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A Vocational Reading of Gen 2:15 to Link Theology of Work and Ecotheology Following Escrivá's Christian Materialism

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Abstract: Genesis 2:15 has been widely used to support both a vocational dimension of work and an earth-caring attitude that goes beyond the dominion narrative of Genesis 1:28. However, this verse has not been interpreted to ground the connection between theology of work and ecotheology. Based on the concept of Christian materialism proposed by Saint Josemaría Escrivá, we give a new interpretation to this biblical passage in order to ground the human vocation to work by linking it to the need to care for or preserve the earth. Therefore, the transformation of creation that most professional activities carry out is qualified by the duty to do it with "care", that is, to transform the natural world with due respect for God's original creative plan. In this way, work can become co-creative, and the transformation of nature that work entails is linked to a divine call to develop it with respect for the inner meaning of all creatures.

Keywords: work; ecotheology; environment; theology; Christian Materialism; Josemaría Escrivá; Genesis 2:15

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1. Introduction

Environmental problems require new perspectives that better connect them with the concerns and values of ordinary citizens. This is especially necessary when the solution to these problems requires personal sacrifices. Religious motivations have been identified as one of the most prominent incentives for behavioural change (Clayton and Myers 2015; De Groot and Steg 2008; Orellano and Chuvieco 2022). Therefore, developing religious arguments that establish a strong link between environmental concern and action and the core beliefs of a particular religious tradition should increase the commitment of those who identify with that tradition (Minton et al. 2015; Morrison et al. 2015; Orellano et al. 2020). Christian appreciation of nature has typically been based on creation theology, Christology, eschatology, sacramental and moral theology. Recognizing the interest and importance of such grounds, new approaches may be very useful to extend the environmental commitment of religious adherents. This paper relies on connecting theology of work and ecotheology, as framed within the approach of Christian Materialism (ChM) presented and developed by Josemaría Escrivá (1902–1975), a Spanish priest and spiritual leader canonized by the Catholic Church in 2002. His proposal of ChM aimed to overcome the spiritual dualism that had prevailed in Christianity in the sense of separating the spiritual and material activities of ordinary believers, attributing spiritual value only to the former (prayer, sacraments, devotional activities). Escrivá emphasized the spiritual value of the

ordinary activities of lay Christians, especially professional work and family and social relationships. Although he did not apply these ideas to the appreciation of the natural world, this is a logical consequence of the ideal he promoted of "loving passionately the world" (Escrivá 1968). This paper presents the relevance given by Escrivá to the vocational approach to work and reflects on the ecotheological implications of the biblical basis of his proposal, based mainly on Genesis 2:15.[1]

2. Implications of Spiritual Dualism on Ecotheology

Dualistic positions have been recurrent throughout the history of Christianity (Gnostics, Docetists, Albigensians, Bogomils, etc.), all having in common a certain disdain for the material component of human nature. In its crudest forms, dualism involved disregarding the value of our bodily dimension in favour of the spiritual, resulting in a negative view of the world and earthly realities (Derrick 1972). These dualisms have been considered a driver of environmental degradation, as they support an anthropocentric view that radically separates humans from nature, as different authors have indicated (Hayes and Marangudakis 2001; Jenkins 2009; White 1967). However, most of these dualisms were also seen as deviating from the orthodoxy of the Church, most clearly shown in the early Christianity's rejection of Gnosticism and Manicheism (Saint Augustine 388–93; E. F. Osborn 2001). However, the more subtle dualisms, which favour a *spiritualized* version of Christianity, have met with much less resistance. Such spiritual dualisms tend to consider that only prayer and devotional activities are spiritually worthy, while secular activities would be marginal or incompatible with a holy life, implying a negative regard for the world. Consequently, professional, social and family activities, in which most lay Christians spend their lives, would be of marginal importance for their spiritual growth. In this worldview, only religious and priestly vocations would have spiritual value, while secular ones would be considered second-class (C. Taylor 1992). Within the Roman Catholic Church, manifestations of these spiritual dualisms have been quite common, even to this day, despite the message of the Second Vatican Council (SVC) declaring the universal call to holiness regardless of canonical status (lay, religious or priest), and that sanctifying material realities is a primary goal for lay Christians.

