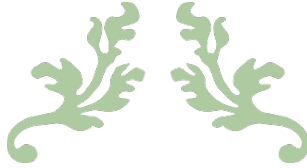


**NARIMAN GASIMOGLU**



**SPIRITUAL  
READING GUIDE  
ON SHARED  
NATURE**



Commonalities in the BIBLE and the KORAN from  
Ecotheology Perspectives



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## FOREWORD, OR HOW FAITH EXPERIENCES BROUGHT ME TO THIS RESEARCH

### ***Prayers always heard...***

...Gasim Gasimzada, a prominent Azerbaijani poet, has written a lot of poems dedicated to nature with each one more beautiful than the other. Their beauty actually is not limited to descriptive motifs at all, as one can generally assume that nature poems should be. The author sees himself as part of mountains, forests, rivers, seas, herbs, stones, rocks, and sometimes socializes with eagles gliding proudly above mountain heights, a colony of gulls flopping over sea waves, or deer he encounters while on an island; he asks his natural bosom friends about their plight, shares looks of love with flowers growing on “lion--mouth of abyss”... He joins waves surging up in anger at those polluting waters, cries out to be heard by those in charge of building motor roads to habitats of living creatures. He feels joyful seeing branchy trees and mourns when seeing them cut off, uprooted. His relations with nature are not one--sided, as the natural beings with whom he socializes are in intimate, live

contact with him as well. In one of his lovely poems, called “The Mountains Don’t Let Me Go,” he says he was forced to leave the bosom of mountainous nature where he stayed for quite a while as the “elgovan” flower had already come out of the earth. Unfortunately, I don’t know the English equivalent of “elgovan” flower which literally means “the one that drives the folk away”. And I am not sure if this wildflower grows anywhere other than Azerbaijan either. Once it appears on the ground in a mountainous environment, you have to take off right away. It serves as a sign of nature’s warning of thick mist and blowing snow in which people will definitely be caught if they are not mindful of its message. Therefore, the poet appreciatively receives this message and parts from the beloved mountains to which he had retreated. He views every natural hurdle on his horseback journey as an expression of the unwillingness of the mountains to part with him after such long intimate relations between the beloved. At parting, nature seems moved to tears, as it starts heavily raining. When the rain stops, it is followed by a mist that blocks the view as not to let him be able to proceed. And once the mist disperses, he sees how a wide trail is blocked by grandiose fallen

rocks. Encountering one more obstacle, which is a big old fallen oak on a forest trail, he says jokingly this time: “the mountains brandishing a tree stick don’t let me go”.

Slope after slope up and down,  
Narrow passageways, canyons  
At one moment were like gates  
opening then closing,  
At another were like riders out-riding  
me to block my way.  
But when I got on a smooth road,  
I heard mountains say offended  
“if you decided to go then go ahead...”\*

I opened my eyes to the world in the family of the poet mentioned, in Azerbaijan, a country where nine out of eleven existing climate zones are present. An unforgettable part of my life was pursued together with him in vine and fig orchards of the Absheron peninsula, on sandy costs of the Caspian sea, at high latitudes of Kelbejar region, Shusha and Gubadli forests, and many other beautiful lands. I cannot help

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\* word-by-word translation from Azerbaijani

but recall how we enjoyed walking in Shusha on the “Jydyr duzu” (“Horse Race Field”) plain that ends right before the seemingly bottomless abyss, and drank cool spring waters in mountainous areas of Kelbejar, called “Baba yurdu” (“Fatherland”) and “Kemer qaya” (“Belt Rocks”). Recalling how we both bathed every morning in a big waterfall of the latter, I feel like it adds now a kind of cooling flavor to my mood tuned up to wonderful memories. Direct communion with nature over long months, plus being the first in our family to listen to poems instilling the sacredness of nature in me – I guess there could not be any better ecological school than this, which played an important role in shaping my worldview and was essential for my spiritual growth.

By the way, the religious mindset of some Azerbaijani Turks reveals traces of a tree cult that has been practiced for centuries before and after adoption of Islam. For example, plane trees in certain districts of Azerbaijan are considered sacred and thus placed in the yards of some mosques and places of pilgrimage. There are people who believe that if you dare to cut a tree, you will be cursed with a bad end. One of my relatives once had a big tree cut down without any



particular reason. After a little while he passed away. Another one of my relatives, pointing to this, said he should not have destroyed that tree. I assume that archaic beliefs with their ecological content have no real potential to shape the ecological mindset of people since they are not deeply rooted in the religious views of the majority. My religiosity was and still is no exception.

The love for nature that was passed on to me from Gasim Gasimzada since my early childhood had its own intimate place in my deep feelings towards the Divine. Once we were on a visit to Neftchala region in close vicinity of the Kur river banks. We were invited there to take a river trip on board a ship to reach the final destination of the Kur river where it merges with the Caspian sea. During the trip we happened to see fishermen pulling a big net, apparently cast long ago, up to the shore where a related government--run fishery was located. One of those accompanying us on the trip was a local influential governmental official, and he jokingly suggested that we sail up to the shore and observe how many fish would be caught for good luck. I knew that as a sign of respect for my father the poet, people around would insist we take a few fish

as a gift. This made me feel uneasy and have pity on fish. I expressed in silence my deepest prayer to God for no fish to be caught in the net. What happened was that they were pulling and pulling the net with no sign of a fish. The fishermen looked embarrassed, telling each other “no, it is impossible, it would never happen, this big net and no damn fish?” But when they were about to take the net out of the water, one of the fishermen screamed, “look what is there in the net”. To our great surprise there was a very big salmon with plenty of red stains on it. “This seems to be by your fortune, as we very rarely happen to catch any salmon in these waters, not to mention the kind of this size” – they said happily. My happiness I had enjoyed a little earlier got mixed up with an uncertain sadness. At first I had thought my prayer was answered by God and many hundreds of fish were saved as a result. But what happened then? Why was this big salmon to be caught in the net? I could find the answer only later when I translated the Koran into my native Azeri Turkic. Now I assume that was a sign of divine environmental teaching about conservation ethics, as if God were appealing to the eyes, minds and souls of people – those in the presence of a poet and nature lover – and was telling them “look, I am granting you

the most beautiful fish ever caught, but no more than one of this kind, so be satisfied with this; do not be greedy, do not put an end to beauty...”

My scholarly activities over the long years past were primarily linked to conducting reforming research concerning Islamic theology and introducing the results of this research into the agenda of both wide public opinion and religious communities in Azerbaijan, where I live and work. I am happy to state that my reform activities in both theoretical and practical fields, following my Koranic translation in Azeri Turkic which was published en masse----first in “Khazar” journal (1990--1993) and then as a separate book (1993)----could to a certain extent contribute to preventing the religious mindset of Azerbaijanis from being influenced by fundamentalism and medieval interpretations.

I believe that reformation in the Muslim mind can be well promoted by orienting the related religiosity towards ecological concerns. Unfortunately, the current religious mindset of the Muslim majority is not sensitive to ecological issues<sup>1</sup>, although Islamic eco--theology----like Jewish and Christian eco--theologies----

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<sup>1</sup> Nasr, Hossein. “Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis”. *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, edited by Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny and Azizan Baharuddin. 85–105. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003.

has already been well established as a new theological discipline thanks to a series of works written by Muslim scholars such as Seyyid Hossein Nasr, Mawil Izzi Dien, Mustafa Abu-Sway, Ali Ahmad, Akhtaruddin Ahmad, Mohammed Ajmal, Tajuddin Alhilaly, Nawal Ammar, Abraham Ozdemir and many others. Not having been previously familiarized with their works, I once wrote an article entitled “Environmental Ethics in the Light of Koranic Verses” and gave a number of talks on this topic in Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan. That article unexpectedly brought me on a long trip abroad, which I counted as God’s grace. I received an invitation from the Most Rev. Metropolitan John of Pergamon to participate in a symposium on board a ship travelling in Brazil on the Amazon River under the patronage of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, and the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan. The invitation was sent to me by Mrs. Maria Becket, coordinator of the international group *Religion, Science and the Environment*.

I felt like I got led to think of his grace on a journey from the Caspian costs to the Amazon river. The reason I considered the chance to participate in this event God’s grace was because of a decision made previously in favor of my religious studies in late 2005 and early

2006 when I stood before a dilemma to choose one of two options offered: either to accept a promising job from a material perspective, which was quite tempting for me and my family, or to accept an offer I had received from the US Scholar Rescue Fund for a temporary work on the second version of my Koranic translation in Budapest, under the conditions of being slightly secluded from the public, in an environment any creative person can dream of working in. In principle, I could put off the latter until later or do that right in noisy Baku city, making use of material means quite decent for our living standards, along with being secluded in my home from time to time. The thing that I never talked about to anyone before except my family members was that I accepted the dilemma as a test of God, who did not leave my prayers unheard, and thus I declined the job in question with deep inner pleasure. This decision was unexpectedly followed by the invitation to *Religion, Science and the Environment* Symposium in Brazil, which I could not accept as other than God's grace, having had a joyful pleasure of faith.

This was the sixth water--borne symposium arranged by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I. The event was attended by two hundred participants----theologians, scientists, policy--

makers, environmentalists and the media----and was dedicated to the topic “Amazon, Source of Life”. It took place “in the heart of the largest forested area on earth, a region whose beauty, biological diversity and delicate ecological balance are among the greatest gifts of God’s creation”, as was stated in the invitation letter. The organizers also wrote that “on a planet where climate change, induced by human activities, is accelerating in an alarming way and threatening the lives of millions of people, the trees of the Amazon offer an invaluable service to the whole of humanity by acting as a brake on global warming”.

I gave my talk at the plenary session of this important event with my paper “Environmental Ethics in Light of Koranic Verses”.

After the event I received a letter from one of the participants, Jones James, bishop of Liverpool, UK, which I have saved in my e-mail box as evidence of the benefit of inter- religious perspectives on the grounds of promoted eco- theologies. It said: “Dear Nariman, I continue to think often about the conversation that we had when we were in the Amazon for the Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment. I met recently with David Miliband who is the Secretary of State for the Environment in the UK Government. I took the liberty of showing him

your paper on environmental ethics in light of Koranic verses. He was extremely interested in what you have written. I think he may well be referring to it on his own website. I felt I should let you know about this. I very much appreciated reading your paper and the Koranic verses and discovering the correspondence between the Bible and the Koran on the importance of caring for the earth because it belongs to God..."

Later he sent me his book "Jesus and the Earth" and a printed text of his lecture he had delivered in the USA under the title "Evangelicals and Environment". In the latter Jones James draws a parallel between eschatology and ecology, meaning "a link between what we think will happen to the earth and how we now treat the earth", and saying: "Some people subscribe to what is in effect a theology of obliteration. This means that if you believe that one day the world will end in some great cosmic combustion then you need not worry about what happens to it now. It means that you can concentrate on securing your personal salvation in another world while sitting loose to your obligations in this one. It means that there are even some people who actually believe that we should hasten the day of such obliteration... Although the Bible talks about the future in language of both continuity and discontinuity the overall sense of scripture is that God is at work

sustaining, renewing and transforming his creation rather than destroying it. The Lord's Prayer has at its heart the petition for "God's will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven". This is a prayer for the earthling of heaven. The biblical vision of the future is one in which heaven and earth are fused together."

As an author of Koranic translation in my native Azeri Turkic I would add that these comments are in full compliance with corresponding Koranic verses, which require that both worldly and hereafter life balance out in the religious thought and practice as believers are called to pray before God, uttering: "Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and defend us from the torment of the Fire!"<sup>1</sup>, which they actually do in their traditional daily prayers. Moreover, the Koranic text characterizes those constantly thinking and asking of the judgment day that will mark the end of the world as if they hasten the advent of the world's end and thus views them in the list of disbelievers: "They ask, "When will be the Day of Judgment?" A Day when they will be tried (and tested) over the Fire! "Taste ye your trial! This is what ye used to ask to be hastened!"<sup>1</sup>.

Jones James also is right when saying: "Yet just as within Christianity there are those who subscribe to a

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 2:201

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 51:12-14



theology of obliteration so too there are Muslims who contemplate the future involving the destruction of the earth. If these, if I can use this word, “obliterationists” gain the ascendancy in Christianity and in Islam and dominate their own cultures with a political world view based on their theological conviction then we are facing an eschatological scenario of the bleakest proportions. It does not require much imagination as to what might happen to us all if the world is held captive to a struggle between two religiously based political ideologies that are predicated on the ultimate destruction of the earth...” I would only add that at this very point, eco--theology regardless of what religion it belongs to should be seen as one of the tools of true salvation for humanity. Basing on the Koranic philosophy, I have to note that there are not many deep--rooted differences among Islam, Christianity and Judaism if they are looked at through the level of doctrines they produce, advocating monotheism. Moreover, the Koranic text reads that it was sent down and revealed by God through His angel Gabriel as a confirmation of previous Scriptures, including the Torah and New Testament. I would refer in this regard as well to a Koranic instruction on how to get into dialogue with people who seemingly represent other faiths but in fact share the same

divine values as those who are considered as believers surrendering to God's will. It reads: "And dispute not with the People of the Scripture, except with means better, except with those of them who do wrong, but say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. Our God and your God is One and to Him we are submitting"<sup>1</sup>.

