text represent significantly different implications for the role of humans on earth with respect to all aspects of life. Though there is overlap in the semantic range of the translations, the first order meaning of each option presents a disparate view of God's purpose for man. Additionally, the two more recent views offer unique challenges to a biblical worldview. This essay argues that the most appropriate translation of **דבא** and **רמש** is agricultural in nature based on the text as well as the context of Scripture.

The traditional and most common view is an agricultural view that Adam was placed in the Garden in order to “cultivate and keep” it. The agricultural interpretation of Gen 2:15 is supported by the vast majority of Bible scholars throughout history along with contemporary scholars such as Calvin Beisner and Richard Bauckham. More recently, two alternative translations of Gen 2:15 have become increasingly popular. The most common recent theological interpretation of Gen 2:15 reads **דבא** and **רמש** as “serve and protect.” This is a view held by Loren Wilkinson, Richard Young, Steven Bouma-Prediger, and others—all avid advocates for ecclesial action in preserving the environment. This view will be referred to as the ecological view. A second recent interpretation, the doxological view, renders **דבא** and **רמש** as “worship and obey.” This variant translation appears to have originated with Old Testament scholar Umberto Cassuto and brought into popularity by John Sailhamer, but is the least common of the three options by far.

1. ECOLOGICAL VIEW

There appears to be little debate prior to the mid-twentieth century on the appropriate translation of Gen 2:15. However, since that time, the ecological view, commended by theologians dedicated to uniting Christian theology with a concern for ecology has become increasingly popular. For example, Bouma-Prediger proposes Gen 2:15 “defines the human calling in terms of service: we are to serve (*‘ābad*) and protect (*šāmar*). We are to serve and protect the garden that is creation—literally be a slave to the earth for its own good, as well as for our benefit.”³ Bouma-Prediger discusses Gen 2:15 four times in

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his book; in three instances he interprets the word **דבא** as implying service for the sake of the earth itself.⁴ In one of these three instances, Bouma-Prediger maintains the translation “till” but claims that it means “to serve the earth for its own sake.”⁵ In the fourth instance, the **דבא** is read as referring primarily to the agricultural work Adam was intended to perform.⁶ Based on his own usage, it seems Bouma-Prediger is not entirely settled on the intended meaning of **דבא**.⁷

The Fellows of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, in their volume *Earthkeeping in the Nineties*, support reading **דבא** as serving the Garden. They note that although the agriculture connotation of Gen 2:15 is much more common, “*’abad* . . . is sometimes translated ‘work’ or ‘serve.’ And in fact, *’abad* is the basic Hebrew word for ‘serve’ or even ‘be a slave to.’ The other word, *šamar*, is translated variously ‘keep,’ ‘watch,’ or ‘preserve.’ The significant thing about both words is that they describe actions undertaken not primarily for the sake of the doer but for the sake of the object of the action.”⁸ Although nothing the authors of *Earthkeeping in the Nineties* state directly opposes the agricultural understanding of the word **דבא**, they appear to be

Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Engaging Culture; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 74.

⁴ Ibid., 74, 154, 175.

⁵ Ibid., 154.

⁶ Ibid., 151.

⁷ Notably, the only source Bouma-Prediger cites in support of his assertion about the meaning of **דבא** and **רמש** is Calvin DeWitt, a zoologist and environmentalist. By his own profession at a conference in 2010, DeWitt is not proficient, or particularly familiar, with original biblical languages. Bouma-Prediger cites Calvin DeWitt writing in a popular article. In DeWitt’s *Earth-wise*, he makes a similar argument with no cited evidence. DeWitt writes, “Genesis 2:15 conveys a marvelous teaching. Adam is expected by God to *serve* the garden and to *keep* it. The Hebrew word for *serve* (*’abad*) is translated as ‘till,’ ‘dress,’ and ‘work’ in some recent translations of the Bible. But ‘serve’ is also a possible translation, as in *Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible*.” Calvin B. DeWitt, *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues* (Issues in Christian Living; Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRC Publications, 1994), 44. Theodore Hiebert supports the ecological view, largely in concert with the documentary hypothesis. In reference to Gen 2:15, he writes, “For J, therefore, the land is a sovereign to be served.” Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist’s Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2008), 157. Wirzba argues along the same lines and basis as Hiebert. Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 31.

⁸ Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation* (Rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 287. Note that Wilkinson cites no sources in support of this argument.

making the argument that since a word can have a desired meaning in one instance, it must necessarily have that meaning in all cases. They do not ask what the *best* meaning for the word in the context is.⁹

Young's Literal Translation of the Bible, by translator Robert Young, is the only relatively common English translation that uses the word “serve” to represent the Hebrew **דבא**.¹⁰ Translating **דבא** as “serve” is possible and justified in some instances: according to *BDB* it is a secondary use of the word **דבא**.¹¹ As Richard Young notes, in general agreement with *BDB*, **דבא** has “service” as its meaning in certain circumstances, but the primary meaning of “till” is more common when it has as its object the ground or something like a vineyard. Despite his own grammatical evidence, Richard Young argues for “service” as the primary meaning of **דבא** because he thinks that God is the primary beneficiary of Adam’s garden-keeping, not Adam himself.¹²

The translation of **רמש** is much more settled, as even ecologically oriented theologians such as Bouma-Prediger and

⁹ Bauckham argues that the eco-theologians are finding only what they are looking for. Richard Bauckham, “Humans, Animals, and the Environment in Genesis 1–3,” in *Genesis and Christian Theology* (ed. Nathan MacDonald, M. W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 188n23.

¹⁰ *Young's Literal Translation* was done by Robert Young, who is different than the Richard Young that will be cited below. DeWitt cites this single translation as authoritative proof that *serve* is the natural meaning of **דבא** in this passage. DeWitt, *Earth-Wise* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRC Publications, 1994), 44.

¹¹ Francis Brown, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (ed. S. R. Driver, et al.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 712–14.

¹² As Richard Young points out, “Normally when *ground* is the object, *abad* means to till or cultivate, implying cultivation for one’s own sustenance. The context of Genesis 2:5, however, suggests a different focus. God’s concern is not with people managing the garden for their own sustenance, for they had not been created yet, but with the need for a manager to help keep order and harmony in creation. The service is to be rendered to God, not to ourselves.” Richard A. Young, *Healing the Earth: A Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and Their Solutions* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 163. Young’s argument is unconvincing because he makes a strong case that the primary meaning of **דבא** in this case should “cultivate,” but because of an explanatory comment in an earlier verse (e.g., Gen 2:5) the grammatical argument should be discarded. It is not clear that argument is even that strong because Gen 2:5 does not necessarily exclude Adam’s benefiting from the act of cultivation, nor require a secondary implication, e.g., worship of YHWH, as the primary meaning. Liederbach and Bible are sympathetic with Richard Young’s method for arguing beyond the basic grammar through the context of the whole Genesis narrative, though they advance his argument to argue for the doxological view based on Sailhamer and Cassuto. Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 60–61.

Wilkinson note: it appears to indicate protecting, guarding, or keeping, which is in line with the most common English translations.¹³ Richard Young echoes the traditional translation of “keep” or “protect” along with Bouma–Prediger and Wilkinson. The traditional view of “dress” or “keep” is supported in general by the ecological view, because **רמש** appears to take its connotation from the verb preceding it. In other words, if **דבא** is translated as *serve*, then **רמש** is naturally “guard,” “protect,” or “keep.” On the other hand, if **דבא** is translated as *cultivate*, then **רמש** takes the meaning of “keep,” “dress,” or “maintain.” There is little semantic difference between the options, so there is little contention between the ecological and agricultural views about **רמש**.¹⁴ There is some warrant for accepting the ecological interpretation of Gen 2:15 on textual grounds, but it seems that theological considerations have a stronger influence on the choice of words.