Escrivá pioneered a new consideration of the universal vocation to holiness. He underlined that Christians should love the world "passionately" (Escrivá 1968) since, far from being an obstacle to holiness, it is the right place to find and love God and to serve others: through a personal life of prayer amid ordinary activities, contributing with other fellow citizens to the progress of the entire society. Escrivá used the term ChM to synthesize his appreciation of the material dimension of everyday life, stressing that these realities (work, family, social, political and cultural activities) are not isolated from the struggle for holiness, but are the very subjects to be sanctified. His approach to ChM is quite different from other authors', who proposed this concept as a potential basis for fostering the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism (Hibbert 1969; Zaehner 1971), while others presented it in a more anthropological sense, to overcome soul–body dualism by somehow embedding the soul within the material dimensions of the body (Corcoran 2006; Inwagen 1995). In contrast to atheistic materialisms that ignore or disregard the spiritual dimension of human nature, as well as spiritualized versions of Christianity, which neglect the bodily dimensions of human life, Escrivá's approach to ChM considered that both the spiritual and material dimensions have religious value and, therefore, both must be considered when aspiring to holiness in the midst of the world. In addition to pioneering these ideas in the 1930s and 1940s, long before they were generally accepted by the Catholic Church, the relevance of St Josemaría's message regarding the spiritual appreciation of ordinary life was enhanced by the creation of a new institution within the Church, *Opus Dei* (OD), in

which thousands of lay Christians try to put it into practice, sanctifying their professional, social and family activities. Therefore, the choice of Escrivá as the central figure of this research is justified by the relevance and novelty of his interpretation of ChM, as well as by the practical importance of his influence on the lives of many lay men and women.

Escrivá was not a theologian but a spiritual leader, and his consideration of the natural world was in line with the mentality of the first half of the 20th century, long before environmental issues became socially relevant. This explains why he did not deal explicitly with ecological issues, and it is therefore necessary to re-evaluate his conception of ChM in order to apply it to ecotheology (Chuvieco 2024). Since the theology and spirituality of work is at the core of Escrivá's concept of ChM, it was a good basis to link his concept to ecotheology, overcoming spiritual dualisms that have also impacted environmental concern and action.

3. The Relevance of Work in Escrivá's Christian Materialism

Several reasons justify this central role of work in Escrivá's approach to ChM. Firstly, it is the most direct area in which the sanctification of material realities takes place, since most Christians devote a large part of their lives to work. Secondly, it clearly expresses our relationship with the material dimension of reality, since work is the usual way in which human beings transform matter (and thus nature) into goods to satisfy their needs. Thirdly, it is probably the most obvious issue where the differences between "materialisms blind to the spirit" (Escrivá 1968, n. 115) and ChM can be observed. Finally, work is the most evident sphere where the spiritual value of material realities is manifested (Aranda 2018; Fernández-García 2004; Pia Chirinos 2012; Rodríguez 2017): "For lay Christians, the professional, family and social vocation is not opposed to their supernatural vocation. On the contrary, it is an integral part of it" (Escrivá 1970, n. 60).

This vocational dimension of work was anchored by Escrivá in Sacred Scripture, mainly in Gen. 2:15, which indicates that God placed man "in the garden of Eden, to cultivate/work and keep/care for it" ("*ut operaretur et custodire illum*", following the Latin Vulgate, which Escrivá used to quote). He emphasized that work is conceived as a prelapsarian vocation of humanity, a loving mandate of God to make us sharers in his Creation, and therefore as a positive reality, not as a punishment resulting from human infidelity, as different theologies of work have indicated (Bergsma 2018; Wilson 2013): "Work is man's original vocation. It is a blessing from God, and those who consider it a punishment are sadly mistaken. -The Lord, who is the best of fathers, placed the first man in Paradise *ut operaretur*, so that he would work" (Escrivá 1988).[2]