While it is admissible that there could be certain disputes between religions over the ways leading to absolute truth, religious interpretations from eco--theology perspectives prove absolutely indisputable as being driven by common concern over the destiny of our planet.

The research I submit to the judgment of readers is a theological work claiming to shed light on this reality.

And finally, giving thanks to our Lord by whose will and grace I believe this work was accomplished, I would also express my gratitude to the US Council for International Exchange of Scholars for having granted me a Fulbright Visiting Scholarship to conduct my research in the USA; Dr. Nayereh Tohidi, a distinguished professor, for her timely invitation and assistance to work on my scholarly writing in

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 29:46

California State University – Nothridge (CSUN); and Evelyn McClave, a linguistic professor in CSUN, whose frequent hiking arrangements in South California's beautiful nature helped me get my research on an inspirational environmental path.

## ECOTHEOLOGY AS AN OFFSPRING OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The ecological crisis is one that is well documented in its various manifestations of industrial pollution, resource depletion, and population explosion. The essential ingredients for human survival, especially water supplies and agricultural land, are being threatened across the planet by population and industrial pressures. Moreover, the widespread destruction of species and the unrelenting loss of habitat continues to accelerate. This becomes more and more a matter of concern for scholars, environmentalists, citizens actively engaged in public activities, and people who really care about the future of our planet.

Many efforts are being made now to help solve environmental problems at the international level to create ecology--oriented movements, pursue certain politics and so on. The reason all that proves not enough leads to increasing numbers of those supportive of the idea that the measures to solve the problems linked to the environmental crisis are to be considered in an interlocking context with problems of morality. As from the religious perspective, what we

see nowadays is that religious values are increasingly occupying the public mind and, religious processes are getting intensified with the passage of time partly due to globalization processes necessitating mutual interaction of different cultures and religions. Therefore, it seems quite effective to try to put the possible moral potential of religions at the service of environmental activities.

Clearly religions, religious scholars, clergies and ordinary believers need to be involved in the development of a more comprehensive worldview and ethics to assist in reversing the environmental crisis. This is critical because the attitudes and values that shape people's concepts of nature to some extent come from religious worldviews and ethical practices.

The moral imperative and value systems of religions are indispensable in mobilizing the sensibilities of people toward preserving the environment for future generations.

Obviously, a materialistic worldview or secularism is not the only reason why many people seem to be so indifferent about protecting nature. Religions also made a negative contribution to this, either through crisis or through superstitions they faced over certain periods of history. Concepts about the next world or human salvation claiming values which traditionally

constitute the main religious ideology of monotheistic religions have at many points been pursued in a context where the human being was kept away from the need to take care of life on earth. Truly, one of the historical and cultural reasons for the current environmental crisis is seen to be linked to this as well.

A positive side of environmental issues being brought to the agenda of religious values is that it helps adapt religions to modernity and thus get them back to their holy essence. Discussions on religion and ecology serve as one of the most effective means to create a good climate for interfaith initiatives as well.

Thomas Berry, a distinguished historian of religions, suggested a comprehensive reevaluation of human--earth relations and the enforcing of worldviews different from those having captured the imagination of contemporary industrialized societies that view nature as a commodity to be exploited. He also believed that the neglect of both the manifestation of the divine in the natural world and creation processes caused humanity to mistake the entire revelatory process<sup>1</sup>. Utilization of the insights of the world's religions is now becoming an important interpretational instrument for ecologically reformed theologies. The formulation of a new ecological

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry (1999). *The Great Work: Our Way Into The Future*. New York: Harmony/Bell Tower. p. 75

theology and environmental ethics is already emerging from within several of the world's religions. Clearly each of the world's religious traditions has something to contribute to this field. Nevertheless, the concept of how to adapt religious teachings to the task of revaluing nature can be sketched as somehow generalized for monotheistic traditions. For example, from a series of researches done by Judaist, Christian, and Islamic eco--theologians, one can conclude that the following three commitments Thomas Berry suggested for Christian theology to fulfill are equally accepted by related scholars in the list of priorities for theologies to convert: from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world; from a spirituality of the divine as revealed in words to a spirituality of the divine as revealed in the visible world about us; from a spirituality concerned with justice merely to humans to a spirituality of justice to the devastated Earth community<sup>1</sup>. As John Cobb rightly points out, "once it becomes clear that the call to save and renew the earth does not come only from human self-interest

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<sup>1</sup> Berry, Thomas. "Christianity's Role in the Earth Project". *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether. 127-134. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000.

or personal preference, that instead it is the call of God, a new level of commitment and loyalty arises. When the going is very difficult, this kind of motivation often makes the difference”<sup>1</sup>.

No less important is the fact that eco--theology as a new discipline bears in itself a great potential to create a certain ground on which to embrace different religions as God--directed or --revealed and thus to let them meet each other with invaluable tolerance inherent in their essence, yet spiritually supplement and enrich each other. In this regard it is good to observe how His All--Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, known as a Green Patriarch in his addresses and statements<sup>2</sup> mostly meant for Christian audiences, make scholarly appeals to the facts of environmental ethics of Judaism and Islam and thus point also to the place of meeting of monotheistic religions, which in a broader sense is, so to speak, nature itself.

Eco--theologians of both Judaism and Christianity, in their attempts to adapt theologies in Judo--Christian traditions to the tasks of environmental concerns,

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<sup>1</sup> John Cobb. Theology and Ecology. <https://www.religion-online.org/article/theology-and-ecology/>

<sup>2</sup> *Cosmic Grace + Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I* edited by John Chryssavgis. Michigan/Cambridge, UK, 2003.



from the very beginning of the emergence of this new discipline were quite naturally to face a series of challenges generated by traditional opponents accusing these religious teachings of having played a negative and destructive role in forming a culture of consumerism and promoting uncontrolled consumerist attitudes towards nature.

## BIBLICAL HUMAN DOMINIAN OVER NATURE MIRROWED BY KORANIC HUMAN STEWARDSHIP

The central point of critiques of such content is about the religiously--provided dominion of human beings over the earth with the reference to the history of Creation in Bible, where “God said, “Let us make man in our image, as our likeness, and let him dominate the fish of the sea, the birds of the heaven, the animals, all the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”. Clearly, the concept of man’s dominion over the whole environment in the negative sense is an unavoidable element of traditional interpretations of the scripture which keeps being a sort of theological burden that eco--Judaism and eco--Christianity successfully attempt to get rid of, objecting to the traditional religious views about nature based on man’s dominion and control and replacing this with a view of man as a member of the community of nature. The following are excerpts again from Jones James’s speech, which may be taken as expressing or generalizing a vision peculiar to all Christian eco--theologians: “What many people overlook is that this dominion is immediately qualified

in the following chapter where Adam is set by God in the Garden to “till it and keep it”. This is an inadequate translation for the words that properly mean “to serve and preserve” the earth. In other words, the relationship between humanity and the earth is to be characterized by servant lordship. The dominion spoken of in Genesis does not mean that humanity is apart from creation but a part of it. The only other time this phrase “to till and to keep” or “to serve and preserve” is used is in the Book of Numbers where it describes the ministry of the priests in the temple. Just as the Levites were to serve God by ministering within the temple, so too Adam is called to serve God by caring for the earth in the garden. The Bible gives nobody a mandate of domination to rape the earth”.

The same view about the concept of human dominion over the earth is shared by eco-Judaism. As Jamie Korngold, a Reform Jewish rabbi and the author of the book *God in the Wilderness: Rediscovering the Spirituality of the Great Outdoors with the Adventure Rabbi* puts it: “Fortunately, Genesis 2:15 answers the question about dominion and clarifies any ambiguity. It tells us that we are supposed to be protectors; we are supposed to “till and tend” God’s garden and take care of God’s planet. There is also a breath-taking passage in the Jewish scriptural text, *Midrash*

*Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, written around 800 c.e., which says, “When God created the first human beings, God led them around the garden of Eden and said: „Look at my works! See how beautiful they are – how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it”<sup>1</sup>.

This eco--theological interpretation of the concept of human dominion over nature may well be reinforced and underpinned by the Koranic principle of stewardship that Adam as first human being was granted, even having limited powers before he was created, as the idea of his dominion was already present in a divine plan God had prepared for human being and later disclosed it to the angels. The related Koranic verse reads: “Behold, your Lord said to the angels: “I will create a vicegerent on earth...”<sup>2</sup>. The great and high value that Adam has in God’s eyes does not necessarily mean that humans have a right to step over limits set by Almighty God. People should always remember that their mission on earth is just to justify the divine status that first human being was granted for by taking care of the whole planet where they represent God’s will to see humans in a

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<sup>1</sup> Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, 1 on Ecclesiastes 7:13

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 2:30

constant state of worship. The latter is not limited to only traditional prayers and religious actions but has a much broader context including protection of nature from destruction. The reminder in the sacred texts about the dust from which the first human was created has been said to represent an antidote against human arrogance and infuse humility into the human feelings before God, who has entrusted human beings with the care of the earth. Just as the Bible talks about Adam having been created of the dust of the earth, so too there are some Koranic verses of the same content but more descriptive about the details of the materials used in Adam's creation.

One of such verses reads: "O mankind! If you have a doubt about the Resurrection, consider that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a clot--like embryo, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest our power to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then foster you that you may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known much, and further, you see the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it,

it is stirred to life, it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth in pairs”<sup>1</sup>.

This detailed description of human’s creation act with the following life stages described is used to further strengthen the belief in resurrection on the basis of comparative examples from nature, which inevitably makes the religious mood of listeners tune into harmony with the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 22:5

## THE EARTHING OF HEAVEN IN JESUS–ADAM TANDEM

Again getting back to eco--theological interpretation of Biblical human dominion over nature, it is worth focusing on the concept of human-divine unity personified in the Adam–Jesus tandem.

According to the New Testament, Jesus was the first Son of God’s incarnation as well as the last one in such a manifestation. In other words, Adam was the first man and Jesus was the second man: “The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. Like the one made of dust, so too are those made of dust, and like the one from heaven, so too those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven”<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, according to the Bible, Adam was created as “a pattern of the coming one”<sup>2</sup> in the person of Christ. These Biblical passages are used by Christian eco--theologians to prove the importance of the incarnate, human Jesus as a Son of Man to the earth community. Jones James refers to the title “The Son of Man” that Jesus ascribes to himself as one of the linguistic yet more theological evidences of his connectedness to the earth based on the Hebrew meaning of the word “Adam” hewn from *adamah*, the

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<sup>1</sup> Corinthians 15:47-49

<sup>2</sup> Romans 5:14

Hebrew for “earth”<sup>1</sup>. He concludes that Jesus not only was earthed but also saw his mission as none other than the earthing of heaven: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the only way that the earth can be relieved of its curse which is believed to have been caused because of Adam’s sin<sup>3</sup> is through the forgiveness, healing and restoration of Adam’s successors.

The call for “the earthing of heaven” can be heard of in a Koranic verse where an inner vision permeated through with belief in God’s creation is considered as needed to assume that spiritual connectedness felt with the heavens is deeply rooted in the ever--existent physical unity of the latter with the earth: “Have not those who disbelieve seen how the heavens and the earth were once one mass which We separated?”<sup>4</sup>.

It also seems quite interesting to observe how similar the title “Son of Man” is to what the Koran reads while talking about Jesus Christ. “Son of Man,” meaning partly of human origin, is represented in the Koranic interpretation as the title “Son of Mary,” which may sound all the more environmentally flexible as the “earthing” of divinity by Mary the Virgin, having given birth to Jesus out of the Holy Spirit sent by God. Moreover, Koranic confirmation of the Biblical Jesus--

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<sup>1</sup> Jones James (2003). *Jesus and the Earth*. Published by SPCK.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:10

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:17

<sup>4</sup> Koran, 21:30



Adam divinity unity that reads “The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam”<sup>1</sup> is straight away followed in the same verse again by the reminder of the material which Adam was created from (“He created him from dust”), as if not to distract us from our earthly cares including environmental ones that are blessed by divinity, as ecotheologians put it. Apart from eco–theology, I can’t help but note again that similarities between the sacred texts go far beyond our research topic. For example, as Jesus in the Gospels is identified as the Word of God and used for his divine origin or mission, so he has the same title in the Koran: “Jesus Christ, the son of Mary was an apostle of God, and His Word which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him”<sup>2</sup>.