Ecotheology is one of many contextual theologies, such as feminism and liberation theology.¹⁵ In the several volumes and articles written on ecotheological hermeneutics, eco-theologians assert that if a reading of a text of Scripture is divergent from their chosen paradigm, in this case the welfare of the earth, then they are not only authorized but are required to soften or change the reading of that text.¹⁶ It appears that the translation of **דבא** in Gen 2:15 is a relatively

¹³ E.g., Bouma–Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 154; Young, *Healing the Earth*, 135–36.

¹⁴ Multiple resources support the understanding of **רמש** as “keeping” as in “protecting the garden” when paired with **דבא** as in this case: Eugene H. Merrill, ed., *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: Genesis–Deuteronomy*, Bible Knowledge Series; Colorado Springs, Colo.: Victor, 2003), 47. According to TDOT, “In the qal šmr has the basic meaning ‘watch, guard, observe, fulfill, keep, keep watch, spy out.’ The variations in meaning and the different nuances are fundamentally dependent on the various subjects and objects, parallelisms and contexts.” G. Johannes Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. Helmer Ringgren, 9 vols., vol. 2; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), 286. According to Keil and Delitzsch, “Cultivation therefore preserved (**רמש** to keep) the divine plantation, not merely from injury on the part of any evil power . . . but also from running wild through natural degeneracy.” Carl Friedrich Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (ed. Franz Delitzsch; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 52.

¹⁵ Ernst M. Conradie, “The Road Towards an Ecological Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics,” *Scriptura* no. 93 (2006): 309.

¹⁶ See for example: Ernst M. Conradie, *Angling for Interpretation: A First Introduction to Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2008); Ernst M. Conradie, “What on Earth Is an Ecological Hermeneutics? Some Broad Parameters,” in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*

mild example of that impetus being applied.

The majority of ecologically focused theologians prefer either a stewardship or dependence model when discussing the relationship of humans to the earth.¹⁷ This means that they presuppose that man is primarily in a servant relationship to the earth, and that man's service to the earth is, by proxy, service to God. While this model of earth-care has advantages and is certainly preferable to indifference to the issue of earth-care, as Beisner demonstrates in *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, it is not the most beneficial model of understanding the human-earth relationship.¹⁸

The stewardship and dependence models of earth-care both precondition the reader to believe that a model of dominion is unacceptable and is roughly equivalent to ruthless domination.¹⁹ Therefore, in order to avoid the embarrassment of the text supporting the image of a farmer showing mastery over the ground by cultivating it, some theologians try to soften the imagery by using an alternative translation of אָבָד as "serve" rather than "cultivate."²⁰ This helps them

(ed. David Horrell, et al.; New York; London: T & T Clark, 2010), 295–311; David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010); David G. Horrell, *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

¹⁷ Donnie McDaniel's dissertation on this topic provides a helpful overview of four categories of relationship of humans to the environment: (1) Dominion model, as propounded by Cal Beisner; (2) Dependence model, as outlined by Ted Hiebert; (3) Stewardship model, advocated by Stephen Bouma-Prediger; (4) and the Good Shepherd model to which McDaniel himself ascribes. See, Donald R. McDaniel, Jr., "Becoming Good Shepherds: A New Model of Creation Care for Evangelical Christians" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

¹⁸ Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 27–42. Beisner argues for a *dominion* interpretation of the human relationship to the environment. This is a valid interpretation, but appears to be used by some evangelicals as grounds for domination of the environment by humans. For example, Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (An Economic Commentary on the Bible; Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

¹⁹ This is the crux of the argument in Lynn White's famous essay, which has served as a foil for all evangelical environmental ethics for the past half century. Lynn Townsend White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in *Ecology and Religion in History*; New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 15–31.

²⁰ Multiple theologians whose writings are concerned specifically with care of the environment continue to support the agricultural reading of Gen 2:15: Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 22; Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 14–18; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 2006), 112–13; Donald A. Hay, "Responding to Climate Change: How Much Should We Discount the Future?," in *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability* (ed. Robert S. White; London: Society for Promoting Christian

to redeem the text to their own paradigm, while still maintaining a claim to biblical authority. While none of the authors cited in this article specifically explain their movement from “cultivate” to “serve” in exactly these terms, given the paucity of grammatical support for “serve,” it appears that the best explanation for the shift in meaning is a dominant worldview.²¹

As Beisner points out, there are potential problems that can arise from retranslating Gen 2:15 as “serve and protect” such as an overemphasis on service to nature resulting in a doorway being opened for eco-centrism.²² To be clear, none of the theologians cited in this essay advocate nature worship; however, the potential exists that if their translation option were to become normalized, an eco-centric Christianity could arise to replace the desired theocentric model.²³ Both the primary implications of a translation and its potential effects should be considered prior to revising existing translations, particularly when the textual support for a new translation is debatable. In the case of the ecological view, it is not clear that the potential negative effects were adequately considered.

Knowledge, 2009), 63; Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 29; Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics* (ed. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter W. Bakken; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 204; Howard A. Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace: Overcoming the Divorce between Earth and Heaven* (ed. Joel Scandrett; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2011), 162–64.

²¹ In another instance, Albert Wolters records a similar worldview influence in textual criticism. In this article, Wolters demonstrates there is a significant and reliable textual variant in 2 Pet 3:10 that has been largely resisted by some biblical scholars specifically because it would tend to undermine their eschatological understanding of an annihilation and subsequent re-creation of the earth on the Day of the Lord. It is apparent that the danger of a worldview affecting translation is not specific to eco-theologians, but is a danger for all scholars. In the case of Gen 2:15, it appears that worldview is indeed a driving force behind retranslation. See Albert M. Wolters, “Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” *WTJ* 49, no. 2 (1987): 405–13.

²² Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 15–18. See also, Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 57–62.

²³ The dependence model of Ted Hiebert, described by Donnie McDaniel, is a step toward such a theology. McDaniel, “Becoming Good Shepherds: A New Model of Creation Care for Evangelical Christians”, 145–222. For an example of someone who seems to move toward an eco-centric model, see Gretel Van Wieren, *Restored to Earth: Christianity, Environmental, and Ecological Restoration* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 78–80.

2. DOXOLOGICAL VIEW

The scholarship of John Sailhamer provides much of the support for the doxological option. At the beginning of his discussion of Gen 2:15–24 in his commentary on Genesis, Sailhamer writes that in v. 15 the author has “returned to this point [that man has been put into the Garden, i.e. Gen 2:5] and recounted the purpose for putting man there.”²⁴ His assertion, in contrast to nearly all common English translations, is that man was put into the Garden to worship and obey.²⁵ Part of his support for this translation is that the verb

²⁴ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (ed. Frank Ely Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 44. Cf., John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Library of Biblical Interpretation; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 100.