Work can therefore be seen first and foremost as cooperation with God's work, transforming matter along the lines of God's original will. Only the effort involved in work is the fruit of sin, and not the work itself, and is therefore also linked to the restoration of matter that comes from Christ's redemptive sacrifice. Although the vocational dimension of work had been widely recognized by Protestant theologians, particularly by Luther (Hanson 2022; Volf 1991), St Josemaría gave it a new understanding: not as a divine call to carry out a specific task (whether manual or intellectual), unique and stable, as in the Lutheran view, but rather as a means by which the vocation to holiness is realized: the vocational is the call to work, rather than to work in a specific activity, and therefore it is compatible with the changes that may be experienced throughout life because of personal decisions or the evolution of professional circumstances: "A professional vocation is something that takes shape throughout life: not infrequently, someone who has started a certain degree course later discovers that he/she is more suited to other occupations (...) your life is subject to the same rules as those of others. And it is that life, with all the changes that

the various circumstances in which you find yourself may bring, that you must sanctify" (Letter 15.10.1948, n. 33–34).

Along with this vocational dimension, Escrivá also added other material aims, among them financial sustenance to cover personal and family needs, the development of one's own personality, the contribution to social progress and to remedying the problems of the society in which it is carried out, since the Christian, like any other citizen, must contribute to the construction of the "city of men" while, at the same time, being convinced that this is a transitory world.

Work is also the primary sphere where spiritual and material realities intersect, the most immediate place to live the "unity of life" that Escrivá suggested, aiming to encounter Christ in the midst of those ordinary activities: "God is calling you to serve Him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life (. . .) This leads you to do your work perfectly, to love God and mankind by putting love in the little things of everyday life, and discovering that divine something which is hidden in small details" (Escrivá 1968, n. 114 and 116).

The relevance of work in the spirituality of Escrivá is also manifested in the legal documents defining the aims of the Catholic institution he founded (*Opus Dei, OD*), starting from the first approval by the local diocese in 1941 to the statutes given by the Vatican when it was erected as Personal Prelature in 1982 (Fuenmayor et al. 1994). St Josemaría clearly indicated that sanctification of work and ordinary realities was the core of the charism he was spreading, as he considered professional activities to be the "hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to get closer to God while being fully involved in temporal affairs" (Escrivá 1990, n. 61). The term hinge, referring to the central role of work in the spirituality of OD, the pivotal point around which all interior life and apostolate circles, is frequently used in Escrivá's writings (Escrivá 1974, n. 45; 1990, n. 58, 61, 62, 81).

It is worth noting that St Josemaría's vision of work goes beyond the modern identification of work with paid work. His conception encompasses all occupations that can be sanctified, including not only paid employment but also other activities that are generally not financially compensated, such as studying, housework or social volunteering, as well as those that do not form part of the labour market, such as retirement, medical incapacity or unemployment. In this sense, he considered that all honest professions, whether intellectual or manual, with higher or lower social reputation, can be sanctified, from being prime minister or plumber to teacher or domestic worker: all have the same importance, and, therefore, ". . . it makes no sense to classify men differently, according to their occupation, as if some jobs were more noble than others" (Escrivá 1974, n. 47).

4. The Biblical Basis of the Vocational Dimension of Work

Escrivá based his vocational dimension of work on the first two chapters of Genesis, in which God entrusts human beings with the task of continuing, in some way, his creative work. Those chapters have been commonly used to support different theologies of work (Bergsma 2018; Ostring and Davidson 2016), as well as different versions of the relationship between humankind and the rest of creation (Bauckham 2010; Horrell 2024). However, both aspects have not been linked previously, neither from theologians of work nor ecotheologians.

As is well established in scholarship on the book of Genesis, the first two chapters show two different traditions, the priestly (Genesis 1 and 2:1–3) and the non-priestly (Genesis 2:4b–25), both showing different and complementary views of God's creative action (Carr 2020). Gen. 1 describes the evolutionary cycles of Creation and the role of the various creatures in the divine plan, exhibiting the beauty and goodness of the whole ("and he saw that everything was good" in several verses of this chapter). Gen. 2:4–25 describes a

different account of the origins, focusing on the garden of Eden, the role of the first human (Adam) and his relationships with other animals and then the first female. The story leads to chapter 3 with the transgression against God's law, the disobedience of man and woman, and the expulsion from the garden of Eden.