Adam’s initial infallibility, damaged later by his sin committed against the will of God in the Garden of Eden, bore undoubtedly divine potential; otherwise God would not have said He made the first human in His image. This divine potential, I believe, has not been corrupted at such a scale as to deprive us – the first Adam’s offspring – the right to claim it in a way that would lead us to salvation. According also to the Koran, as the Holy Spirit gave the birth to Jesus and further “strengthened” him<sup>3</sup>, so a particle from it is installed in each of us as a sacred material used by God when He

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 3:59

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 4:171

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 2:253

created the first human<sup>1</sup>, and transmitted to us via his following generations. Likewise we may assume from the Bible that as long as the whole humanity is the first Adam's offspring and called to follow Jesus's teaching to become sons of God as the second Adam in the person of Jesus, so we may further claim that divinity in our constant search for forgiveness and salvation. This perception seems also underpinned by Koranic teaching that referring to material components used by God to create the human body in evolutionary order and sequence<sup>2</sup>, at the same time directs our attention to the spiritual component and reason of creation ("He breathed into him of His spirit"), hence urging us to understand the responsibility humans should hold both before material--built nature and before God himself, and all the more discloses the various ways for humans to be conscious of this.

The religious instructions in the holy books teach that the divine potential installed in humans since the very beginning of creation and meant to exalt human beings<sup>3</sup> is not to separate us from other creatures but rather to help us tune our feelings and thoughts into being absorbed in searches of how to please God, the Highest Authority who gives us clear commandments, including ecology--oriented ones.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 32:9

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 23:12-14

<sup>3</sup> Even angels are to worship human being according to the Koran, 15:28-31

BREATH OF GOD – HOLY SPIRIT  
RECEIVED BY NATURE

The breath of life which the Bible says was blown into the nostrils of Adam after he was shaped is believed to be of the same Holy Spirit's nature. Interesting at this point is one of the interpretations given by Kathy Cochrane, an ordinary Christian believer in her speech at Seekers Church, Washington DC, April 19, 1998. Referring to verses 21 and 22 of John 20 in the New Testament, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you... When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit". She suggests that these verses contain certain thoughts that speak to a creation from an ecological perspective regarding the earth. In her view, the word "breath" is the creative expression of life from the Spirit -- the breath of God. "This is the same breath of God -- wind of God -- Spirit of God -- Ruah of God present in the first chapter of Genesis", as she puts it, and she continues: "A wind from God swept over the waters" is found in Genesis 1. Then God speaking--breathing -- there is no speaking without breath -- says "let there be light." God breathing a beginning -- over and over again. In the New Testament passage once

again the mysterious breath-- Holy Spirit is beginning the work -- the work in us”<sup>1</sup>. Interpreting the Holy Spirit as the breath of God from the Islamic point of view, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, a great Sufi mystic of the Middle Ages, wrote that “the Breath emerges from a root which is Love for the creatures, to whom God desired to make Himself known, so that they might know Him”<sup>2</sup>.

Ibn Arabi’s thought sounds quite consonant with contemporary eco--theologies views of nature – part of the whole creation as a source of religious incentives for those striving to be in the permanent presence of God. One may conclude that at this very point humans are called to view themselves as part of creation not only by virtue of the dust of the earth which the first human being was created of, but also due to the presence of God in all his creatures – lands, waters, forests, animals, etc. This viewpoint can be well reinforced by a series of Koranic verses, one of which says: “In the creation of heaven and earth, and the alternation between night and daylight, there are signs for prudent persons who remember God while standing, sifting and lying on their sides, and meditate

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<sup>1</sup> D. W. Ekstrand. *The Holy Spirit’s work in our lives*. <http://www.thetransformedsoul.com/additional-studies/spiritual-life-studies/the-holy-spirit-s-work-in-us>

<sup>2</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi. *Al-Istilah al-Sufiyah*, translated by Rabia Terri Harris. *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, Vol. III, 1984, p. 132.

on the creation of heaven and earth by saying: “Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Glory be to You! Shield us from the torment of fire!”<sup>1</sup>

The Arabic word that is translated as “sign” in English is “*ayat*”, which can be interpreted in the Koranic context as “sign of God’s might, or sign of God-being, or sign of God’s will, or sign of God’s work, or sign of God’s covenant”, etc. along with the meaning Koranic verses as “God’s word”. God’s presence in all that He has made and permanently goes on making is meant, as it follows from the verses mentioned to instruct believers to keep being mindful to His creation.

Signs of God are present in our souls as well: “On earth there are signs for the convinced, and even within your souls; do you not notice them?”<sup>2</sup>. “By noticing them” on earth and even “within himself” one can be definitely inspired to deepen his love for God while contemplating signs of God in the whole creation of which humans constitute solely a part. This may also help understand the teaching of love, a concept partly expressed by Jesus in a Biblical verse: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 3:190-191

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 51:20-21

<sup>3</sup> Mathew 22:37

## GOD'S COVENANT WITH CREATION

What is also to ecologically influence the Judeo-Christian faithful is a reminder of a covenant that God made not only with humans but also creation as a whole. This takes place in the Biblical flood story when, right after Noah started tending the earthly salvation blessed by God, he heard Him saying: "Behold, I am making a covenant with you and with your offspring after you. And with every living creature that is with you, with the birds, the animals, and all the beasts of the earth with you, all who departed from the ark, including every living creature on earth. I will keep My covenant with you, that never again will all flesh be cut off by flood waters, never again will flood waters destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I pledge between Myself and you, and between every living creature that is with you, for the generations of all time. I have set my [rain] bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Myself and the earth" God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between Myself and between all flesh that is on the earth"<sup>1</sup>.

The same flood story is present in the Koran but

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 9:9-17

with no mention of God's covenant with creation. Nevertheless, the list of obligations prescribed in the Koran for humans as God's vicegerents on earth under the covenant with God does include preserving nature. As for God's covenant with nature, it is shown metaphorically throughout the Koranic text, speaking for itself as the abovementioned signs of God in all that happens in nature. The following verses are of the same content: "He is the One Who has spread the earth out and placed headlands and rivers on it, and has placed two pairs for every kind of fruit on it. He wraps daylight up in night. In that are signs for folk who meditate. On the earth are neighboring tracts, and vineyards, cultivated fields and date--palms, [growing] in clumps and all alone, watered from a single source. We make some of them excel others in food value. In that are signs for folk who use their reason"<sup>1</sup>.

Not just by meditating but merely reasoning, one may argue that the covenant spoken of in Genesis in the context of the flood story is not a new, but is rather a renewal of its previous yet more eternal version, thanks to which a new life was breathed into the whole creation that "received the Holy Spirit", and which served as a guarantee for the whole creation

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 13:3-4

not to totally perish but survive and begin a new life.

Tom Murphy, Episcopal priest touching upon the covenant in question, focuses our attention on the ever--active will of God to keep this agreement that was not negotiated with unconscious earthly beings in force “out of pure love for creation”: “This covenant with Noah and all of creation is very good news for us. No matter what – even when we stumble, when we sin, when do what we shouldn’t do or don’t do what we should do, when we don’t stick with our Lenten sacrifices, when we don’t even bother to make a Lenten sacrifices – no matter what – God still loves what God has made and the covenant between God and creation is still in effect”<sup>1</sup>.

God’s love for His creation sounds herein like an ecological incitement for the faithful to protect and care about the environment in order to be granted His love as an indispensable tool for eternal salvation. The sad alternative to this is not noticing signs of God’s covenant with creation, which may potentially drag a religious mind down into paganism, as the Koran puts it: “In the creation of heaven and earth, the alternation between night and day, the ships which plow the sea with something to benefit mankind and any water God sends down from the sky with which to revive the

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Murphy. Blog of Sermons and Writings. <https://tommurphe.blogspot.com/2009/>



following its death, and to scatter every kind of animal throughout it, and directing the winds and clouds which are driven along between the sky and earth, are Signs for folk who use their reason. Yet there are some people who adopt rivals instead of God, whom they love just as they should love God..."<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 2:164-165

## NATURAL WORLD AS A PRIMARY PART OF REVALATORY PROCESS

Eco--theology oriented reading of Holy Scriptures may help us gain an insight into the perception that divine service of obeying and worshipping the God--being is not something that only human beings are called upon to be engaged in. According to Koranic verses, creatures included in the universe and ranging from the smallest invisible ones to the biggest ones are in a position to obey and praise the God--being in their own way. One of the reasons to explain this is that the High Conscience who is the Creator of the system to which all the material and spiritual creatures belong is the Most High, God himself. As long as God is the high manager of the system regulating everything that happens in the universe and activities held by creatures, the act of observing the rules and laws put by Him, however it might seem instinctive or deliberate, is disclosed as an act of obeying and worshipping the God--being. As the Koran reads: "Do you not see that God is He, Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the

animals and many of the people..."<sup>1</sup>. And again according to the Koran, everything that exists glorifies God:

"The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein, glorify Him and there is not a thing but glorifies His praise. But you understand not their glorification..."<sup>2</sup> God's blame is directed herewith to humans for not observing this glorification enough to understand it.

"Man disbelieves in the glorification uttered by inanimate things, but those inanimate things are masters in performing worship" -- as Jalaladdin Rumi concludes in a Koranic way<sup>3</sup>. Referring also to this, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a famous Islamic ecotheologian, says, "all the creatures in the natural world sing the praise of God. In destroying species, we are in reality silencing a whole class of God's worshipers"<sup>4</sup>.

Islamic perception of nature overall glorifying the Divine is well echoed with the famous phrase that belongs to Hildegard of Bingen, a great Christian mystic of the Middle Ages: "All creation is a song

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 22:18

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 17:44

<sup>3</sup> citation is taken from L. Clarke. "The Universe Alive: Nature in the Masnavi of Jalal al-Din Rumi". Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust, edited by Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny and Azizan Baharuddin. Cambridge, MA 2003. p.44.

<sup>4</sup> Nasr, Hossein. "Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis". Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust, edited by Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny and Azizan Baharuddin. Cambridge, MA 2003. p.96.

of praise to God”. A Biblical Psalm has the same idea: “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands”<sup>1</sup>. Sallie McFague, apparently meaning this same idea, suggests that “the entire universe reflects God’s glory, each and every creature and thing in its particular, concrete, unique way”<sup>2</sup>. This also brings to mind a Koranic verse that reads: “Do you not see that God is He Whom do glorify all those who are in the heavens and the earth, and the birds with expanded wings? He knows the prayer of each one and its glorification, and God is Cognizant of what they do”<sup>3</sup>.

The above--mentioned word “expanse” in Psalms taken from the Hebrew root word “*rakia*” is believed to have different meanings in the Bible. I cannot help here but to go out of the context of this research if only to add (in no way to claim the ultimate truth) that “expanse” would be better understood as “expanding” in consonance with the well--known scientific discovery about the expanding universe. This could better fit in with the literal yet more word--for--word translation of a related Koranic verse which reads: “And as for the heaven We constructed it by hands, and verily

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 19:1

<sup>2</sup> Sallie McFague (2001). *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 24:41

We are expanding”<sup>1</sup>. The expanding of the heaven will indeed mean the declaration of God’s work not only in the context of extrapolated conclusions from its spiritual assignment. I believe the scientific discovery in question would not have come true if not willed by God, who is forever at work sustaining, renewing and transforming his creation, including the minds of scientists who may be unconscious of how God inspires----even incognito----His vicegerents on earth into creative activities for the sake of both God and mankind.

Thomas Berry urged the religious establishments to teach more effectively that the natural world is our primary revelatory experience. He argues that “emphasis on verbal revelation to neglect of the manifestation of the divine in the natural world is to mistake the entire revelatory process”<sup>2</sup>

What really follows from the whole eco--theological context of the sacred texts is that nature itself, also being a source confirming God’s works, should be accepted as an unwritten Holy Book, a miracle bearing the sacredness of Holy Writ, and thus needs to be read and learned to help understand the greatness of God--being. According to the Bible, nature gives

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 51:47

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Berry (1999). *The Great Work: Our Way Into The Future*. New York: Harmony/Bell Tower. p. 75

lessons to learn more about God, because everyone has some internal knowledge of God and also has “a measure of faith”<sup>1</sup> and, as the Bible further states: “... that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made...”<sup>2</sup>

The Koran also confirms this concept by putting an emphasis on the internal knowledge of God as coded in the nature of human beings by monotheistic will: “As an upright/monotheistic one, keep your face set towards the religion – God’s nature upon which He has patterned mankind...”<sup>3</sup> There is an initial faith present in humans’ nature and what is required is just to add to it by different means, one of which is learning lessons from nature itself, reading in it carefully.