²⁵ There are other sources who agree with the doxological view. For example, John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis* (2 vols.; EP Study Commentary, vol. 1; Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2003), 106–107. Also, Davis proposes the ecological translation, but implies significant doxological overtones in her description. Unfortunately, Davis does not cite sources for her views on translation of this text, so it is difficult to follow those lines of her argument. Ellen F. Davis, “Just Food: A Biblical Perspective on Culture and Agriculture,” in *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability* (ed. Robert S. White; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2009), 123–26. Multiple Targums provide support for this reading. According to the *Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan*, “The Lord God took Adam from the mountain of worship to the place whence he had been created, and made him dwell in the garden of Eden to labor in the law and to keep its commandments.” Michael Maher, ed., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 23. In the footnote, the editor/translator reveals a bias, writing, “The phrase ‘to till it and keep it’ raised problems, since the arden of Eden needed no one to till it. The Targums, apart from Onq, took the biblical phrase to refer to labor in the Law.” *Ibid.*, 23n33. In *Targum Neofiti 1* Gen 2:15 reads, “And the LORD God took Adam and had him dwell in the garden of Eden to toil in the Law and to observe its commandments.” Martin McNamara, ed., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesisidem.*; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 58. On the other hand, as Maher comments in the footnote cited above, *The Targum Onquelos to Genesis* does not support the reading that Adam’s function was to keep the law in the Garden. In *Onquelos*, Gen 2:15 reads, “Now the Lord God took Adam and made him dwell in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it.” Bernard Grossfeld, ed., *Targum Onquelos to Genesis: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notesidem.*; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988), 44. Matthews notes there are some examples of Jewish commentaries that argue Adam was placed in the Garden to till and guard the law and the commandment, rather than the Garden itself. E. G. Matthews, “Armenian Commentary Attributed to Ephrem,” in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation: A Collection of Essays* (ed. Judith Frishman and Lucas van Rompay; Traditio Exegetica Graeca; Lovanii, Belgium: Peeters, 1997), 147. Ibn Ezra rejects the idea that the law or a commandment can be served. Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis* (ed. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver; New York, N.Y.: Menorah, 1988),

translated “put” is typically used “for two special uses: God’s ‘rest’ or ‘safety,’ which he gives to man in the land (e.g., Gen 19:16; Deut 3:20; 12:10; 25:19), and the ‘dedication’ of something in the presence of the Lord (Exod 16:33–34; Lev 16:23; Num 17:4; Deut 26:4, 10).”²⁶ Sailhamer asserts that Eden prefigures the eternal Sabbath by claiming that both of the proposed meanings of “put” are in play in this verse.²⁷ This lays the foundation for Sailhamer’s proposed translation of **דבא** and **רמש**.²⁸

Sailhamer acknowledges that the agricultural translation existed as early as the LXX, but argues that “the suffixed pronoun in the Hebrew text rendered ‘it’ in English is feminine, whereas the noun ‘garden,’ which the pronoun refers to in English, is a masculine noun in Hebrew. Only by changing the pronoun to a masculine singular, as the LXX has done, can it have the sense of the EVs, namely ‘to work’ and ‘to keep.’”²⁹ This is the strongest of Sailhamer’s arguments against the agricultural view and deserves careful consideration.

There are at least three possible solutions to the problem mentioned by Sailhamer regarding the pronoun gender. The first is that the word **גג** (garden), which is normally masculine, may take variable gender as some nouns referring to places do in Hebrew grammar. Since no other instance of **גג** (garden) being treated as feminine is known, there is limited support for this contention, but either a grammatical error or single occurrence of this morphological

58. The editors of Ibn Ezra’s commentary note, “While the root *ayin, bet, dalet* is used in referring to worship, it is not used in Scripture as a technical term for the practice of a precept. The term used for the latter is *lishmor* (to keep) (Deut. 8:1; 10:13) One serves (*oved*) God and observes (*shomer*) the commandments. One cannot be said to serve the commandments, hence I.E.’s [Ibn Ezra’s] objection to this interpretation.” Ibid., 58n60. As will be seen below, Ibn Ezra argues for the agricultural view of Gen 2:15.

²⁶ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 44–45.

²⁷ Ibid., 45.

²⁸ *TDOT* allow for the translation of **רמש** in a doxological sense in many occasions, but those occasions are always when the subject of the verb is functioning in a covenant keeping or priestly role. The examples *TDOT* provide tend to be explicit covenants and worship functions (i.e., priest in the temple) rather than oblique references as Sailhamer, et al., appear to be arguing. Based on the discussion in *TDOT*, it seems that **רמש** takes on the meaning of its context, rather than the reverse, making **דבא** the critical word of concern in this passage. Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 286–302.

²⁹ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45.

phenomena is certainly possible.³⁰

A second possible solution exists, as Hamilton notes in his commentary of Genesis, which is that the referent of the pronominal suffix may well be *ground*.³¹ Indeed, Hamilton's reading might appear to be the common sense reading since the object that is naturally tilled is the ground, especially given the close proximity of **דבא** and **מדה** in Gen 2:5 and Gen 2:23. This option would resolve the question of the gender of **גג** (garden) since *ground* is a feminine noun. However, Cassuto, who is Sailhamer's main source in his discussion of Gen 2:15, rejects Hamilton's proposal because "this noun [ground in v. 9] is too far away from our verse."³² Cassuto's argument seems to be fairly strong in opposition against ground being the object of the pronoun, since six verses separate the object and the verb, unless it is implied to be the "ground of the garden" and the word "ground" is supplied by the reader. However, the assumption of the implied "ground" is not a necessary argument and brings in other translational difficulties.³³

³⁰ See also, Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Jerusalem: Magnes Press Hebrew University, 1978), 122. For an argument supporting the masculinity of **גג**, see: Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans., Mark E. Biddle; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 10. Some scholars support the use of **גג** (garden) as a feminine. Delitzsch sees this as a logical explanation, but holds that it is a simple grammatical error by the author. Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (ed. Sophia Taylor; Minneapolis, Minn.: Klock & Klock, 1978), 137. Logically, if the Hebrew grammar changes as much as English grammar has in the past few centuries, it is very reasonable to suppose that **גג** (garden) had a flexible gender for Moses and a stable gender for later biblical authors.

³¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 171. See also, Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 70.

³² Cassuto, *Genesis*, 122. Ibn Ezra also rejects the assertion that ground is properly the object in view in this instance, but his argument is based not on the relative distance between the words in the text, but rather on the fact that Adam was said to be in the Garden, which would seem to preclude him cultivating the land outside of the Garden. Ibn Ezra, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis*, 57–58.

³³ This argument for ground as the object of cultivation and keeping could be strengthened by relying on higher criticism of the text because some more liberal scholars have proposed Gen 2:10–14 is not organic to the text and might represent a collation of texts. Skinner offers the only proposed significant textual emendation based on his adherence to higher criticism. He writes: "[Gen 2:15] is either a resumption of 8b after the insertion of 10–14 or a duplicate from a parallel document. It is too original to be a gloss; and since there was no motive for making an interpolation at 8b, the excision of 10–14 seems to lead necessarily to the conclusion that the two sources have been combined." John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (International Critical Commentary on

A third possible solution is that there is a discrepancy in the vowel pointing in **דבא** and **רמש**. In this case, the pronominal suffixes became masculine instead of feminine. Cassuto rejects the revocalization, arguing the words are properly spelled infinitives. Cassuto contends that the infinitives used in Gen 2:15 reflect language relating to sacrifices in Exodus and are thus original.³⁴ Additionally, the argument for revocalization is not compelling because there is little textual evidence for it.³⁵ Of these three possible solutions, it appears that a grammatical irregularity provides the strongest rebuttal to Sailhamer's arguments against the agricultural view.

The proposal for rejecting *garden* as the object of **דבא** and **רמש**, as proposed by Cassuto and Sailhamer, creates an additional problem. Namely, if the pronominal suffixes of **דבא** and **רמש** are definitively feminine and Cassuto and Sailhamer are implying that the object of "worship and obey" is God, then it would appear that they are implying that a third person feminine singular pronoun is being used in reference to God. The feminization of God in the Hebrew Old Testament is not considered a valid option by any recognized scholars.³⁶ Therefore, Cassuto offers that the omission of the *mappiq*

the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; New York: Scribner, 1910), 66. Vawter uses higher criticism, but retains *ground* as the object of cultivation without splitting the text as Skinner does. Vawter, *On Genesis*, 70. This would address the problem of distance that Cassuto proposes. However, the argument from higher criticism is an argument from supposition since there are no significant textual variants to this text. Additionally, bringing in higher critical methodology unnecessarily brings into question the inerrancy of the text, and so it is not a desirable option. Cassuto rejects Gen 2:10–14 as an interpolation because it is so repetitive with other passages in Genesis, which seems to make it unlikely a scribe would attempt to insert a non-unique passage. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 121.