Regarding humanity's role in creation, the priestly narrative grants humanity dominion over the rest of creation as a consequence of being created in God's image, giving them the mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28), which some authors have interpreted as a biblical endorsement of the human's unrestrained use/abuse of other creatures. This was White's main argument to criticize Christianity for providing a religious support for environmental degradation (White 1967). This argument has been used by other authors (Jenkins 2009; Taylor et al. 2016), but it has also been answered by many others from different perspectives: theological and biblical (Bouma-Prediger 1995; Conradie 2006; L. Osborn 1993; B. Taylor 2016), historical (Harrison 1999) and statistical (Chuvieco et al. 2016). However, in the context of theologies of work, this verse has been understood as a manifestation of God's willingness to entrust human beings with the responsibility of developing creation and ultimately transforming it through their work, which would be a manifestation of human dominion over the rest of Creation, as it is explicitly indicated in the Second Vatican Council's constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 12 and 57) and the encyclical letter *Laborem Exercens* (John Paul II 1981).

On the other hand, the non-priestly tradition of Gen. 2:15 shows more clearly the vocational dimension of work, as Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden to "work/till and care/keep for it". Several authors consider Gen. 2:15 as a constitutive definition of humanity's vocation. For example, Claus Westermann and John Scullion frame this constitutive character of work in the context of the importance attached to it in Genesis ("work is regarded here as an essential part of human existence" (Westermann and Scullion 1984, pp. 219–22). Hamilton holds the same view of the fundamental role of work in the biblical narrative: "Work enters the picture before sin does, and if man had never sinned, he still would be working" (Hamilton 1990, p. 171). These authors pointed out the contrast between the biblical narrative on work and the Sumerian and Babylonian creation myths, in which work is considered a divine punishment (Carr 2020; Pérez-Gondar 2023).

Gen. 2:15 was the main biblical argument used by Escrivá in his vocational approach to work, quoting this verse in many of his writings (Escrivá 1970, n. 10, 24, 55; 1988, n. 482; 1990, n. 57, 81, 169). Escrivá considered that, since the divine call indicated in Gen. 2:15 predates the original sin, the vocation to work should not be seen as an evil consequence of the Fall, but as a positive mandate that makes us sharers in the unfolding of Creation.

In the context of ecotheologies, Gen. 2:15 has not been associated with the vocational character of work, but rather has been noted for providing a gentle view of the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation, closer to an environmental stewardship approach than Genesis 1:28, which seems to endorse the human dominion/subduing of the earth (Bauckham 2010; Bouma-Prediger 2010, 2019; Castillo 2019; Hamilton 1990; L. Osborn 1993).

Although Escrivá used both Gen. 1:28 and Gen. 2:15 to substantiate the vocational character of work, the latter was much more frequent in his writings (more than 15 times, versus twice for the former). Most probably he did so not because Gen. 2:15 was more environmentally friendly than Gen. 1:28, but rather because the former more clearly evidenced the original divine call to work. However, it is also worthwhile to note that Escrivá never considered that the main purpose of work was to subdue the earth, since when he used Gen. 1:28, twice in Escrivá (1974), he did not emphasize the transformative character of work, much less advocated for the indiscriminate transformation of nature. His main concern was to show the spiritual value of work as a means of personal sanctification

beyond its environmental implications, which he did not develop. However, his positive view of material realities, especially through his comments on the original goodness of creation, implied a pro-environmental rather than an anti-environmental attitude.

Gen. 2:1–3 (still within the Priestly tradition) includes explicit mentions of God's work: "He rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had undertaken" (Gen. 2:2), repeating the same idea in the following verse. The divine rest (cf. Gen. 2:3), which refers readers to the Sabbath on the basis of other traditions, is precisely justified by summarising God's work during the preceding days. Consequently, following the beginning of Gen. 2, we can properly call Creation "the Work of God" and God "the first Worker". Unlike other theologies of work, which have seen in Gen. 2:2 a statement of God's work activity (John Paul II 1981; Maspero 2021), Escrivá did not conceive human work as an imitation of God's creative work, but primarily as a participation in it (Escrivá 1974, n. 47). He rather presented the working life of Jesus as the example that a Christian should imitate, with those hidden years of Jesus' life being central to his theology of work (Escrivá 1990, nn. 55–72).