Many Islamic scholars characterize nature as a “*Qur’an Takwini*”, a cosmic or ontological “*Qur’an*”<sup>4</sup>. This unwritten “book” is meant to be read by believers as well as the written one. The word “Koran” literally means “reading” in translation from Arabic. At this very

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:3

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:19-20

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 30:30

<sup>4</sup> Seyyed Hossein. *Islam and the Environmental Crisis*. Islam and the Environment, edited by A. R. Aqwan. p.5-20. New Delhi. Journal of Objective Studies.

point, nature is accorded the divine status as a God-built guiding system on the path of divine perception.

Of the same content are the following inspirational quotes about nature: “God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees and flowers and clouds and stars” -- Martin Luther; “Nature is the art of God” -- Ralph Waldo Emerson; “My profession is to always find God in nature” -- Henry David Thoreau; “Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can learn more than what is in books, for they speak with the voice of God” -- George Washington Carver<sup>1</sup>.

In Jewish eco--theology some successful attempts are made to relate to the natural world in the “Oral Torah”, a term used mainly to denote the legal and interpretative Jewish traditions not mentioned in the written Torah. According to Rabbinic Judaism, the oral Torah, oral law, or oral tradition was given by God orally to Moses in conjunction with the written Torah. Michael Fishbane, a scholar of Judaism and rabbinic literature, assumes the world as “the pulsing, indivisible expression of God’s breath as it takes shape and form. This is fullness and foundation. As an extension and as a vitalization of divine being, such a primordial articulation is an Oral Torah... All that

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.quotes.oneindiaonline.com/nature-quotes.php>

we know and experience in the world thus comes from God and is the realization of this Torah *She--be'al Peh*, or Oral Torah, through infinite condensations and configurations, at all levels of organic coherence – be these sensate or otherwise, whether vegetable or mineral, and in all their parasitic and interdependent forms”. As for the written Torah, it is viewed by him as “the humanly cognizable Oral Torah of God”. He concludes, that “the Oral Torah is eternally God’s breath as it vitalizes being, *ruha be ruha* (“spirit within spirit”), whereas the Written Torah is the same reality contracted into the vessels of human cognition, language, and experience”<sup>1</sup>

From Christian eco--theology perspectives, nature can be assessed as an “unwritten or oral Bible” as well if we deeply read into the meanings of the Seal of God. It is believed in Christian theology that the Book of Revelation is sealed up with God’s seals in order to prevent it from being corrupted: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Fishbane. *Towards a Jewish Theology of Nature. Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word*, edited by Hava Tirosh Samuelson. Harvard Divinity School. 2002. p.19-20



tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book”<sup>1</sup>. It does not require much deep insight to see the seal of God extended to nature as well in the context of His covenant mentioned in flood story with the earth, in which both divine revelations and nature take part. Earth’s part in the covenant with God finds its expression in a Christian prayer “God’s will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven”.

The covenant with earth at this point serves as grounds on which faith can evolve towards maturity to further rise to the heavens. This matured faith can be gained if guided by the will of God on earth, which the faithful must take care of similarly to the way that they perfect their faith through reading and fulfilling their obligations before God. Consequently, nature itself attains the Biblical status meant to show its Christian followers the ways of eternal salvation, not to mention the term “Green Bible” which is already in use. Eternal salvation in the Koranic context is called “great salvation” as an ultimate destination that can be reached only by those who pass through its small earthly models, predesigned by God’s law for decent and faithful lives to be pursued with regard to divine commandments concerning the “unwritten Koran”

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 22:18-19

as well.

According to the Bible, the seal of God is given not only to Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup> but also to the followers<sup>2</sup>, and can be put on other fellow believers<sup>3</sup>. Granting His seal to His servants, God adds them all to the list of His people. By the way, the followers of Jesus Christ are promised in the Koran to be lifted up to God's kingdom: "God said: "Jesus, I shall gather you up and lift you towards Me and purify you from those who disbelieve, and place those who follow you ahead of those who disbelieve until Resurrection Day..."<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, eco--theology--driven reading in the Bible gives us an insight to see the seal of God also placed on those who treat nature respectfully; otherwise the Bible would not have stated the following: "They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God in their foreheads"<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:27

<sup>2</sup> Corinthians 1:22

<sup>3</sup> Timothy 2:19

<sup>4</sup> Koran, 3:55

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 9:4

## DIVINE CONCEPT ON NATURAL BEAUTIES AND WONDERS

It is the level of faith that indicates how well human beings' attitudes are manifested towards the environment. The reason why everything we contemplate in the environment---forests, meadows, mountain heights covered with snow, murmuring rivers, blue seas, picturesque flora and fauna, dome of heaven, stars, etc.----looks so beautiful is conditioned by God's seal and paint they all bear in their capacity as His creatures. "Paint of God..., and who is better than God in painting? And Him do we serve"<sup>1</sup> – reads a Koranic verse. The suggestion here is that we take into consideration the beauty, harmony and equilibrium He has set for the life of both human beings and the earth as a whole.

According to Biblical eco--theology, religiously approved environmental ethics should be formed by the fact that the whole creation has a great value in the eyes of God who Himself was the first to enjoy the beauty He revealed through His creative act. Reading the Bible, we hear a refrain "God saw that it was good" or "God saw that it was very good" that

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 2:138

sounds exaltedly at His tongue after He completes this or the other part of creation: “God called the dryness “Earth,” and the gathering of waters He called “Seas” and God saw that it was good<sup>1</sup>; The earth brought forth grass, and herbs yielding seed of its kind, and trees bearing fruit which has in it great lights, the large light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night, and the stars. God set them in the canopy of the heaven to illuminate the earth, to rule in the day and the night, and to divide between the light and the darkness; and God saw that it was good<sup>2</sup>; And thus God made the beasts of the earth, each of its kind, the animals [of pasture] each of its kind, and everything that creeps on the ground, each of its kind, and God saw that it was good<sup>3</sup>; God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good”<sup>4</sup>.

It is obvious that God enjoys His creation work, thus causing us to imitate His enjoyment in order for our religious feelings to be in harmony with the divine purposes revealed. The same appreciation of His own creation is placed in a Koranic verse which describes the stages of creation of a human being: “We created man from an extract of clay; then We placed him as a drop of semen in a secure resting--place. Then We

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:10

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:16-18

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:25

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:31

turned the semen into a clot; next We turned the clot into tissue; and then We turned the tissue into bones and clothed the bones with flesh. Then We reproduced him as a fresh creation. Blessed be God, the Best of Creators!”<sup>1</sup>.

Beauties in creation as revealed by God are testified to as well as in Ecclesiastes: “Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end”<sup>2</sup>. People quite naturally cannot be in a state that would allow them to observe God’s greatness in all that He reveals due to our limited reason, as is commonly believed by monotheistic theologians: “God’s Being and His super--essential characteristics reveal themselves only partially through their attributes” – state Merișor Dominte and Stelian Onica, authors of the article “The concept of beauty in the orthodox esthetic and iconography/ iconographic benchmarks”<sup>3</sup>

Consonant with God’s appreciation for the beauties and wonders He created is the following Koranic verse that literally says: “He is the One who

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 23:12-14

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 3:11

<sup>3</sup> European Journal of Science and Theology 2 (2006), 2, 11-23.

beautified/made beautiful/perfected everything He created..."<sup>1</sup> No doubt, all this suggests sort of prerequisite to forming the religiosity of His human servants in the spirit of respect for all what He initially had made. It has to be noted that the idea of beauty itself, when shaped into a theological concept, appears to be of divine origin. God is praised in the Bible as an all-beautiful being: "All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you"<sup>2</sup>. God reveals Himself as all beautiful by Koranic text as well. God's names, characteristics which are commonly believed to come to 99 in number, are called in Koranic original as "*al-asma'u-l-husna*" meaning "the most beautiful names": "Appeal to God, or appeal to the Mercy-giving: whichever name you may invoke, He still has the most beautiful names..."<sup>3</sup>. These name/characteristics of God stem mainly from one of His names, "*Muhsin*", meaning "the one who acts beautifully, who creates beauties, who beatifies" etc., which believers are encouraged to imitate in order not to be forced out of the pre-designed harmony with God's acts in creation, and even more to feel responsible for fulfilling their obligations under the eternal covenant

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 32:7

<sup>2</sup> Song of Solomon 4:7

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 17:110

with God. And this covenant undoubtedly implies environmental obligations as well. Muslim believers are also encouraged to create beauties under a saying ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad -- “God is beautiful and He loves beauty”.

## BLESSED TREES TO QUIDE THE FAITH TRIP TO A NEW EARTH

The beauties of God’s creation, illustrated by plants, are also used in Holy Scriptures as metaphors or comparisons meant to sing of beloved or blessed persons. We see in Song of Solomon a depiction of the beloved as likened to nature with “an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, camphor, with spikenard, saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices”<sup>1</sup>.

This part of the Bible has many interpretations from different perspectives. One Christian interpretation states: “Saints in the church, and graces in the saints are fitly compared to fruits and spices. They are planted, and do not grow of themselves”<sup>2</sup>. No doubt, Matthew Henry, a famous English commentator on the Bible, had not pursued any environmental concern for his commentary at the time, but his explanation of the Biblical verse in question would best fit the purposes of Christian eco--theology to view plants as blessed as saints are.

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<sup>1</sup> Song of Solomon 4:13-14

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/songs/4-13.htm>



This reminds me of one Koranic verse narrating how Mary the Virgin was born and grew up under the protection of God. It is linked to a comparison with a beautifully growing plant: after she was born “her Lord accepted her in a beautiful manner and caused her to grow like a beautiful plant”<sup>1</sup>.

Islamic eco--theology would insist that fellow believers meditate over each beautiful plant to gain a deep insight into the signs of God. As God causes the beautiful plants to be of the service to humans by producing earthly life--giving products, so did He raise up Mary the Virgin by whom to produce eternal life--giving faith for human beings in the person of Jesus Christ. At this very point to be really faithful means to be ecologically driven, and to treat plants “in a beautiful manner” with the humility that is to be felt before the memory of Mary the Virgin, who had been chosen by God over all women in the world, as the related Koranic verse reads: “So the angels said: “Mary, God has selected you and purified you. He has selected you over all the women in the Universe”<sup>2</sup>.

All the more, “a beautiful plant” can be meditated on in order to be blessed and even more penetrated with the Holy Spirit (that gave a birth to Jesus Christ), because the breath of life is present everywhere, to

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 3:37

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 3:42

speak of the diverse manifestations of God's signs in creation.

On top of that, we see in the Koran Mary the Virgin giving birth to Jesus under a date--palm and then hearing a voice telling her: "Don't feel so sad! Your Lord has placed a brook at your feet. Shake the trunk of the date--palm towards you so it will drop some fresh dates on you. Eat and drink, and refresh yourself"<sup>1</sup>. I cannot help but to liken this scene to the Koranic description of paradise with every fruit at hand<sup>2</sup> and rivers running underneath. This also creates an association with the Biblical tree of life in both the Garden of Eden and Kingdom of God, symbolizing mainly Jesus Christ.

An ethical point of treating trees in a beautiful manner at God's command is also based on God's will to teach humans to adequately maintain a respectful attitude towards whatever or whomever practices good deeds toward them. Using the example of plants, humans should feel respectful towards them at least as God's means whereby He provides food to support human life on earth. As for being deserving of the heavenly life, one should also manage to see the signs of Judgment Day in nature. A related Koranic verse reads: "Each one of them all -- will be brought before

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 19:24-26

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 55:54

Us (for judgment). A sign for them is the earth that is dead: We do give it life, and produce grain therefrom, of which you do eat. And We produce therein orchard with date-palms and vines, and We cause springs to gush forth therein that they may enjoy the fruits of this. It was not their hands that made this: will they not then give thanks? Glory to God who created in pairs all things that the earth produces, as well as their own souls and things of which they have no knowledge”<sup>1</sup>.

Plants appear to have been granted life-giving status in the capacity of food--providers on earth as initially having the breath of life: “... God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground---everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food”<sup>2</sup>.

Eco--theology, be it Judaist, Christian, or Islamic, may equally well apply a ban on needless destruction of everything bearing the breath of life. Steven Bouma Prediger, pointing to the scantiness of resources on earth as a factor to be taken into ecologically reformed

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 36:32-36

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:29-30

theology, refers to Exodus 16 in the Bible, which tells that God provided manna and quail just for one day at a time for Israelites who wandered in the wilderness to eat. Their resources were not unlimited, lest they forget to constantly depend upon Divine Providence. The same idea is picked up by Steven Bouma--Prediger in Jesus Christ's petition to God in Matthew 6:11 for human needs: "Give us today our daily bread"<sup>1</sup>.