³⁴ Cassuto, *Genesis*, 122.

³⁵ Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44.

³⁶ I have found no support for any occurrence of the third person feminine singular pronoun being used in reference to God. Notably, Mayer G. Slonim wrote a series of articles about gender substitutions in Hebrew, but at no point did he ever reference a female pronoun being used for God. Rather, the opposite was more likely for a scribal substitution. Mayer G. Slonim, "The Deliberate Substitution of the Masculine for the Feminine Pronominal Suffixes in the Hebrew Bible," *JQR* 32, no. 2 (1941); Mayer G. Slonim, "Masculine Predicates with Feminine Subjects in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 63, no. 3 (1944); Mayer G. Slonim, "The Substitution of the Masculine for the Feminine Hebrew Pronominal Suffixes to Express Reverence," *JQR* 29, no. 4 (1939). Wolters' article explains that even when female imagery is used in reference to God, the pronouns remain masculine. Albert M.

in the final *he* of several texts of Gen 2:15 demarcates **רמש** and **דבא** as infinitives, such that they become masculine in form and thus can properly refer to God.³⁷ However, if the verbs refer to a masculine object because of the missing *mappiq*, then it does not appear to be textually necessary to argue for **דבא** and **רמש** referring to God instead of the Garden.³⁸ Therefore, the main basis for grammatically arguing for “worship and obey” appears to be significantly weakened by Cassuto’s own argument for the missing *mappiq*.³⁹

Cassuto also argues for a connection between the temple language of later Old Testament writings and Gen 2:15 in support of the doxological view. Based on rabbinic interpretation, Cassuto argues that **דבא** should be translated in the doxological sense,

Wolters, “Cross-Gender Imagery in the Bible,” 8, (1998): 223–26. Challenges to the masculinity of God that are raised by contemporary revisionist scholars typically base their findings of the femininity of God in the imagery used of God rather than in the language referring to God. Notably, the arguments that I found regarding God’s femininity all neglect the masculine grammar surrounding even the feminine images. Consider the following examples: Mukti Barton, “Gender-Bender God: Masculine or Feminine?,” *Black Theology* 7, no. 2 (2009): 142–66; Arthur E. Zannoni, “Feminine Language for God in the Hebrew Scriptures,” *Dialogue and Alliance* 2, no. 3 (1988): 3–15.

³⁷ Cassuto, *Genesis*, 122. Sailhamer deals with this in a note, which is much clearer than Cassuto’s explanation. Sailhamer argues that “infinities with a final *he* and without the *mappiq* [as in these words in Gen 2:15]. . . are common in biblical Hebrew. The importance of these two infinitives can be seen in the fact that the narrative returns to precisely them in its summary conclusion of the state of mankind after the Fall.” He then goes on to draw the parallel between “worship” and “work the ground” and “obedience” and being “kept” from the tree of life in Gen 2:15 and Gen 3:23–24 respectively. Adding to the intrigue of this objection, it seems there was a morphological change in Hebrew that changed from the earlier use of *-he* for both masculine and feminine singular pronominal suffixes to the more recent delineation of *-waw* masculine and *-he* for feminine. See, Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 47–48n15. One scholar posits that morphological changes and subsequent oversight in transcription may have led to instances of 3rd person masc. pronominal suffixes in the MT. Ian Young, “Observations on the Third Person Masculine Singular Pronominal Suffix -H in Hebrew Biblical Texts,” *HS* 42, (2001): 225–42. Note that Young does not discuss Gen 2:15 in his article.

³⁸ The missing *mappiq* is not discussed in Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11*, 44. Cassuto comments that “several texts” lack the *mappiq* but he does not cite them. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 122. Sailhamer uses Cassuto’s argument but without reference to the texts, he assumes Cassuto’s evidence, pointing out that if Cassuto’s text criticism is correct, then the infinitives are also grammatically supported. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 47–48. I have been unable to trace down any further references to the missing *mappiq* that Cassuto references, leading me to conclude that there are not many texts in which the omission has been noted.

³⁹ Sailhamer follows Cassuto with a comment in his notes on Gen 2:15. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 47–48.

because it refers primarily to the sacrificial system established later in the Pentateuch.⁴⁰ Significant in considering Cassuto's position on this interpretation is his positive view of a version of the documentary hypothesis.⁴¹ As Sailhamer states, "The description of the Garden of Eden appears to be deliberately cast to foreshadow the description of the tabernacle found later in the Pentateuch."⁴² This reading, however, is dependent on Sailhamer's compositional approach to the Pentateuch, which is not universally accepted.⁴³

⁴⁰ Cassuto, *Genesis*, 122. Cassuto also makes lengthier allusion to the Garden as temple motif, finding parallels to language in Ezekiel and Joel. *Ibid.*, 74–78. See also, Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 98–100. In *True North*, in order to establish the primacy of worship as man's function in the Garden, Liederbach and Bible first argue that the Garden, indeed all of creation, represents a temple in the Genesis accounts. Liederbach and Bible move from the conclusion that all of creation and particularly the Garden represents a temple, to the argument that a "fuller and more proper meaning to the Hebrew words דבא רמש and רמש דבא than merely 'cultivate' and 'keep' or even 'serve' and 'protect'" is warranted. This is the basis for their argument for "worship and obey" as the primary meaning of דבא רמש and רמש דבא in Gen. 2:15. Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 62–66. Other recent work has been done along this vein by Gregory Beale: Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *JETS* 48, no. 1 (2005): 5–31; Gregory K. Beale, "Garden Temple," 18, no. 2 (2003): 3–50; Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Wheaton, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004). Luther comments that Adam was placed into the Garden "as into a castle and temple." Luther does not develop this into the doxological view, but stays with the agricultural view. Martin Luther, *Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, et al., trans., George V. Schick; Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1955), 1:101.

⁴¹ In the preface to his commentary, Cassuto hints at his views, arguing they are different than the more common theory of J-E-P composition of the text of the Pentateuch. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 2–3. The exact nature of Cassuto's view for the documentary hypothesis is beyond the scope of this essay; however, Cassuto appears to argue for a later and more eclectic composition of the Pentateuch which would support the thematic projection of the temple back into the Garden of Eden. A more in-depth discussion of his own hypothesis, which is more complex, but still reflects a de-emphasis on divine inspiration, is found a few pages later in the introduction. *Ibid.*, 84–94. Cassuto's view is being pointed toward here primarily because the view that there was a robust and later redaction process, whether that eliminates inspiration or not, gives rise to a more literary and thematic reading of Scripture.

⁴² Sailhamer, "Genesis," 41. Cf., Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 98–100. Wenham sees some of the same connections between the Gen 2:15 language and later temple language, but he maintains the agricultural emphasis, highlighting the doxological aspects as a secondary reading and intentional literary connection. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol 1, Waco, Tx.: Word, 1997), 67.