5. Ecotheological Implications

Focusing on the main verse that Escrivá used to substantiate the vocational character of work, it is worth exploring the theological implications of this verse for the relationship between work and ecotheology. The Vulgate version that Escrivá quoted for this verse included two verbs, *operaretur* (cultivate/till/work) and *custodire* (custody/keep/care), and therefore if this verse grounds the vocational character of work it is relevant to question whether this original divine call comprises the two verbs or just the first one. In fact, St Josemaría never commented in his frequent quotations of Gen. 2:15 on the relevance of *custodire* for the vocation to work or even its implications for the way one should work, and therefore we do not know in what sense *custodire* is part of his theology of work, let alone how it can be related to his view of caring for Creation. In spite of his silence on this aspect, and given that Gen. 2:15 is substantial in Escrivá's vocational interpretation of work, it is important to dwell on it in attempting to link his theology of work with ecotheology. From this perspective, several key questions arise. The most obvious is: what does the divine call to keep/care the garden really mean? Is it simply to ensure that the fruits are harvested at the right time, i.e., to watch over the harvest, or rather to ensure that the land is worked in such a way that its fertility endures? And, if we adopt the meaning of "caring for", what does this care bring to the vocational dimension of work?

5.1. Working with Care

We may begin by reflecting on the first question based on the biblical narrative and the interpretation offered by the early Christian tradition and recent ecotheologians. What does *custodire* really mean, both from the point of view of the action to be performed (to care for, to keep, to watch over) and the object (garden, crop, land)?

The Latin verb used in both the Vulgate and the Neovulgate is frequently used in the Old Testament to describe many actions, such as to guard (Gen. 3:24), to keep (a promise Gen. 17:9; 30:31), to protect someone (Gen. 28:15) or even to confine (in prison: Gen. 39:20), just to quote from Genesis. The Hebrew word used in Gen. 2:15 (*samar*) has similar meanings (to keep, maintain, guard), but according to Kristin Swenson in the context of Gen. 2:15, where the narrative takes place in a pristine setting, the verb indicates a custodial attitude on behalf of "…the garden's welfare (…which also…) produces delight and serenity for the human being", and therefore it should be better translated as caring or caretaking (Swenson 2006). However, she also indicates that the object of care is not the land in general (*adamah*), but only the garden (*gan*), because *abodah* without *samar* is

previously used in Gen. 2:5 to indicate that there was no man to cultivate the land, and again in Gen. 3:23 referring to postlapsarian working conditions, while *samar* is not quoted again in Gen. 2–3. Therefore, it can be concluded that after the Fall work is no longer done gently, with care, but rather with toil, "by the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat" (Gen. 3:19); hence the double meaning of work, which is still retained in many languages, as a task and as an effort.

On the other hand, the verb *samar* appears again in Gen. 4:9, but in this case it does not refer to the land but to a person. When Cain responds to God after killing his brother, he excuses himself by saying: "Shall I care/custody (*samar*) my brother?". This implies that care also applies to postlapsarian conditions. Following Swenson's interpretation again, Cain discovers that "even though he worked in reverent service to *abodah* the land, carrying on that part of the human mandate, he was not absolved of the duty to *samar* and that duty, Cain learns, extends not only to the land but to other people, too" (Swenson 2006, p. 383). As a result of rejecting his responsibility he finds the rejection of the land, which will bear him no fruit.

The careful attitude towards the earth implied in Gen. 2:15 also appears in other biblical texts, such as the post-Flood covenant with Noah, which includes all creatures (Gen. 9), the prescriptions of Leviticus to rest the earth (following the Sabbath cycle: Lev. 25:2–5), or the command to avoid harming "the grass of the earth or any plant or any tree" during the last plagues of Revelation (Rev. 9:4, similar idea in 7:3).

