Interpreting of Genesis throughout history

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| **Renaissance/Enlightenment**   * Renaissance/Enlightenment (16th century Europe) * Advances in science, technology and philosophy * People believed humanity could change the world for the better.   *Francis Bacon (1561-1626)*   * One of the founders of modern science * Saw the scientific task as a vocation based on Genesis 1.28 * God has given humans the ability to understand and control nature, for human benefit:   ‘I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave... [Scientific discoveries] have the power to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations.’ (Francis Bacon) | **The 19th century**   * The development of social sciences in the 19th century reinforced ideas of human dominance. * They sought to understand, and then control, the laws governing human behaviour and interactions. * August Comte (a founder of modern sociology) famously described the task of sociology as:   ‘savoir pour prevoir; prevoir pour pouvoir’  (‘knowledge serves foresight; foresight serves power’)   * It seemed that the expansion of human scholarship could bring limitless benefits.   *Genesis 1 and human power*   * Humans imagined themselves in a position of domination and control. * But the ancient biblical texts gave support to this idea. * Genesis 1 was interpreted as encouraging humans to make the most of their God-given power over nature. |
| **An age of ecological crisis**   * In the early 20th century, the optimism of the enlightenment was shattered. * The First World War, the Holocaust and the threat of nuclear war showed humans to be capable of terrible evil as well as good. * Ideas of progress towards a better world now seemed idealistic and naïve.   *Environmental damage*   * In recent decades, the impact of humans on the nature world has become increasingly apparent. * The question now is can we act with sufficient speed to limit the negative consequences of global warming. * The hope is that the rise can be limited to two degrees, although this is looking increasingly unlikely.   *Genesis and stewardship*   * In this context, interpretation of Genesis which favour stewardship are preferred. * Often, this is presented as a rediscovery of what the Bible ‘really’ says. * Previous interpretations are seen as distortions:   ‘Humans were created to act nobly in the place of the Creator… this leaves no room for "lording over" or "mastering" humans or any other living things. Tragically, the passage [in Genesis 1] has all too often been distorted and used to justify the domination of both human beings and nature.’ (Brennan R. Hill)  **Keywords:**  **Dominion -** human beings were created by God in His image and therefore they can use the environment (and animals) as they wish  **Stewardship -** humans were created by God in His image and therefore humans have a duty to be ‘stewards’ of the environment and care and look after it. | |