I would quote herein a Koranic verse that reads: "He it is Who has produced gardens, both trellised and untrellised, and date--palms and field crops with different foods, as well as olives and pomegranates which are so alike and yet so unlike! Eat some of their fruit as they ripen, and give their due/right on their harvest day. Yet do not waste by excess: for God does not love the wasters"<sup>2</sup>. This verse is quite interestingly followed by a verse blaming "those who slay their children, from folly, without having any knowledge..." as "having lost out and gone astray"<sup>3</sup>. The latter is mostly interpreted by contemporary Muslim theologians as against abortion of babies. This interpretation, if taken as a starting point from which to move to explaining the

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger. Response to Louke van Wensveen: A Constructive Proposal. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions. 2000. p.178

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 6:141

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 6:140

following verse, will somehow lead to the associated idea of promoting ecological concern about uprooting plants by dooming their generations to extinction. The first verse quoted clearly teaches that the respectful treatment of plants includes people's obligation to give them their due/right on their harvest day. Plants even seem to have a right not to be excessively exploited, and the violation of this right puts the violators at risk to lose God's love, hence consequently to face God's wrath.

God's wrath is inevitable if people disobey His commandment to "eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God but do no evil nor corrupt on earth"<sup>1</sup> and if they do not keep being faithful to the eternal covenant. The consequence of corruption on earth of any sort, including environmental, can be perceived from what is described in the Biblical Apocalyptic picture: "The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 2:60

left”<sup>1</sup>.

The massive environmental damage described in different Apocalyptic depictions creates an impression that it is “as though the Lord were saying, “You have taken the natural world for granted, abused it, and plundered it. You want a devastated world? Very well, then. You shall have it.” As always, the worst judgment God can mete out to sinful humanity is to give humanity what it demands”<sup>2</sup>

Environmental disobedience that is harmful to nature seems punishable well before the advent of Judgment Day by bringing a bitter crop of fruit reaped by people. Referring to this is a Koranic verse that warns against violence towards the environment by reminding us in a miraculous way of what happens at the present time: “Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return”<sup>3</sup>.

By the way, the first sin committed by human beings is viewed by eco-theologies as an act of environmental disobedience when Adam and Eve took the fruit from the forbidden tree. All the more, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 24:4-6

<sup>2</sup> Ray C. Stedman with James D. Denney (1991). *God’s Final Word: Understanding Revelation*. Published by Discovery House.

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 30:41

inevitable that the punishment is shared by the first man who “was a botanist responsible for tending the garden”<sup>1</sup>.

William Brown, referring to the free reign that the first human is granted over the produce of every tree in the primal garden with the exception “you shall not eat of it” (this free reign of the first couple, limited by the interdiction in question, is stated in the Koran as well: “...Adam, settle down in the Garden, both you and your wife, and eat freely from it anywhere either of you may wish. Yet do not approach this tree lest you become wrongdoers”)<sup>2</sup> as a compensation for his work to “tend and keep” the garden, rightly concludes: “It is within the space between the commission and prohibition that the man’s vocation – indeed, part of his very identity – is to be found: to work the ground but not reap its entire bounty”<sup>3</sup>

In both the Bible and the Koran, this environmental disobedience story ends with the expulsion of the first human couple from paradise. Christian eco--theology sees their expulsion from paradise as the starting

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<sup>1</sup> Lytton John Musselman. A Biblical View on Christian Environmental Concern. President’s Lecture Series. Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary. Amman, Jordan. 17 March 1998. <https://ww2.odu.edu/%7Elmusselm/essays/ABiblicalViewofCreation.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 2:35

<sup>3</sup> William P. Brown (1999). *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible*. Michigan/Cambridge, U.K. p. 138-139.

point of a dynamic journey for God’s people from the Garden of Eden to the City of Gold<sup>1</sup>, which is associated with the Kingdom of God on a new earth. Although the expulsion of the first human couple in Islamic theology is taken as part of God’s scenario for His people to make a “faith trip” back to the Gardens of Eden<sup>2</sup>, what is interesting is that the final destinations of God’s people in both scriptures are meant to become a new earth.

As Jesus Christ in the Biblical context promises to come again and receive God’s people into himself to take them to that destination<sup>3</sup>, so God refers in the Koran to His promise He has given to His messengers about renewing the earth on the day of God: “Do not reckon God will break His promise to His messengers... the day the earth will be changed into a different earth, and so will the heaven”<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, what “forces” the earthling of a promised “different earth” in the Koranic context is that its new inhabitants will enjoy similar fruits and foods which had ever been available for their use after the story of the fall. Therefore, promised both in the Bible and Koran to be transmitted to the new heavenly earth, plants once blessed as part of the Garden of Eden are to be seen as maintaining their

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 21:18

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 9:72 and the following ten verses

<sup>3</sup> John 14:3

<sup>4</sup> Koran, 14:47-48



divine status in relationships between mankind and God. Although it is obvious that every fruit-bearing plant has a divine value, some of them are underlined in sacred texts as attributes of both a Biblical land on the new earth and Koranic gardens of paradise on the same new earth. For example, according to the Bible, the new earth designed for the righteous is represented by a land of wheat and barley, vines and fig-trees and pomegranates, and a land of olive-trees<sup>1</sup>, while date-palms, pomegranates<sup>2</sup>, and vines<sup>3</sup> are particularly stressed in the context of the Koranic paradise description. A list of particularly blessed fruits in the Koran extends to fig-trees and oil-trees, which God swears by, and more importantly, God's oath is voiced in the context of His confirmation of how beautiful a creature the human is, whom He has brought to life along with all the blessed plants: "By the fig and the olive, by Mount Sinai, by this city/land of safety, We have created man in the finest stature"<sup>4</sup>. Apart from its ecology-loaded context, God's oath "by Mount Sinai" and "city/land of safety" may well connect the latter accordingly to both the "God of Sinai"<sup>5</sup> and the abovementioned "City of Gold"<sup>6</sup>. In the context of its final destination of God's

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 8:8

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 55:68

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 78:32

<sup>4</sup> Koran, 95:1-4

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 68:8

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 21:18

people, the Biblical Tree of Life as a symbol for Jesus Christ in tandem with the Koranic assertion of the latter as God's Word bestowed on Mary<sup>1</sup> may serve as a good example of a fruitful tree and a righteous person talked about in comparative parables in both the Bible and Koran: "He [the righteous man] is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither"<sup>2</sup>; "Do you not consider how God makes up a parable? A good word may be compared to a good tree whose root is firm and whose branches soar up into the sky. It yields its food each season with its Lord's permission. God composes parables for mankind so that they may be reminded"<sup>3</sup>.

Having been created by God "in the finest stature"<sup>4</sup>and grown like "a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form"<sup>5</sup>, the human being is called upon to deserve God's love and thus to reciprocate his feeling so as not to fall into sins. Otherwise, "with the roar of a mighty storm He (God) will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken".

Humans' destiny of both being born like a plant and burnt in fire like a plant from the eco--theology perspective is not to be separated from nature's destiny

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 4:171

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 1:3

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 14:24-25

<sup>4</sup> Koran 95:1-4

<sup>5</sup> Bible, Jeremiah 11:16

if the latter turns to be tragic at the hands of people. Trees that are cut down rather than being taken care of---- and hence deprived of life by people just to serve their greed---- will add even more fuel as dry wood in fire predestined for disbelievers. One such disbeliever is destined in a Koranic reference to be “burnt soon in a fire of blazing flame together with his wife carrying the wood as fuel with a twisted rope of palm leaf fibre round her neck”<sup>1</sup>, in contrast to the one blessed to live eternal life with his wife, who “will be like a fruitful vine within his house”, and his children, who “will be like olive shoots around his table”<sup>2</sup>.

By the way, in Holy Scriptures a particular emphasis as part of God’s blessings is put on the olive tree. God’s act of swearing by the olive in the Koran<sup>3</sup> can be possibly assumed as referring to its ever--green nature. In the Bible, olive oil is presented as having been used for many spiritual purposes, including use in lighting the tabernacle, the altar, the candlesticks, anointing of spiritual leaders, priests, use for adoration, dedication to the Lord, for healing, etc.

We also see in the Bible that the oil believed to be of the olive was used for the lamps which metaphorically illuminate manifestations of the Holy Spirit. As the Bible reads: “The lamp of the Lord searches the spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 111:3-5

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 128:3 2

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 95:1

of a man, it searches out his inmost being”<sup>1</sup>.

In Gavin Finley’s view, “poetically the Word and Light of God is there as “a lamp unto our feet” to help guide us along the pathway when darkness comes”<sup>2</sup>.

The following Koranic parable speaks for the same purpose: “God is the Light of Heaven and Earth! His light may be compared to a niche in which there is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass; the glass is just as if it were a glittering star kindled from a blessed olive tree, [which is] neither Eastern nor Western, whose oil will almost glow though fire has never touched it. Light upon light, God guides anyone He wishes to His light. God composes parables for mankind; God is Aware of everything!”<sup>3</sup>.

One of the symbols to match eco--theology instructions is the color green, which has become very popular as a symbol of environmental protection. The color associated most often with nature is used by eco--theologies to identify their religious priorities, such as Green Judaism, Green Christianity, and Green Islam.

The latter venerates this color as its own symbol associated with the color of a promised paradise<sup>4</sup> where believers granted eternal life will wear green

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 20:27

<sup>2</sup> Gavin Finley. The Parable Of The Ten Virgins. <http://hkfinance.joinbbs.net/archiver/?tid-1173.html>

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 24:35

<sup>4</sup> Koran, 55:64

clothes<sup>1</sup> and recline on green cushions<sup>2</sup> as if claiming to be absorbed in lush greenery. What makes the religious thought turn to environment protection is that believers are offered to contemplate green nature on earth as a small model of the ever cherished great place of salvation, which is also blessed as bearing God's signs referring to His mightiness, covenant, oneness, etc.: "It is He Who sends down water from the sky. Thus We bring forth plants of every type with it. We produce green vegetation from it. We produce grain from it piled tight packed on one another, and from the date-- palm, clusters hanging low and near --produced from its pollen, as well as orchards full of grapes, olives and pomegranates, which are so similar and yet dissimilar. Look at their fruit as He causes it to grow and ripen. In that are signs for folk who believe"<sup>3</sup>; "Have you not seen how God sends down water from the sky, and the earth becomes clothed with green? God is Gracious, Informed. He holds whatever is in Heaven and whatever is on Earth. God is the Transcendent, the Praiseworthy!"<sup>4</sup> The phrase about "date--palm clusters hanging low of nature and near" creates an association with fruits within easy reach

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 76:21, 18:31

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 55:76

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 6:99

<sup>4</sup> Koran, 22:63-64

in the paradise of greenery<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, every kind of fruit made by God in pairs on earth<sup>2</sup> is present as part of the whole greenery in paradise<sup>3</sup> as well.

The color green is symbolic of sacred signs in the Bible as well. First seen as the color of “plants for food” that God has given to “everything that has the breath of life”<sup>4</sup>, it is further seen as the color of the rainbow over the throne of God, “like an emerald in appearance”<sup>5</sup>. The rainbow as a sign of a covenant that God has made permanently with creation<sup>6</sup> reappears over the throne of God in green, which can be seen as one more confirmation that the covenant is irreversible. At this point the covenant certainly speaks for itself as “the green covenant”. Green also symbolizes God’s people and His seal on them<sup>7</sup>, making His Kingdom dyed in it into a symbol of divine royalty. Green also appears to be the color of the feast of tabernacles celebrating life with God and adorned by green branches as required by God’s commandment to Moses: “Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days”<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 55:54

<sup>2</sup> Koran, 13:3

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 55:52

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:30

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 4:3

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 9:16

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 4:9

<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 23:40

## WATER AS A COMPONENT OF SPIRITUAL COSMOGONY TO TURN INTO THE BLESSING ELIXIR OF LIFE

Of great importance to eco--theologies is to attach the religious thought of humans to the value of water revealed in Holy Scriptures. There are plenty of passages in both the Bible and Koran that address the sacredness of water from various perspectives, most of which shed light on religiously – approved approaches towards how reverently humans should treat water. Worth noting is that new theological research coming into the religious agenda seems to be working to the benefit of eco-- theologies with regard to water. The issue initially deals again with creation history, from which some modern Biblical research allows us to assume that water was the only element that preceded the creation of our present physical world, before the first human couple ---- Adam and Eve---- had ever come into existence.