⁴³ For an explanation of Sailhamer's view, see: John Sailhamer, "Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon," *BBR* 10, no. 1 (2000): 89–106; This is not related to the text in question, but does provide some insights to Sailhamer's exegetical methodology,

Although Sailhamer and Cassuto both provide grounds for their objection, it is telling that they stand in relative isolation in their argument for “worship” and “obey” as the proper translation for **דָּבַר** and **רָמַשׁ**.⁴⁴ The grammatical grounds for their position are tenuous, and plausible support for more traditional alternatives to this translation exists.

Since the textual arguments against the doxological view are inconclusive, the contextual arguments surrounding the doxological view must also be considered. One contextual argument tending to support the doxological interpretation of Gen 2:15 is that it appears God is declaring his purpose for creating humans as he puts Adam and Eve into the Garden. The reading, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to worship and obey,” seems to take a broader perspective than limiting the whole of human function to mere agricultural labor.⁴⁵ This argument is consistent with the idea that the Garden was in a perfected state, in the sense that it was completed and flawless. However, the assumption that Eden was perfect in that sense is not necessary.⁴⁶ It may be that “very good” (Gen 1:31) is not the same as complete and perfect.⁴⁷ In fact, when the

which is primarily thematic. John Sailhamer, “Exegetical Notes: Genesis 1:1–2:4a,” *TrinJ* 5, no. 1 (1984): 73–82; A lengthy overview of his methodology can be found in the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 1–79. Generally, Sailhamer proposes that the order in which the canon exists is theologically significant, such that each later addition should be read in light of previous content, as in a narrative. This methodology raises problems for Sailhamer in this case, since he argues to read Genesis 2 in light of Genesis 1, but the primary interpretive tool for reading Genesis 1 is Deuteronomy 32. Thus deriving a Numbers 7 form of adamic priesthood from the alleged doxological language in Gen 2:15 creates logical difficulty.

⁴⁴ In his commentary on Genesis, when dealing with this issue, Sailhamer does not consistently deal with any counter arguments in his views on the text. Even though his reading of Gen 2:15 is novel, he does not engage any other commentators in depth on the question. Although this does not invalidate his conclusions, it does make it more difficult to carefully evaluate Sailhamer in light of other scholarly work.

⁴⁵ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 101. Sailhamer also asserts that the presence of God’s command in Gen 2:16, immediately following the verse in question, reinforces the idea that Gen 2:15 has a doxological meaning.

⁴⁶ See Liederbach and Bible’s discussion of this: Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 69–70. Additionally, several commentators offer the idea that man’s primary role in the Garden was to maintain its pristine state against animals or natural disordering, for example: Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 106; Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, 61–62; Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 40; Ibn Ezra, *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis*, 57–58.

⁴⁷ Green argues this is Augustine’s perspective on creation. Bradley G. Green, *Colin*

entire canon is considered it appears that God's end state for creation is a city built in harmony with nature, rather than a simple garden (Rev 21:1–22:5). It may be that the so-called cultural mandate (Gen 1:28–30) is being explained in more detail in Gen 2:15. In this case the command to cultivate and keep the Garden could be viewed as an immediate, contextual application of the otherwise unspecified cultural mandate.⁴⁸ On the other hand, if completed perfection of the Garden is assumed, then the argument for the doxological view based on divine purpose for humanity is possible, but still not necessary. It remains possible that worship is a secondary focus of the passage and that mankind was indeed intended to cultivate the Garden and develop civilization.⁴⁹

While there is an appropriate sense that Adam's cultivation of the Garden was intended to be an act of worship and obedience, there are significant theological difficulties with this translation for which adherents of the doxological view fail to account.⁵⁰ The first significant difficulty is one of the main tenets in Sailhamer's and Cassuto's argument against the agricultural view. Both Sailhamer and Cassuto explicitly reject work as a function of humanity prior to the fall: instead, they see work as a part of the curse.⁵¹

Gunton and the Failure of Augustine: The Theology of Colin Gunton in Light of Augustine (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 109.

⁴⁸ The argument for moving from garden to city based on human development is supported by the *dominion* view that is advocated by Beisner. Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 14–18.

⁴⁹ This can be illustrated by Pope Benedict XVI's short treatise on creation and the fall where there is a strong doxological emphasis, yet he maintains the agricultural understanding as the primary meaning. Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...* (Ressourcement; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 27–39. Another recent translation uses the agricultural translation of Gen 2:15, but offers in a footnote, "At this point, his [Adam's] 'work' consists of 'tending' the garden and delighting in God's creation, which perhaps better fits a definition of 'worship.'" David Friedman, *Bereshit, the Book of the Beginning: A New Translation with Commentary* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 6n4.

⁵⁰ Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 57. Currid advocates the translation "serve and obey" in Gen 2:15, but his commentary states that, "The upshot is that Adam was placed in the garden to worship God by serving him and obeying him." He then cites the first question in the Westminster shorter catechism. Currid bases his argument on the idea that the feminine endings to *דבא* and *רמש* should be understood as infinitives, as Sailhamer and Cassuto argue. He cites only Cassuto for his argument and only Waltke in opposition. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis*, 106–107.

⁵¹ Neither Sailhamer nor Cassuto gives a legitimate basis for their rejection of work, but rather they assume that the references to work in Gen 2:5 and 2:15 are foreshadowing of the curse of work at the fall in Gen 3:23. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 102,

Sailhamer contends that the working of the ground was intended as an ironic reversal of Adam's purpose in the Garden, which was to worship and obey, but not to work and keep the Garden. He writes, "Throughout [Genesis] chapter 2 the author has consistently and consciously developed the idea of man's 'likeness' to God along the same lines as the major themes of the Pentateuch as a whole, namely the theme of worship and Sabbath rest."⁵² So, according to Sailhamer, God's primary design for man was undiluted doxology in the Garden.

Cassuto and Sailhamer both argue that the Gen 2:5 reference to the lack of a man to till the ground was a foreshadowing of the coming of the fall; according to Cassuto, it was God sending the rain and man tilling the ground that allowed the previously dormant thorns to spring up and frustrate human efforts.⁵³ Thus, work was a part of the curse and man's purpose in the Garden was not agricultural. This interpretation of work is contrary to the vast majority of Christian interpretation throughout the history of the church.⁵⁴ Neither

22–23; Sailhamer, "Genesis," 40–41, 45.

⁵² Sailhamer, "Genesis," 45.

⁵³ Cassuto, *Genesis*, 101–102; Sailhamer, "Genesis," 40.

⁵⁴ According to the *IDOT*, "The OT, then, does not represent Paradise as a place of blissful enjoyment. This must be stated unconditionally, for there are commentators who, because of a false, or at least nonbiblical understanding of man, have regarded v. 15b as a later insertion. The work of man is a task which he is given by God, not service of God. On the other hand, man's work is not related to God mythically; it grows out of the environment in which God has placed him." Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 38. See also in the commentary of *The Interpreter's Bible*: George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, 12 vols., *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1; New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), 496. Claus Westermann counters the notion of a work-less garden in his commentary, specifically countering the argument of K. Budde from 1883, where Budde asserts that Gen 2:15b is a later amendment. Rather, Westermann writes, "Work is regarded as an essential part of man's state not only in the Creation narrative but in the whole of the Old Testament. A life without work could not be a complete life; it would be an existence quite unworthy of man." Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 80–82. Westermann, though, also holds that work was always toilsome, bringing into question his view of the historicity of the fall. *Ibid.*, 102–103. See also, Westermann's similar commentary: Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 220–22. Gowan writes, "For the human is not just put into the garden to live and do nothing. He is given word to do (v. 15): he is to till it and keep it." Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 41. For sources in support of Edenic work, also see, Augustine, *On Genesis against the Manichees and, on the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, an Unfinished Book* (trans., Roland J. Teske; Fathers of the Church; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1990), III; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary*

Cassuto nor Sailhamer provide textual support for their assertion that work is a result of the curse, but assume it as foundational for their arguments. The aberrant theology of work requires a retranslation of Gen 2:15, which appears to be the primary basis for the offering of “worship and obey.”

