Genesis 2: The two verbs "to cultivate and to keep
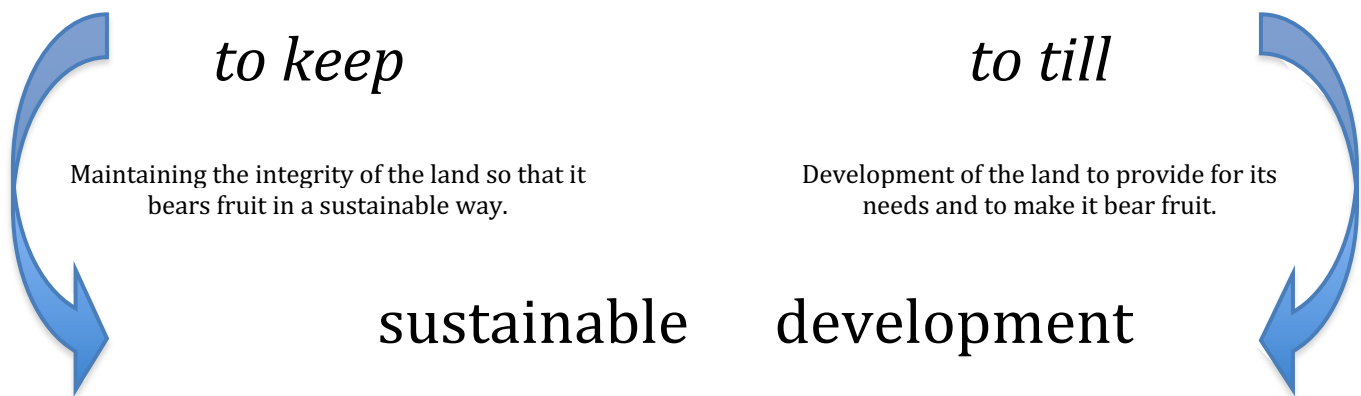
And what is the role of the human being in this garden? God invites him to keep it and cultivate the soil. (Gen 2:15) The verb to cultivate, in Hebrew *lavda*, also means to serve. The human being must serve the earth! In the Bible, it is more often a question of serving God. But when you think about it, "serving the earth" and "serving God" both ensure a fruitful life!

Both verbs are important. Firstly, the verb **'to cultivate'** concerns the idea of developing the land. It implies cutting, sowing, building, developing. The Brundtland report in 1987 insisted on this positive dimension of development, particularly for poor countries. Secondly, the verb **'to keep'** concerns a long-term vision, a sustainable garden. We then realise that, in the first pages of the Bible, there is the inspiration for sustainable development! This concept is already there, in our Judeo-Christian tradition.

to keep   to till

Maintaining the integrity of the land so that it bears fruit in a sustainable way.

Development of the land to provide for its needs and to make it bear fruit.

sustainable   development

Origin of the word :
In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundtland Report used the concept of "Sustainable Development", defined as follows:

"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Two concepts are inherent in this notion:

- the concept of "needs", especially the basic needs of the poorest, which should be given the highest priority;
- the idea of the limitations that the state of our technology and social organisation imposes on the capacity of the environment to meet present and future needs. "

Naming the animals

In verses 19 and 20, "the animal is called a living being (literally 'breath of life'), like man. The author first emphasises the close link between humans and animals and then makes clear the superiority of humans. He will give particular names to the different species of animals, thus demonstrating his [intelligence] and power. "
(TOB Bible 2011, footnotes)

Most exegetes agree that Adam names the animals to show that he has power over them.

I would venture to go further. While it is true that a family names a pet when it comes into the house, and that this name is used to call it, discipline it and scold it. But there is no indication that Adam names all creatures for the purpose of making them pets.

It seems to me that Adam names all the animals for an exploratory, almost encyclopaedic purpose. In fact, Psalm 104 is, in a way, the wildlife dictionary of the Bible. I imagine Adam marvelling at the diversity of living beings and naming them to remind himself of it. Let's think of Brother Marie-Victorin who travelled through Quebec in order to describe the Laurentian flora. He was the first to make a botanical classification of all the plant species in our province. Thanks to his naming effort, we can name the plants again, and also give some characteristics.

The act of naming involves a sensitivity to the other. It is to acknowledge its existence. We only have to think back to the teachers we knew. When one of them was able to call us by name, we felt important in his eyes and we were much happier than when another teacher did not know our name.

The sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd; the sheep that belong to him he calls by name, and leads them out" (Jn 10:3). "(Jn 10:3). God called Abraham by name, and Moses too. There is such great tenderness to be imitated between this Creator God who knows all his Creation in the smallest details. "Not one of the sparrows falls to the ground without God your Father knowing it. "(Mt 10:29)

A personal challenge

Would you be able to name all the creatures that live in your environment? Instead of saying "birds", can you distinguish between nuthatches, sparrows and chickadees? Instead of saying "conifer", can you distinguish the larch, the spruce and the fir? Instead of saying "fish", can you tell the difference between bass, carp and pike?