The suggestion is that we read the literal wording of the passage: “For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed

with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”<sup>1</sup>. The literal wording of this passage sheds light on “the world that then was” and “the heavens and the earth, which are now”. The phrase “the earth standing out of the water and in the water” may well correspond to the statement of Genesis 1:2 about the earth that was covered in waters as a reference to pre--existent water<sup>2</sup>.

The other interesting point concerns water as a component of spiritual cosmogony as reflected by the following Genesis narrative: “And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the 67 firmament: and it was so...”<sup>3</sup> The upper water is believed to constitute part of the third heaven after the two heavens (Earth’s atmosphere --- “And God said, let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl [that] may fly above the earth

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3:5--7

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kjv bible.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:6--8



in the open firmament of heaven”<sup>1</sup> and outer space – “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years”<sup>2</sup>. The third heaven is above the higher “sea” referred to in the following narrative: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal...”<sup>3</sup>

However debatable these points may be from traditional Bible interpretation perspectives, all this, I believe, matches eco--theology’s purposes to introduce the idea of the sacredness of water into the religious agenda. All the more, the interpretations mentioned above do not seem alien to how the sacredness of water is viewed from Koranic perspectives. There is a Koranic verse that refers to water as pre--existent before the creation of heavens and earth took place: “He is the One Who created Heaven and Earth in six days while His Throne was over the water, so He may test which of you is finest in action”<sup>4</sup>.

We may assume that the fact of pre-existent water with regard to God’s creation act revealed explicitly in the Holy Scriptures does not mean water could ever exist on its own if considered in

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:20

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:14

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 4:6

<sup>4</sup> Koran 11:7

the framework of monotheistic logic under the sacramental texts identifying its place amongst all things God has created in heavens and earth as part of the creation act. It can rather mean, or make our thoughts succumb to the assumption, that water was singled out by God to make it serve as a top--priority material to be employed in the process of the creation act under His throne, on which the sacramental texts put a particular emphasis. In this sense, it may somehow favor arguments of proponents of modern process theology, which includes environmentally friendly motivations in many of its directives. The original ideas of this theology found in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead basically state that God created our universe out of the chaotic remains of some prior universe or cosmic epoch but not of “nothing”. However, this is criticized by some traditional Christian theologians advocating the Bible--oriented Christian environmental ethic (for example, see Steve Bishop, Green theology and deep ecology: New Age or New Creation?<sup>1</sup>). With no intention to get into debates between these two theologies, we would only state that the question about pre--existent water mentioned above remains open for deeper insights to be gained in God’s creation act. What makes this theme worthy of further consideration is that a similar pre--existing water is also present as symbolized by

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ecology\\_bishop.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ecology_bishop.pdf)

a vast dark ocean in the hymn of creation in the Rig Veda, one of the sacred books of Hinduism: “In the beginning was darkness swathed in darkness; all this was but unmanifested water...”. Not claiming any particular theological conclusion, we believe it would make sense to think of how these very similar references to water could be intrinsic in the Veda, Bible and Koran. Anyway, in our opinion, this could not be considered as just a coincidence.

Why has water been granted this status of having a higher value than other materials used? Not being an expert in natural sciences, I would just leave this question for big bang cosmologists to support their arguments about hydrogen atoms’ role in the expansion of the universe, which is believed to have consisted in its young age of a compact hydrogen soup which blasted apart with a huge force when it was heated so hot that hydrogen atoms were broken up into their constituent protons and electrons, etc.<sup>1</sup>

“Have not those who disbelieve seen how the heavens and the earth were once one mass which We separated? We have made every living thing out of water. Will they still not believe?”<sup>2</sup> – reads a Koranic verse in associative support of the Genesis

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<sup>1</sup> Cosmology: A Research Briefing, Board on Physics and Astronomy. Commission on Physical Sciences, Mathematics, and Applications. National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington DC. 1995. p.27  
<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/9293/chapter/5#27>

<sup>2</sup> Koran 21:30

1:6--8 narrative if the latter is interpreted as mentioned above.

“Every living thing made out of water” may apply to every creature, from organic ones---- including us as humans, animals, plants, etc.---- to non--organic matters in the universe, in the sense that all the creatures regardless of their material composition somehow radiate from within particles of the Holy Spirit as certain units of energy. This energy makes them all to be a in sort of harmony with the Creator Himself, and hence praise and worship Him in a way that can hardly be understood by humans, as Koranic verses read: “The Seven Heavens and Earth, as well as whoever is in them, glorify Him. Nothing exists unless it hymns 71 His praise; yet you do not understand their glorification”<sup>1</sup> “Do you not see that God is He Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many of the people...”<sup>2</sup>

The same idea is stated in the Bible: “Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 17:44

<sup>2</sup> Koran 22:18

and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.”<sup>1</sup>

“Every living thing” can be assumed as having received its own portion of holy spirit from water when made out of the latter above which<sup>2</sup>, as the Bible states, “Spirit of God was hovering”<sup>3</sup> at the initial stage of creation.

Consequently, creation of the first human out of soil has not excluded the use of water intrinsic to the divine creation process and, therefore, it is not by chance that the majority of the human body is made up of water. Referring explicitly to this is a Koranic verse that reads: “He is the One Who created humanity out of water, and He has granted them blood ties as well as in-- laws”<sup>4</sup>. Some Islamic eco--theologians also tend to interpret the following Koranic verse as meaning that humans are included among “out of--water--created” animals who “walk on two legs” in order to prove the inseparability of humans from nature, encompassed with the same Holy Spirit received from water since the very beginning of creation: “God has created every

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 148:1--6

<sup>2</sup> Koran 21:30

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:2

<sup>4</sup> Koran 25:54

animal out of water; some of them walk on their belly, while others walk on two legs and still others walk on four. God creates anything He wishes; God is able to do everything”<sup>1</sup>.

It should be mentioned that eco--theological attempts to adapt religious teachings to the needs of environmental agendas may well succeed in obtaining the possible flexibility of some passages in Holy Scriptures in favor of ecological interpretations. For example, Koranic verse 50 of the chapter The Criteria (25) starts with the phrase “sarrafna” that if translated literally would sound as: “We have spent it/ or put it into circulation/ or made it away/ or distributed it/ or detailed it/ or spelled it”, then come the words “amongst them in order that they may remember”. The word “it” in many places in the Koran means “Him” or the Holy Writ. Many translators are inclined to translate this as a “Koranic text” in the abovementioned verse, as it seems quite logical at first perception that God might say “We have detailed the Koran amongst people so that they will remember/ or get proper lessons”, and moreover, in many other verses the word “sarrafna” in the sense “we have detailed” is paired up directly with the Koran itself. But the previous verses refer to God who sends

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<sup>1</sup>Koran 24:45

“pure water down from the sky” “to bring life to a dead land, and let everything” He has “created drink from it, such as livestock and men aplenty”<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, the word “it” can mean water instead of the Koranic text because “water” will fit in with the context when God says that “we have put it into circulation so that you remember”. As the word “remember” is generally meant in the Koranic text to come out in a sense of meditating, we seem to be called to meditate on the fact that humanity has been initially created out of water, and to meditate on water having been given to us as a gift from God.

This gift of God in Holy Scriptures is meant to have miraculously healing power because it can cause the eyes of the blind to be opened, the ears of the deaf to be unstopped, the lame to leap like a deer, the tongue of the dumb to sing when it bursts forth under God’s mercy in the wilderness, as streams in the desert, turning the parched ground into a pool and the thirsty land into springs of water<sup>2</sup>. Apart from symbolic meanings, the healing power of water has to be considered herewith as associated with the Holy Spirit, who has been encompassed by water from the very beginning of Creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 25:48-49

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 35:5-7

It is also viewed in Holy Scriptures as a means of spiritual cleansing that would take the righteous to the place of ultimate salvation, signs of which can be seen on earth by the righteous at God's mercy coupled with God--sent pure water. A Koranic verse that describes a situation when the righteous feel concerned about their own ability to resist attacks in which they are outnumbered by armies of idol--worshippers puts an emphasis on rain as a sign (if not means) of a combination of God's blessings for His people as it cleans their souls of doubts that could possibly overcome their belief in God: "He caused drowsiness to overcome you as an assurance from Him, and sent down water from the sky on you to cleanse you with and to remove Satan's blight from you, and to bind up your hearts and brace your feet with it"<sup>1</sup>.

Spiritual cleansing, referred to in the Biblical interpretation as being born of water, receives its high symbolic definition from Jesus Christ's words: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit..."<sup>2</sup>

It is indeed the Holy Spirit that gives water its creative nature, and that also leaves its content once the water gets defiled, because the Holy Spirit is

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 8:11

<sup>2</sup> John 3:5



present where cleanliness is consistently present, at least to the extent that the righteous could meditate on any substance infused with it. A Koranic verse which describes the Garden with rivers of incorruptible waters<sup>1</sup> as an ultimate source of life serves as an example of how God-- sent water on earth should be kept pure to sustain the lives of all creatures brought forth at God's will.

We know from the Bible story of Moses<sup>2</sup> that the Nile River, defiled after Pharaoh had the Hebrew baby boys thrown into it, turned into a source of death after a long period of time when this river had served people living around as a source of life. The fact that its waters became polluted, bitter and undrinkable for Egyptians at God's will primarily due to the crimes committed by Pharaoh's clan fixes our mind on an associative impression that the various possible causes leading to any kind of water pollution should be punishable in a criminal context in the next world, if not also in this one.

Generally, Holy Scriptures addressing rivers certainly grant them some kind of divine status. They appear to be one the key attributes of God's kingdom described in a figurative way, with the purpose to instill the idea of importance of rivers as the main source

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 47:15

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 7:14--24

of life into the religious conscience of the righteous. We are called upon to be worthy of the promises God gave to the righteous: “I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs”<sup>1</sup>; “He will forgive you your sins, and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow, and to beautiful mansions in Gardens of Eden. That is indeed the Great Salvation”<sup>2</sup>.

The story of Moses similarly cited in the Bible and Koran teaches that river or sea waters should also be seen as a tool of salvation. Moses, while an infant, escapes his expected death by being cast into the river in a basket by his mother. The Koran reads at this point: “We sent this inspiration to the mother of Moses: “Suckle him, but when your heart fears about him, cast him into the river, but fear not nor grieve: for We shall restore him to you, and We shall make him one of Our apostles”<sup>3</sup>. In other episode of Moses, salvation is attained by means of sea split asunder across which the children of Israel escape from Pharaoh: “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 41:18

<sup>2</sup> Koran 61:12

<sup>3</sup> Koran 27:7

land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left”<sup>1</sup>; “We took the Children of Israel across the sea: Pharaoh and his hosts followed them in insolence and spite...”<sup>2</sup> What also adds to the sacredness of water is that at the initial stage of creation we see water fulfill the commandment of God to bring out an abundance of living creatures<sup>3</sup>, thus behaving like the holy law-abiding angels in the presence of God. It keeps being sacred on earth because of its eternal life-giving source in the kingdom of God. In Biblical descriptions of His kingdom, water represents the unrestricted flow of God’s blessings<sup>4</sup>, and its spring is presented even as a symbol of God when He blames his people for committing two sins: “They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water”<sup>5</sup>. The latter passage, despite its use of living water in a metaphoric sense meaning all divine values, nevertheless forms the association in the reader’s mind of water as a kind of a reminder of its ever creative nature. The same is

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 14:21

<sup>2</sup> Koran 10:90

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:20--21

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 47:1--12

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 2:13

true of Jesus Christ's famous phrase: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"<sup>1</sup>.

God's blessings in the form of abundance water are seen in many Koranic descriptions of paradise where rivers flow beneath. Why beneath and not through? We are reminded linguistically of the water that lay under the throne of God when He started to create our physical universe, and which still lies and will lie forever in the same position. God's unlimited blessings are also clearly expressed by the Koranic word "*kauser*" in the title of a separate chapter, translated literally into English as "plenty". "*Kauser*"-- "plenty" is believed to be the name of a legendary river which flows beneath paradise, its water being reserved exclusively for His people. Prophet Muhammad seemed to have been granted the same living water when he was given yet more consolation during his early persecution by idol-worshippers: "We have given you plenty, so pray to your Lord and sacrifice since your opponent is the one who will be lopped off"<sup>2</sup>.