At one level the rejection of work seems to be a minor point; however, the assertions made by Sailhamer and Cassuto appear more troublesome on at least two fronts.⁵⁵ First, eliminating work from the original design of humanity brings into question the nature of the *imago Dei*.⁵⁶ For example, Genesis 1 records God doing work as he creates

for Teaching and Preaching (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1982), 46; Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis* (trans., John King; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1948), 125; Jean Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis, Chapters 1:1–11:4* (trans., Rob Roy McGregor; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 155–59; John James Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Salem, Wisc.: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1998), 83–84; Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, 137; Ralph H. Elliott, *The Message of Genesis* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1961), 50; Gill, *An Exposition of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 42; Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 52; Luther, *Works*, 101–103; Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1988), 17; Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 92; North, *The Dominion Covenant*, 85–86; Rad, *Genesis*, 80; E. Basil Redlich, *The Early Traditions of Genesis* (The Colet Library of Modern Christian Thought and Teaching; London: G. Duckworth, 1950), 78; Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 37. Also many theologians are cited in support of the human work before the fall, such as Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Wolfgang Musculus, William Perkins, Andrew Willet, and Johannes Brenz in Thompson, ed. *Genesis 1–11*, 86–89. Additionally, every church father cited in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* references work, but classifies it as not toilsome. This list includes Augustine, Severian of Gabala, and Symeon the New. The resistance of Gen 2:15 being a reference to something other than work appears to be a relatively novel concept in the 20th century. Conti and Oden, eds., *Genesis 1–11*, 59–61. In a Syrian commentary on Genesis the ancient writer notes, “As soon as Adam was created, He [God] brought him into the garden, so that whilst working and tending it, He would teach him not to love idleness, the parent of much evil. Through his working and tending it, He taught him also that there was a Master and that it was his duty to observe His commandment.” Abraham Levene, *The Early Syrian Fathers on Genesis* (London: Taylor’s Foreign Press, 1951), 76.

⁵⁵ The recent interest in vocation and work among evangelicals highlights the importance of a proper understanding of vocation for the Christian life, for example, see: Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word, 1998); Timothy J. Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012); Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Focal Point Series; Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002). Additionally, organizations like the Acton Institute, the Institute for Faith, Work and Economics, and the Center for Faith and Work have all arisen in the past few years to address this important topic.

⁵⁶ Cf., E. Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate Use of Resources in a World of Scarcity* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988), 30; Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis*,

all things, and then culminates in God resting from his work on the seventh day (Gen 2:2–3). If God works before the fall and man does not, then it seems unlikely that man would become functionally more like God because of human sin.⁵⁷ Second, Jesus works throughout his life on earth (e.g., Luke 13:14; John 4:34; 5:17); he is the perfection of the *imago Dei* (cf. Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:45–46). Jesus’ working is significant, since the holistic picture of the life of Jesus appears to demonstrate the relief of the curse, rather than participation in the effects of the curse.⁵⁸ Therefore, Jesus’ working argues against the absence of work prior to the fall.

The second contextual difficulty with the doxological view is that, much like the ecological view, it introduces the danger of neo-paganism. Changing the verbs in Gen 2:15 to the doxological form opens the door for a theologically dangerous reading of the text. As can be seen through the arguments above about whether *garden*, *ground*, or *God* is the appropriate object for “cultivate and keep,” that

Chapters 1:1–11:4, 155–59.

⁵⁷ See, Ian Hart, “Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a prologue to the Book of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 316. Hart’s article outlines this point nearly exactly. There is a difference in terminology between man’s tilling and God’s working, however, there is a significant thematic connection, and the vocabulary appears to point toward the likeness of human work to God’s work in creation. For more discussion on the relationship between the *imago Dei* and work, particularly with the functional view in mind, see: Paul Marshall, “Work and Rest,” *Reformed Journal* 38, no. 6 (1988):8–10.

⁵⁸ A representative sampling of Jesus’ miracles can include the following events: a paralytic was healed (Matt 9:1–8; Luke 5:18–26), the hemorrhaging woman was healed (Matt 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48), the official’s daughter was healed (Matt 9:18–19, 23–26; Mark 5:21–24, 35–43; Luke 8:40–42, 49–56), the blind were made to see (Matt 9:27–30; 12:22; 15:30; Mark 8:22–26; Luke 7:21; John 9:1–3), and evil spirits were cast out (Mark 5:1–15; Luke 8:26–38). The miracles were restorative in nature; they took a fallen state and worked to make it right for the glory of God. Jesus says in John 9:3 that the healing of that particular blind man was done to show the works of God. John 20:30–31 explicitly reveals Jesus’ miracles were performed and recorded so people would believe—in other words, so that the restoration of individual souls would occur. Matthew 15:31 records that the results of the miracles were people glorified the God of Israel. The miracles pointed toward who God is and caused people to give him glory; they are demonstrations of the fulfillment of the eschatological promise of the gospel. All things will be made new, and that process began with Christ during his life on earth. See also, discussions on this topic such as: Stephen S. Kim, “The Christological and Eschatological Significance of Jesus’ Miracle in John 5,” *BSac* 165, no. 660 (2008): 413–24; Hans Schwarz, “Eschatological Dimension of Ecology,” *Zygon* 9, no. 4 (1974): 323–28; Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 333–35.

same possible confusion becomes more insidious when the possibility exists that *garden* or *ground* could replace *God*. Certainly, none of the advocates for “worship and obey” would advocate for a neo-pagan perversion of worship, but the fact is that reinterpretation of the text as has been proposed could allow for such wrongheaded misreading.

Based on both textual and theological considerations, it seems the doxological view has questionable support as a primary interpretation, though it may add value as a secondary reading of the text. Consideration of the final position, the agricultural view, is warranted before drawing any firm conclusions.

3. AGRICULTURAL VIEW

The most common translation of **דָּבַא** and **רָמַשׁ** is “cultivate and keep” or “till and dress.” Only one common English translation reflects anything other than the agricultural language described by “cultivate and keep.” Throughout history, the vast majority of biblical scholars, both Jewish and Christian, have assumed that Gen 2:15 is primarily agricultural in its reference.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For example: George Bush, *Notes on Genesis* (Minneapolis: James Family Christian, 1979), 61–62; Marco Conti and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Genesis 1–11* (ed. Andrew Louth, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 59–61; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1–11* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 34; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (15th ed.; Westminster Commentaries; London: Methuen, 1948), 40; Brandon Frick, “Covenantal Ecology: The Inseparability of Covenant and Creation in the Book of Genesis,” in *Genesis and Christian Theology* (ed. Nathan MacDonald, M. W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 211; John Gill, *An Exposition of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Newport Commentary Series.; Springfield, Mo.: Particular Baptist Press, 2010), 42; Gowan acknowledges the possibility of “serve” and “worship” but notes that only the significance of “work” is appropriate here. Donald E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1–11* (International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 41; Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 52–53; Luther, *Works*, 101–103; Alastair I. MacKay, *Farming and Gardening in the Bible* (Emmaus, Pa.: Rodale Press, 1950), 42; Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1976), 92; James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis with a New Translation* (Buffalo, N.Y.: William S. Hein, 1986), 94; W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 20–21; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Rev. ed.; Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 80; Skinner, *Genesis*, 66; Beverly J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric and Ideology in Genesis 2–3* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament.; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 37; Vawter, *On Genesis*, 70–71; John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*:

According to *BDB*, the primary translation for **אָרְבַּע** is “labour, work, do work,” which is expressed as “till” or “cultivate” in Gen 2:5 and 2:15. Richard Young’s textual research supports the agricultural meaning in this text, and implies the object of cultivation is likely either *garden* or *ground*.⁶⁰ Every common English translation, except Robert Young’s 19th century *Young’s Literal Translation*, offers something like “cultivate and keep” for the rendering of Gen 2:15, which would seem to place the burden of proof on the alternative translations.