Analysis of the ecclesiastical tradition on Gen. 2:15 does not provide further insights on the interpretation of this verse to illuminate the Christian consideration of work, since the theology of work is not extensively dealt with by the early Fathers. Escrivá greatly appreciated the commentary on Sacred Scripture by those early theologians, but he never quoted any in relation to his use of Gen. 2:15. Several Fathers wrote extensive commentaries of Genesis 1, describing in detail the different phases of Creation and the importance of the final Sabbath rest, but only a few also commented on Gen. 2:15. The detailed analysis of Bouteneff (2008) on early Fathers' comments on Gen. 1–3 do not even mention Gen. 2:15. The compilation made by the Catena Bible project (https://catenabible.com) includes seven commentaries by Fathers of Gen. 1 (Basil, Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Nemesius and Hippolytus), some of them very extensive, while Gen. 2:15 is briefly commented by four (Ambrose, Ephrem, Augustine and Chrysostom), and none considered this verse as the foundation of an original vocation of human beings to work, let alone that the divine command to *care for it* should refer to the well-being of the earth. However, it is worth quoting Bergsma's commentary, who emphasizes that the combination of *abodah* and *samar* is quite unusual in the Hebrew Bible and is commonly linked to a liturgical office (Bergsma 2018, p. 18). A similar idea is shared by other biblical scholars (Hahn 2006; Morrow 2009). However, these two verbs also appear in Deut 13:5 and 16:12 with a non-cultic, legal meaning. In any case, the liturgical interpretation of Bergsma and Hahn is certainly plausible. According to his interpretation, Adam, before the Fall, would have been called by God to perform some kind of liturgical work in dealing with the earth, or, in other words, he could be considered a priest of creation. This concept has been extensively developed by some Christian ecotheologians (Chryssavgis and Asproulis 2021; Wirzba 2011; Zizioulas 2006).

5.2. Linking Theology of Work and Ecotheology

The use of Gen. 2:15 within ecotheology is much more extended than in theology of work, mostly to underpin the stewardship role of Adam. But the relevant comments of this verse do not consider its connections with theology of work, therefore emphasizing the *custodire* but forgetting the *ut operaretur*. Norman Habel, in his particular ecotheological

interpretation of the biblical narrative, interprets *abodah* and *samar* as "serve and preserve", assuming that the garden was forest, not agricultural land, and therefore the role of Adam was to maintain its integrity (Habel 2011, pp. 46–66), while Brown considers that Eden was an agricultural irrigated area and Adam's work was to make it more fertile and preserve its fruits, to "tend and keep what has already been planted" (Brown 1999, p. 138). Hiebert stresses the different roles assigned to human beings in Gen. 1 and 2, the former as a manager and the latter as a farmer, "an equal member of the community of life and a servant of nature's processes" (Hiebert 2000, p. 117), while Bauckham or Brown translate *custodire* as to keep or preserve, implying that the divine mandate entails that Adam takes care of the soil (Bauckham 2010, p. 22; Brown 2010, p. 81). Finally, Castillo brings a political ecology interpretation to the Genesis narrative, indicating that the verse is a call for humans to live in a threefold communion with God, neighbour and earth, giving them the role of gardeners of the world, but never mentions the connections between "serving and caring" the garden and human labour (Castillo 2019, pp. 67–101).

Within specific studies on the two verbs included in Gen. 2:15, Giussepe Di Carlo argues that the conjunction between *abodah* and *samar* suggests to "defend and preserve the integrity" of Creation, and that this responsibility "extends into the future and could be called providential" (Di Carlo 2013, p. 19). Following Brueggemann (1982) on this point, Di Carlo considers that a caring attitude towards Creation is part of the divine vocation to be co-creators and custodians, in the threefold relationship with God, earth and our fellow human beings. Nggada and Malgwi (2021) defend the argument that Adam's activity in Eden was to work and care for the earth, implying a divine mandate to work even before the Fall, and therefore, in the same sense as Escrivá, consider work a positive reality, a primary component of the human vocation. They favour a more literal interpretation of Gen. 2:15, considering *abodah* as manual and non-liturgical work, and *samar* as the responsibility to maintain the fertility of the garden, imitating God who also worked in Creation and protects his creatures. However, as this work was carried out in paradisiacal conditions, framed in a harmonious relationship with nature, they suggested that it should be considered a priestly activity, connecting also with the idea of "being a priest of our environment", who has the "responsibility of protecting it against anything that will pollute its ideal standard" (Nggada and Malgwi 2021, p. 78). In the same vein to these authors, Pope Francis uses Gen. 2:15 in his encyclical latter on the environment (*Laudato Si'*) as a biblical base for environmental stewardship: "Tilling refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while keeping means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature" (Pope Francis 2015, n. 67). Cardinal Turkson, commenting the Laudato Si, underlines a similar idea by pointing out that the human vocation: "is 'to till and to keep' it (the universe). But tilling and keeping cannot include domination and devastation -lest we till too much and keep too little! These make a mockery of dignity and respect of God's gift" (Turkson 2019).