A river of pure water "coming from the throne of God"<sup>3</sup> could by no means only be described as flowing

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:14

<sup>2</sup> Koran 108:1--3

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 22:1

in the heavenly kingdom of God; rather, it stretches to our earthly life as well, and does not stop running down to the earth by God's decree: "When he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it."<sup>1</sup> "He gives rain on the earth and sends water on the fields"<sup>2</sup> ; "He is the One Who has sent the winds as heralds announcing His mercy. We send pure water down from the sky, so We may bring life to a dead land, and let everything We have created drink from it, such as livestock and men aplenty"<sup>3</sup>; "We have sent down blessed water from the sky and We grow gardens with it as well as grain to be harvested, and soaring palms which have compact clusters as sustenance for worshippers. We have revived a dead countryside with it; thus will reappearance be"<sup>4</sup>.

From both Koranic and Biblical eco--theology viewpoints, rain is seen as containing in itself divine signs to be followed in order to know God: "It is He Who sends down water from the sky... In that are signs for folk who believe"<sup>5</sup>; "Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like

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<sup>1</sup> Job 28:26--27

<sup>2</sup> Job 5:10

<sup>3</sup> Koran 25:48--49

<sup>4</sup> Koran 50:9--11

<sup>5</sup> Koran 6:99

the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth”<sup>1</sup>.

An interesting point is that seas and oceans are also viewed in eco--theologies as sources from which to extract fresh water. For example, there are Koranic verses that modern Muslim theologians refer to when trying to talk about the scientific context of Koranic text. These verses translated literally into English read: “Have you observed the water which you drink? Is it you who shed it from the equilibrium or are We the shedder”<sup>2</sup>. The first verse is viewed as a statement that God directs believers to ponder the fresh water that people drink. Muslim eco--theologians conclude that the verse in question is indicative of the water circulation process on our planet, which ultimately serves to extract fresh water from the salty water of the seas and oceans. This interpretation of the verse combined with scientific commentary on the hydrologic cycle says that salts in the seas and oceans protect the water per God’s will from being spoilt due to action of bacteria and the limited motion of water in these oceans or seas. Then comes the role of sunrays to warm water on the surface of these oceans or seas

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 6:3

<sup>2</sup> Koran 56:68--69

and winds to turn this water surface into clouds of fresh water-- vapors. The latter idea is referred to in the second of the two verses mentioned above.

To the possible surprise of many who are accustomed to view religion as separate from science, this hydrologic cycle----the process by which clouds are formed, rain is produced and ground water is replenished---- is presented in Bible as well. The related Bible verses read: "He wraps up the waters in his clouds, yet the clouds do not burst under their weight"<sup>1</sup> ; "He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind"<sup>2</sup> ; "The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again"<sup>3</sup>.

The sacredness of water seems obviously proven for the righteous who include ritual washing acts as part of their religious performances. With some different manifestations of the ritual washing in monotheistic religions, ritual ablutions make water a revered substance used for spiritual purification.

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<sup>1</sup> Job 26:8

<sup>2</sup> Job 36:27--28

<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:6--7

Jewish ritual washing traditions are believed to have their roots in the Torah. For example, we see in the Scripture priests obliged to be washed at their consecration: “Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water”<sup>1</sup>. Or they are demanded to perform certain ablutions on the Day of Atonement: “He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on”<sup>2</sup>. The requirement of hand washing have followed from statements such as: “Anyone whom the one with the discharge touches without having rinsed his hands in water shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be 83 unclean until the evening”<sup>3</sup>; and “I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O Lord”<sup>4</sup>. Many details are given describing what kind of water is used for ritual cleansing in Judaism, of which the main requirement is that the water used for ritual washing be naturally pure, unused, not contain other substances, and not be stained.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 29:4

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 16:4

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 15:11

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 26:6



In Christian ritual practice, water is mainly viewed as a means of the baptismal cleansing for the remission of sins. Christian baptism is believed to have its origin in the symbolism of the Israelites being led by Moses out of slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea and from the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan: "All our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Now these things became our examples"<sup>1</sup>. Christians are called on to follow a commandment given by Jesus Christ after his resurrection to his disciples: "...Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit..."<sup>2</sup> What explicitly connects water baptism in Christianity to the presence of the Holy Spirit is indeed water's nature, having been blessed since the time when the "Spirit of God was hovering over the waters"<sup>3</sup>, and also the fact that baptismal ablution is viewed as both following Holy Spirit baptism<sup>4</sup> and leading to it<sup>5</sup>.

Quite interesting is a common view in Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Corinthians 10:1--2, 6

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:2

<sup>4</sup> Acts 10:47--48

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:38

theology with regard to some symbols water transmits in the Christian liturgical tradition such as: purification, cleansing, healing, blessing, sanctification, baptism including remission of sins, illumination, regeneration, new birth, the presence of the Holy Spirit, redemption, salvation, etc. From this perspective water appears to be a unique earthly element capable of immediate contact with God.

Water has entered Muslim daily spiritual life, as Muslims are supposed to perform ablution before each bodily prayer, which according to traditions they observe mostly five times a day. Motivated by the Koranic statement that “God loves those who 85 purify themselves”<sup>1</sup> the righteous Muslims feel obliged to be physically pure in the presence of God when performing daily ritual prayers. Details of how to do daily ablutions and other cleansing acts are in the related Koranic verse that reads: “You who believe, whenever you intend to pray, wash your faces, your hands up to the elbows; and wipe off your heads; and your feet up to the ankles. If you are soiled, then take a full bath. If you are ill or on a journey, or one of you has just come from the toilet or had contact with any women, and you do not find any water, then betake

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 9:108

yourselves to pure earth and wipe your faces and hands off with some of it. God does not want to place any inconvenience on you, but He does want to purify you and to complete His favor towards you, in order that you may act grateful”<sup>1</sup>.

These verses are interpreted by Muslim eco--theologians as also meaning that the righteous should avoid wasting water when performing ablutions, as they may lack water if they do not use it in reasonable measure, hence causing the wrath of God. The righteous are offered in this regard to keep in mind that even God, the owner of the whole universe, “has sent down water from the heaven in measure”<sup>2</sup>. The latter means that rain, if sent in due measure, brings life to barren land, bringing forth crops for people and their cattle<sup>3</sup> ; otherwise it will result in torrents, creating havoc, sweeping life away as in the following verse: “We sent the sky upon them in torrents and let rivers flow beneath them, and yet We wiped them out because of their offences and raised up other generations to succeed them”<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, wasteful use of water can be associated with the wrath of God, being manifest in destructive acts that can lead to an

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 5:6

<sup>2</sup> Koran 43:11

<sup>3</sup> Koran 32:27

<sup>4</sup> Koran 6:6

unhappy end, the way it has always happened when in judging mankind's sin God "opened the windows of the skies; ...rain fell on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights"<sup>1</sup> or "opened Heaven's gates for water to pour down; ...drilled the earth full of springs and the waters met at a command which had been decreed"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 7:11--12

<sup>2</sup> Koran 54:11--12

## BIBLICAL AND KORANIC SANCTITY OF SOIL

Another lesson taken from the verse describing the details of Muslim ablution<sup>1</sup> is about Koranic permission to use pure soil for lack of water to perform the cleansing ritual, which means that believers are obliged to treat soil as respectfully as they do water. The sanctity of soil, here directly linked to Islamic worship rituals, is also emphasized in the Bible from a moral perspective as referring to human's obligations to maintain purity in behavioral patterns under God's law which, when violated, can cause the land in which the unfaithful live to be impure: "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am casting out before you defiled themselves; and the land became defiled, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants"<sup>2</sup>.

Naturally, pure soil is meant to be fertile, as it was in the garden where Adam and Eve were first given the offer to enjoy its fruits. Moreover, as mentioned above, this very soil--- "*adamah*" in Hebrew--- was

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 5:6

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 18:25

used by God to create the human being. From this perspective, the first sin committed by the couple's disobedience to the commandment of God, along with other theological implications, seems to fit into the context of environmental disobedience as well.

Ellen F. Davis in her article "The Bible and Our Topsoil" considers the first 11 chapters of Genesis in the Bible as the "story of Adam's progressive alienation from God and fertile soil". In support of this consideration, we would only add that one of the ways which can possibly lead to reunion with God consists of progressive life-giving efforts by humanity towards the soil. Moreover, people are called to recall that the first human being was born in soil, which is no other than their own, thus soil's need to be cared for by humans is part of their eco-obligations under the Covenant.

Her interpretation of Genesis 12:3 addressing God's assurance to Abraham also proves interesting: "In you all the families of the fertile soil shall be blessed". In many other translations "the fertile soil" simply reads "the earth" or "the ground". An environmentally motivated interpretation of "the earth" or "the ground" as fertile is justified by the word "*adama*" in Hebrew, which is naturally associated with its quality and predestined mission to bring forth

living creatures. She concludes, “Abraham represents those around the world who understand that God’s blessing is ineluctably connected with topsoil; it is the indispensable medium for communication of God’s goodness to all the peoples of the world”<sup>1</sup>.

I would totally agree with this environmentally motivated assessment, especially in light of the following Koranic verse where Abraham appeals to God: “O our Lord, I have had some of my offspring reside in a valley without cultivation alongside Your Hallowed House, our Lord, so that they may keep up prayer. So fill the hearts of some among men with love towards them, and provide them with fruits so they may act grateful”<sup>2</sup>. Adopted by God as a bosom friend<sup>3</sup>, Abraham really seems to understand the connection of his Patron’s blessing with cultivated soil. As it follows from the quoted Koranic verse, in order to gain God’s blessings for his future generation, he wanted to give life to a barren valley. Thus he made some of his offspring dwell there to cultivate the land and turn it into topsoil and a fruitful field by experiencing the presence of God in the world of nature, and by being there permanently. We assume that this is one of

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen F. Davis. The Bible and our topsoil. <https://www.cropchoice.com/leadstryc76a.html?recid=1105>

<sup>2</sup> Koran 14:37

<sup>3</sup> Koran 4:125

reasons why Abraham has been so distinguished in the Koran among the other prophets that he seems to have personified a community in his own person<sup>1</sup> and served together with “those with him” as a “final model”<sup>2</sup> for people whom God is addressing and instructing to “eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God” but “do no evil, nor mischief on the earth”<sup>3</sup>.

By the way, the figure of Abraham personifies a party with whom God sealed a covenant in both the Bible and Koran.

From a Christian eco-theology perspective, the importance of topsoil is well proven through some interpretations of Jesus Christ’s parables quoted in the Bible. Mostly emphasized is the parable of the sower that reads: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 16:120

<sup>2</sup> Koran 60:4

<sup>3</sup> Koran 2:60



grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold”<sup>1</sup>. This parable is about four different kinds of soil: an unconcerned soil, a shallow soil, a polluted soil, and a good soil. The latter, apart from any other interpretations, represents from an eco-- theology perspective the one that responds and produces a bountiful harvest for God’s glory. “Rocky ground” with little soil on it is likened in the Koran to those hypocrites who spend their wealth just to advertise their “generosity” while not believing in God: “You who believe, do not cancel your acts of charity by making any reproach or scolding like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in God nor in the Last Day. They are in parable like a hard, barren rock, on which is a little soil: on it falls heavy rain, which leaves it just a bare stone. They will be able to do nothing with aught they have earned. God does not guide those who reject faith”<sup>2</sup>. As the real generosity belongs to God who blesses His people by granting them fertile soil to live on, so even heavy rain that falls to pair up with topsoil should serve as a blessing: “And the likeness of those who spend their substance, seeking to please God and to strengthen their souls, is as a garden, high

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 4:3--8

<sup>2</sup> Koran 2:164

and fertile: heavy rain falls on it but makes it yield a double increase of harvest, and if it receives not heavy rain, light moisture suffices it. God is observant of anything you do”<sup>1</sup>. In the other verse the faithful are likened to “a grain of wheat which sprouts into seven ears with a hundred grains in each ear”<sup>2</sup>. Bearing certain figurative meanings referred to in traditional commentaries, the latter Koranic parable about the righteous personifying the fertile ground brings to our minds a picture of the only topsoil on which wheat, a universal symbol of fertility, prosperity and nourishment, can be grown.