In Gen 2:5, the referent for **אָרְבַּע** is *ground*, but *BDB* points toward the object in Gen 2:15 being *garden*.⁶¹ As discussed above, the difficulty with *garden* being the object of the tilling is that the pronominal prefix to **אָרְבַּע** is a feminine and *garden* is typically a masculine noun. *BDB* allows that *garden* can be used as a feminine noun, though it lists Gen 2:15 as the only example.⁶² On this basis, as

An Exposition of the Scriptures, Old Testament ed.; Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1985), 31. Also many theologians are cited in support of the agricultural view, such as Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Wolfgang Musculus, William Perkins, Andrew Willet, and Johannes Brenz in John Lee Thompson, ed., *Genesis 1–11*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture), 86–89. Bauckham comments, **אָרְבַּע** “with a personal object means ‘to serve,’ there is a consistent usage of the verb to mean ‘to work’ or ‘to cultivate’ when the object is inanimate (Gen. 3:23; 4:12; Deut. 28:39; Isa. 19:9; cf. Prov. 12:11; 28:19; Zech. 13:5). This is the obvious meaning in Genesis 2.” Bauckham, “Humans, Animals, and the Environment in Genesis 1–3,” 188n23. See also, Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Sarum Theological Lectures.; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010), 21–22, 106–107. Although the majority of the targums of Genesis support a version of the doxological view, at least one of them supports the agricultural view. See, Grossfeld, ed. *Targum Onqelos to Genesis: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes*, 44. It also seems significant that Jerome expressed no questions about this portion of the text, but held to the agricultural view. His only question in Gen 2:15 related to ‘Eden’ vs. ‘paradise of pleasure.’ Jerome, *Saint Jerome’s Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (ed. Robert Hayward, Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 31. Even strong proponents of the doxological view as Liederbach and Bible appear to tacitly admit that the grammar of Gen 2:15 appears to point to agriculture as a primary meaning of **אָרְבַּע**. Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 61.

⁶⁰ Notably, as discussed above, Young comes out in support of “serve and protect” but he does this in a manner that seems unconvincing. See the discussion above. Young, *Healing the Earth*, 163.

⁶¹ Brown, *BDB*, 712–13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1037. GKC supports this as well. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (ed. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, 2d English ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), 122. Waltke and O’Connor likewise argue for the femininity of **גַּן** (*garden*) in Gen 2:15 as a part of their larger discussion on gender in nouns. Bruce K. Waltke, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (ed. M. O’Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 102–104. Contra this, Cassuto claims that **גַּן** (*garden*) is “invariably masculine.” Cassuto, *Genesis*, 122. Another approach to this is the

discussed above, Sailhamer and Cassuto both reject the agricultural translation of **גַּן** in favor of the doxological translation. However, Sailhamer and Cassuto both fail to notice the more significant potential translational difficulty that they create in their rejection of the Garden being the object of Adam's service—namely, the feminine pronoun must then refer to God.⁶³ They both avoid the potential difficulty by claiming that the verbs are infinitive based on limited textual evidence, and thus the resultant masculine form can rightly point to God. However, the argument for the masculine infinitive removes the impetus for the arguing against **גַּן** as the object. In any case, Hebrew grammar allows for a variable gender in nouns that refer to places, which makes Sailhamer's and Cassuto's contention about the relationship between the verbs **דָּבַח** and **רָמַשׁ** and the object **גַּן** less grammatically difficult.⁶⁴

assertion that there is a problem of vocalization in the text (not the text itself, but the later vowel pointing). The contention of this argument is that vowel pointing is in error and that the pronoun should, in fact, be masculine in order to agree with the usual use of **גַּן** (garden). While this argument is a possible solution, it does not appear to be a necessary one. Though it is interesting to note that the argument historically has been a grammatical one, regarding the gender of **גַּן** (garden), with scholars assuming **גַּן** (garden) is the object that is cultivated, rather than looking for a more complex solution like the one proposed by Cassuto. See Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11*, 44. Twelfth century Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra comments, “*Gan* (garden) can be both masculine and feminine, hence the plurals *gannim* and *gannot*. . . . [A]fter Adam sinned God expelled him from the garden and commanded him to till the soil. . . . *To till it* (le-ovdah) therefore refers to the garden of whose fruit he ate. It was only after he sinned that he had to eat the grass of the ground, i.e., bread. *To till it* means to water it. *To keep it* means to guard the garden so that no animals enter therein and befoul it. Some say that *le-ovdah* means to serve God's commandment. However, a commandment is not served.” Ibn Ezra, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis*, 57–58. In the footnotes the editors of Ibn Ezra's volume point out that the feminine plural form of garden can be found in Ecc 2:5, and the masculine plural can be found in Cant 4:15. *Ibid.*, 57n56. Higher critical Old Testament scholar Skinner argues for repointing of the vowel in this text. Skinner, *Genesis*, 66.

⁶³ See footnote 27 for a discussion of the use of the 3rd person fem. sing. pronoun for God.

⁶⁴ Waltke, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 102–104. The mere fact that **גַּן** is used as a feminine noun only once in the Old Testament does not preclude this instance from being intended or original. There also exists the possibility that there is a simple grammatical error in Genesis, which in no way impugns the historicity or inerrancy of the account. Additionally, translators of the LXX, who were particularly careful in their translation of the Pentateuch, resolved the difficulty merely by normalizing the grammar, instead of creating an alternative and hypothetical translation. See Sailhamer's comments on the LXX translation: Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45. For the text of the LXX with a parallel English translation: Susan Ann Brayford, *Genesis* (Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden:

Whether the referent is the nearby noun *garden* or the more distant noun *ground* seems trivial; however, as Beisner points out, there is an important difference between man's responsibility to fill and subdue the earth/ground in Gen 1:28 and his responsibility to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden in Gen 2:15.⁶⁵ The purpose of the subduing in Gen 1:28 is first to turn the rest of earth into a garden outside of Eden and then to maintain it, as is described in Gen 2:15. Also supporting the idea that *garden* is the object of cultivation, rather than the more general *ground*, is the relative distance between the two options. Garden is found within a few words of **דבא** while the closest reference to earth is in Gen 2:9. It appears from the text that man was put in the Garden to cultivate it and keep it, not to serve it and protect it, nor to specifically worship and obey God.⁶⁶

Although tradition alone is insufficient grounds for maintaining the agricultural meaning of Gen 2:15, it seems the arguments put forward by proponents of the ecological and doxological views must provide sufficient support to overcome over two millennia consistent interpretation by Jewish and Christian scholars. While the grammatical evidence is insufficient to give certainty to the agricultural reading of Gen 2:15, the evidence for the

Brill, 2007), 36–37. Brayford's commentary on the text supports the agricultural translation with no objections, *ibid.*, 229–30. Another commentary on the LXX: John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993), 29. Wevers' commentary harmonizes with Brayford's.

⁶⁵ E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 127. The editors of Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis offer this comment in the footnotes: "The pronomial suffixes (it) of *le-ovdah* and of *le-shomrah* are in the feminine. Those who say that these words refer to the ground do so because they cannot believe *gan* to be masculine while ground is feminine. However, I.E. [Ibn Ezra] maintains that *gan* can be either masculine or feminine. Thus *le-ovdah u-le-shomrah* can refer to *gan*." Ibn Ezra, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis*, 58n58.