Regardless of the importance of Gen. 2:15 for the early Christian reflection on Creation, the exegetical analysis of the biblical text and Escrivá's frequent use of this verse underline its relevance for connecting theology of work and ecotheology. Considering the substantial character of this verse for both disciplines, the absence of texts that have put them in direct relation is particularly striking. On the one hand, from the frequent quotations of Gen. 2:15 by ecotheologians, no reference is made regarding the possible application of this verse to qualify the vocational dimension of work with an earth-caring attitude. For instance, in a recent book on the biblical roots of ecology (Yebra and Aldave 2024), none of the twenty chapters include any reference to theology of work, even though two focus their comments on Gen. 1 and 2 (Gomez-García 2024; Rodriguez-Torné 2024). On the other hand, the general and widely used commentaries on Genesis by the-

ologians of work do not mention what *samar/custodire* adds to the vocational character of *abodah/operaretur*, apart from a manifestation of agricultural activity (Hamilton 1990; Skinner 1956; Westermann and Scullion 1984).

With regard to the question that we posed at the beginning of this section, we can conclude that, despite the possible different interpretations of *custodire*, this verb is certainly part of the constitutive working vocation of human beings, as manifested in Gen. 2:15. In short, the internal connection between work and care should better frame the purpose and ways of working within an ecotheological perspective. In this sense, *operaretur* carries a certain responsibility to make the earth more fruitful and to expand the possibilities opened up by creation through human effort, but when it is linked to *custodire*, it implies considering a relational meaning and thus a responsibility (to care) for other human beings and the natural world, contributing to their maintenance, restoration or flourishing. This idea is shared by one of the main essays on theology of work, written by Miroslav Volf, who, when commenting Gen. 2:15, indicates that "All work must have not only a productive but also a protective aspect. Therefore, economic systems must be integrated into the given biological systems of ecological interdependence (since . . .) all human labour must include an element of creation care" (Volf 1991, p. 145).

6. Conclusions

Drawing on Escrivá's vocational theology of work, we have shown how a new reading of Gen. 2:15 could help to frame a new connection between theology of work and ecotheology. We first reflected on the ecotheological implications of the biblical texts that Escrivá used to support his vocational approach to work, comparing his frequent recourse to Gen. 2:15 with other Catholic theologians' more-frequent use of Gen. 1:28. Although he never explained his choice of the former verse as being more environmentally friendly than the latter, it is reasonable to deduce from this biblical foundation that his approach to work was very positive towards nature. The ecotheological extension of his vision implies that work must be done with care, following the second command in Gen. 2:15 (*et custodire*). Since we do not know Escrivá's interpretation of this second verb, we can rely on his indirect comments on the kind of work that sanctifies us, in particular the idea of rectitude of intention (working for love of God) and generosity to others, which implies that care involves working with attention to the consequences of our work not only on other human beings, but also on other creatures. In this way, human work can be co-creative, helping the rest of creation to fulfil its divine purpose, restoring when required the degradation introduced by human misdoings, and providing the common flourishing of both human beings, particularly the most vulnerable, and all other creatures.

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[1] The main ideas of this paper were included in Chuvieco's DPhil dissertation, presented at the Faculty of Theology and Religion of the University of Oxford (Chuvieco 2024).

[2] Escrivá died in 1975. Therefore, all references after this date are posthumous writings, mostly taken from his spiritual notes written in the 1930s and early 1940s or from his oral preaching.

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