⁶⁶ There is no doubt that the point behind the text is that Adam was supposed to cultivate and keep the garden as a part of his worship and obedience. Liederbach and Bible are correct in reading resonance with 1 Cor 10:31 in Adam's agricultural assignment, but farming for God's glory is a secondary implication of the text, not the primary meaning. See Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 124. Gill notes in his commentary Jewish interpretation that saw worship and study of the law as a secondary meaning of Adam's work in the garden. Gill, *An Exposition of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 42. As discussed above, there is little controversy about the translation of **רמש** apart from those who follow Sailhamer and Cassuto. Advocates of both "serve and protect" and "cultivate and keep" agree on the general meaning of the Hebrew word.

newer readings of Gen 2:15 does not appear to be strong enough to drive a new translation.

A second reason to reject both the doxological and ecological interpretations of Gen 2:15 is the worldview implied by shifting away from an agricultural interpretation. In the case of the ecological interpretation, replacing “cultivate and keep” with “serve and protect” significantly redefines the human-earth relationship and appears to diminish the mandate to subdue and rule the earth given to Adam and Eve in Gen 1:28. Ecologically oriented theologians would define the nature of man’s dominion by the second mandate to “serve and protect” the Garden.⁶⁷ Instead, as Beisner argues, “the meanings of the words themselves [in Gen 1:28 and Gen 2:15] simply are too divergent for the latter to define the former. Subduing and ruling are quite different from tilling and keeping.”⁶⁸ Additionally, there is a difference of the geographic setting in which each command is given. In Gen 1:28, the so-called cultural mandate is given with the backdrop of the whole earth. In Gen 2:15, the command to cultivate the Garden is given within the limited geographic scope of Eden. It is more appropriate to understand “subdue and rule” in reference to the wilderness around the garden and “cultivate and keep” to refer to Eden.

A third reason to reject “worship and obey” and “serve and protect” is that the alternative translations are not theologically necessary. As argued above, the variant meanings are determined based primarily on worldview, rather than grammar. In fact, Liederbach and Bible make their strongest argument for the doxological view because of their desire to unite man’s Edenic activities with the New Testament instructions to do everything in an attitude of worship (cf., Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17). They argue, “Adam’s calling and purpose was very specifically to a life of worship in the Garden before God. . . . The same is then true for all of us. God built us to be worshippers who are to do all things for his glory.”⁶⁹ Sailhamer sees this role in keeping with man’s functioning as a priest, and illustrating the Pentateuch theme of worship and Sabbath rest.⁷⁰ This is a logical implication of the text, but that does not make the doxological view a compelling option for

⁶⁷ Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 74.

⁶⁸ Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 15.

⁶⁹ Liederbach and Bible, *True North*, 64.

⁷⁰ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45.

translation.⁷¹

Likewise, “serving and protecting” nature as a guiding implication behind a biblical understanding of man’s dominion over the creation is helpful but not necessary.⁷² As Beisner argues, there is a difference between man’s responsibility in Eden and outside the Garden. Humanity is commanded to subdue and rule the whole earth (Gen 1:28), which was in need of cultivation (Gen 2:5). On the other hand, Adam’s role was specifically to cultivate the Garden and guard it against the encroaching wilderness (Gen 2:15). Retranslating **דבא** and **רמש** to prevent tyrannical human dominion is not necessary if consideration to the overall context is given.⁷³ The primary meaning of Gen 2:15 appears to be agricultural and the secondary implications may be doxological or ecological, but varying the translation based on a desired implication is not warranted.

A fourth reason to maintain the agricultural interpretation is that the Gen 2:15 description of man’s responsibility to cultivate the Garden of Eden is surrounded by two clear references to his agricultural role. Genesis 2:5 says there is “no man to work the ground.” Additionally, Gen 3:23 states, “The Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.” No commentators dispute the agricultural use of **דבא** in these cases. The question then arises why Moses would use **דבא** to refer to agricultural work in Gen 2:5 and Gen 3:23 and then have a doxological meaning between them in Gen 2:15.⁷⁴ It is not impossible but it does not seem likely that there is such a significant variation

⁷¹ As an example, reformation era scholar Johannes Brenz supports the agricultural view, but argues that there is a spiritual element of divine worship in Adam’s vocation in the garden. The inclusion of work as the primary meaning need not exclude proper worship. Thompson, ed. *Genesis 1–11*, 88.

⁷² Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, 14–18. This is illustrated by the retention of the agricultural view of Gen 2:15 in the writings of multiple environmentally conscious theologians as cited above in footnote 48.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷⁴ Hiebert argues along these lines in support of his ecological view in concert with the documentary hypothesis: “Two opposite views of the relationship between humanity and the earth are present here: for P [as in Gen 1:28] the human is the land’s master, coercing it into service, while for J [as in Gen 2:5, 15; 3:23; 4:2] the human is the land’s servant, performing the duties demanded by its powers and processes.” Hiebert, *The Yahwist’s Landscape*, 157.

in the use of the word within so few verses.⁷⁵ The entire context of the narrative appears to be agricultural, with the secondary idea that vocation is doxological.

No doubt more reasons could be enumerated and expounded for maintaining the traditional interpretation of Gen 2:15.⁷⁶ Not only does the grammar at least allow, if not require, the agricultural translation, but the context of the passage and the theological implications of the three different views all argue toward maintaining the agricultural translation of Gen 2:15.⁷⁷

CONCLUSION

Of the three translations discussed in this essay, the textual and theological evidence points toward the traditional, agricultural interpretation of Gen 2:15 as the primary meaning. The ecological view appears to be driven primarily by a worldview that demands

⁷⁵ Also, Gen 2:18–20 refer to Adam doing animal husbandry; another reference to agriculture.

⁷⁶ For example, there are strong parallels between other ancient cosmogenic accounts and Genesis; in all sources, man was originally created to tend a divinely created garden paradise. This speaks to a shared memory outside of the Bible, which provides an echo of truth that is confirmed by inspired revelation. See: Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus*; *Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 95; A. R. Millard, “A New Babylonian “Genesis” Story,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 114–28.

⁷⁷ Given the weakness of the textual support for the alternate translations, maintaining the agricultural translation is also warranted because of the potential eco-centric readings that could be drawn from either the ecological or doxological views. A significant weakness of the ecological view is that there is a strong opportunity for an eco-centric worldview to develop where man’s efforts in the Garden and all of creation are essentially for the good of the creation itself rather than for God’s glory. The doxological view has even more opportunity for misuse in neo-paganism. If the verse is retranslated as “The Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to worship and obey,” then the resultant question must be: What is man supposed to worship and obey? All advocates of the doxological and ecological views would all argue that YHWH is the only appropriate object of worship, but by shifting an implication of the text to a primary meaning, the door is opened for an egregious error. The twin errors of eco-centrism and neo-paganism are unsupportable using Gen 2:15 if the agricultural interpretation is maintained. This alone is insufficient grounds for choosing the agricultural reading, but might sway the argument if the textual and contextual arguments were otherwise equal.

human subservience to creation, despite biblical evidence to the contrary. The doxological view appears to take a clear implication of the canon that stands behind the text and bring it to the foreground as the primary meaning for this text. The ecological translation has very little textual support and the doxological translation merely substitutes one grammatical question for new grammatical difficulties. Both innovative translation options have significant worldview implications that would bring into question the validity of the respective interpretation. The body of the evidence, in addition to more than two millennia of tradition, seems to support the traditional, agricultural translation of Gen 2:15 as the best option for future translations.

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