The Biblical parable of the weeds instigates eco-theological thoughts in a similar way. In this parable, fertile soil is symbolically associated with the kingdom that, being likened to a sower of good seed, also brings forth wheat<sup>3</sup>. In the following verses Jesus Christ interprets the parable as descriptive of the world, at the end of which the righteous, likened to “good seeds,” (exactly as in the Koranic parable of a grain of wheat) will become a good part of the heavenly harvest<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 2:165

<sup>2</sup> Koran 2:161

<sup>3</sup> Mathew 13:24--30

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 13:37--43

## FAITH ETHICS TO PROTECT ANIMALS' RIGHTS

A particular focus of eco-theologies is the relationship between humans and animals. The latter are meant to be treated by humans respectfully, as demanded by the logic of faith itself. The righteous are asked to take into account that animals, like other creatures, are always in touch with their Creator, who has not left them alone but sustains their lives by providing food for their needs. As the Bible reads: "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or 93 barn; yet God feeds them..."<sup>1</sup> "He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call"<sup>2</sup> . Accordingly, the Koran reads: "And do they not see that We do drive rain to parched soil and produce therewith crops, providing food for their cattle and themselves? Have they not the vision?"<sup>3</sup> . Moreover, in God's eyes humans and animals have equal rights when it comes to sharing water He sends down from the sky: "...We send down pure water from the sky, -- that

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:24

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 147:9

<sup>3</sup> Koran 32:27

with it We may give life to a dead land, and slake in much portion the thirst of what We have created as cattle and men”<sup>1</sup> .

The Bible also points out that the first human beings and animals shared food (vegetation) since they were created: “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food”<sup>2</sup> . Some eco--theologians in Judaism and Christianity take this as a sign that the first human couple before the fall were vegetarians and did not kill for food, enjoying peaceful coexistence with animals in the Garden of Eden as a single community. The Koranic description of Adam and Eve before both they and the Satan were forced “to get down with the enmity between themselves” to the earth --- their temporary dwelling--place and means of livelihood----<sup>3</sup> also speaks for human’s vegetarian lifestyle but with no mention of animals being present. Furthermore, humans and animals projected to earthly life appear to be members of a single community for whose use God

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 25:48--49

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:29-30

<sup>3</sup> Koran 2:36

has created the earth, brought forth from it its water and its pasturage, and firmly fixed the mountains<sup>1</sup>.

Producing more insights about animals, Christian eco-- theologians tend to focus also on the presence of animals in the kingdom of God where there will again be no need to kill animals for food purposes. Nevertheless, the Bible itself, as if asserting the need to avoid any kind of extremes at this point, reads: “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving”<sup>2</sup>. The Bible also says that the Lord (God in many Christian interpretations), appearing to Abraham in human form, ate of “a calf, tender and good,” along with “butter and milk”<sup>3</sup> , and Jesus ate the Passover lamb with His disciples<sup>4</sup>.

Challenging to Muslim eco--theologians with regard to flesh--eating is that the Koran describes paradise for the righteous as full of “any kind of fruit and meat that they desire”<sup>5</sup>, as a place where they are also offered “any bird-meat they desire”<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, it is believed that does not imply at all that the righteous will kill the animals in paradise for

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 79:30--33

<sup>2</sup> I Timothy 4:4

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 18:7--8

<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:7--8

<sup>5</sup> Koran 52:22

<sup>6</sup> Koran 56:21

their self- nourishment, because they are expected to totally rely on divine nourishment as rewarded by God. As for me, the author of this research, I would add that the Koran, addressing both spiritual and materialistic mindsets, explicitly puts an emphasis on the rewards of Paradise as not of earthly origin, but as a simulation of the latter. The righteous, when given any product as provision in Paradise, will say: “‘This is what we were given before’. But they were only given a simulation of it...”<sup>1</sup>

However, eco--theologians in Judaism, Christianity and Islam cannot escape the fact that scriptures have predestined animals while on earth to meet a variety of human needs, including food. “...God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything”<sup>2</sup> – reads the Bible. “In cattle you have an example: from within their bodies We make you drink; there are, in them, numerous benefits for you; and of theirs you eat”<sup>3</sup> – reads the Koran.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 2:25

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 9:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Koran 23:21

Vasu Murti in his article “Vegetarianism in Islam”<sup>1</sup> points out that “as in the Jewish tradition, animal life partakes of the sacred, and the ritual and humane slaughter of animals is regarded as a divine concession to human lust and brutality”. He also refers to a Koranic verse<sup>2</sup> that considers animal sacrifice as a means of worship a futile act, as “their flesh will never reach God, nor yet their blood—but your devotion and piety will reach Him”<sup>3</sup>. Consonant with this is a Biblical statement “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”<sup>4</sup>.

Departing from sacred texts, we may see that God has generally made divine concession for human weaknesses in their various manifestations. The Biblical instruction “Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect”<sup>5</sup> is believed to speak for God’s concession to human weakness in setting an ideal standard, but tolerating His people’s failure to reach that level. Commenting on this, Martin G. Collins points out “We can certainly attain an increasing level of spiritual maturity, yet we cannot truly complete the process until changed into God—until our human

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<sup>1</sup><https://bhaktiyoga.wordpress.com/transcribed-lectures/vegetarianism-in-islam-by-vasu-murti-das/>

<sup>2</sup> Koran 22:37

<sup>3</sup> <http://bhaktiyoga.wordpress.com/transcribed--lectures/vegetarianism--in--islam--by--vasu--murti--das/>

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 10:4

<sup>5</sup> Mathew 5:48

nature has been totally changed”<sup>1</sup>. A Koranic verse that directly speaks about God’s concession to human weakness states: “God does wish to lighten for you. For man was created weak”<sup>2</sup>.

We believe that divine concession to human weakness in meeting earthly needs implies part of a divine mechanism that is meant to raise the spirituality experienced by the righteous from its lower level to its possible upper tiers as to give them chances to increase their spiritual maturity. In other words, the permissible is to be conceived of as a point of departure for an eternal journey of evolution into the most desirable by divine demand. Projecting this idea onto people’s needs for nourishment, the way the righteous may evolve from unmeasured eating towards measured eating may serve in itself as a sort of reflection of the spiritual journey towards maturity.

Besides the previous ideas, God’s compromise to human weakness implies certain moral limits for people not to surpass while using animals for different needs.

Commenting on God’s provision of the animals for food, Matthew Henry wrote that this “fully warrants the use of them, but not the abuse of them by gluttony, still less by cruelty. We ought not to pain

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/712/Spiritual-Maturity.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Koran 2:28



them needlessly whilst they live, nor when we take away their lives”<sup>1</sup>.

This commentary sounds in part like an echo of what the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have said: “...When you slaughter an animal, you should sharpen your knife so as to cause the animal as little pain as possible”.<sup>2</sup> Muhammad is also believed to have said that “providing food and drink for animals are among those virtuous gestures which draw us one step nearer to God,” and “everyone who shows clemency, even towards a mere bird under the knife, will find God’s clemency towards him on Doomsday”.

David Suzuki, in his book *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place In Nature*, suggests that we reclaim the ancient understanding of the interconnectedness of all things on earth to recover the sense of responsibility that people felt when they lived in nature as part of their lives. He quotes the traditional Waswanipi hunter as saying that success in hunting is not entirely his own doing. A successful kill can partly be attributed to the willingness of the particular moose or beaver or whitefish itself to lay down its life so that Waswanipi people can live... They know that the north wind and the souls of their prey

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<sup>1</sup> <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/9-2.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Shaddad bin Aus. Muslim; Vol. 2, Chapter 11; Section on ‘Slaying’.

are neither capricious nor passive but are a dynamic indication of the hunters' current moral standing in the "eyes of nature". The north wind and the animal spirit operate in a reciprocal relationship with the hunters' actions today and in the past. In exchange for nature's generosity in meeting Waswanipi needs, the hunter acknowledges his profound obligation to act responsibly towards nature. His many responsibilities include killing animals swiftly, without causing unnecessary suffering; neither killing more than is given nor killing for fun or self-- aggrandizement; acting respectfully towards the bodies and souls of the animals by observing the proper rituals when retrieving, butchering and eating them; and using what is given completely, without carelessness or waste <sup>1</sup>.

Truly, some ancient belief systems thought to be pagan seem to have claimed spirituality in all natural surroundings. One of the best examples in this regard is Tengrism, named after Sky--God – Tengri, the belief system of the ancient Turks and Mongols. The ancient Turks believed that 17 Deities -- Tengri, Yer--Sub, Umai, Erlik, Earth, Water, Fire, Sun, Moon, Star, Air, Clouds, Wind, Storm, Thunder and Lightning, Rain, and Rainbow, ruled our Universe. Mongols believed

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<sup>1</sup> David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell (1998). *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place In Nature.* [Douglas & McIntyre, Limited. p.102-103

that 99 Deities, Tengris, ruled our Universe. The core in this belief system was that all existing on the earth is subject to Tengri -- the incarnation of a celestial beginning, the creator of the universe, the “Spirit of the Sky”, and subsequently their cautious and careful actions towards nature were preconditioned by a perception of the natural world as bearing Tengri’s spirit in every single part. They believed that every part of nature, including flora and fauna along with other natural resources, was in the possession of certain minor deities bearing Tengri’s spirit, and these unseen beings placed on a lower echelon of the divine hierarchy were in a constant state of submitting to Tengri. Aware of not being owners of their natural surroundings, they were cautious not to harm nature in the process of gaining any benefit from it. For example, they had a common feeling that if one spoke loudly during hunting it might have angered the real owner of the area where hunting took place. They practiced a self--imposed ban on polluting water basins/ rivers and needlessly cutting down trees. Otherwise, they would be challenged by unseen owners of these natural resources – i.e. conditions could deteriorate, people could face misfortunes, disasters, epidemics, etc. In other words, divine punishments for violations of natural law were viewed as inevitable in this world.

Interesting traces of hunting similar to the

Waswanipi case are found in Kitab--i Dede Korkut, an ancient Azeri--Turkic epos recopied later in the Middle Ages and thus Islamized by copyists. One of the heroes catches an infant deer in his net while hunting. He sets the animal free after having implanted his stamp in the deer's ear so that this animal, if ever trapped into anyone else's net, could be recognized as an untouchable possession. This little creature released from the net was given time to grow and was meant only to fall prey to his master who caught him first in his infancy. It implied that the fertility of animals was understood as part of people's responsibility before the sacred nature.

Coming back to monotheistic religions, we see that eco-- theologians consider any kind of cruelty to animals, be it physical or psychological, forbidden from both Biblical and Koranic perspectives.

"If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young"<sup>1</sup> – reads Bible, indicating the Torah's prohibition of either cooking a kid in its mother's milk or taking eggs or chicks from a nest while the mother bird is present. **Another verse is: "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together"**<sup>2</sup>, **which Jewish tradition sees also as the Torah's instruction not**

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 22:6

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 22:10

to cause injury or pain to these animals, who naturally work at different paces.

The pagan practice of slitting the ears of animals is seen in the Koran as a devilish act carried out according to the command of Satan, who after having been cursed by God, cries out that he is going to mislead people: “I will mislead them and I will create in them false desires. I will order them to slit the ears of cattle and to deface the nature created by God”<sup>1</sup>.

The moral limits to which human treatment of animals is confined are preconditioned in scriptures as divine reminders of how animals are valued in God’s eyes.

“Do you not see that God is He Whom do glorify all those who are in the heavens and the earth, and the birds with expanded wings? He knows the prayer of each one and its glorification, and God is Cognizant of what they do”<sup>2</sup> – reads the Koran. I would turn to John Calvin, the great Protestant reformer, whose words in “Preface to Olivitan’s New Testament” sound like a commentary on the above Koranic verse: “It is evident that all creatures, from those in the firmament to those which are in the center of the earth, are able to act as witnesses and messengers of His glory to all

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 4:119

<sup>2</sup> Koran 24: 41

men; to draw them to seek God, and after having found Him, to meditate upon Him and to render Him the homage befitting His dignity as so good, so mighty, so wise a Lord who is eternal; yea, they are even capable of aiding every man wherever He is in this quest. For the little birds that sing, sing of God; the beasts clamor for Him; the elements dread Him, the mountains echo him, the fountains and flowing waters cast their glances at Him, and the grass and flowers laugh before Him. Truly there is no need for long searching, since everyone could find Him in himself, because every one of us is sustained and preserved by his power which is in us"<sup>1</sup>.

John Calvin also suggests that while we contemplate the immense treasures of wisdom and goodness exhibited in the creatures as in so many mirrors, we may not only run our eye over them with a hasty, and, as it were, evanescent glance, but dwell long upon them, seriously and faithfully turn them in our minds, and every now and then bring them to recollection<sup>2</sup>. I cannot help but quote here a Koranic verse which bears almost the same suggestion: "He created the seven heavens one above another; you see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent;

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<sup>1</sup> <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/preface-to-olivetans-new-testament.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Institutes 1:14

then look again, can you see any disorder? Then turn back the eye again and again..."<sup>1</sup>

The Koran calls on human beings not to overlook the fact that just as God communicated with His human messengers, so He did with bees: "And your Lord revealed to the bee saying: Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build. Then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of your Lord submissively. There comes forth from within it a beverage of many colours, in which there is healing for men; most surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect"<sup>2</sup>. The Bible also records an episode when God spoke through an animal. In that episode, a prophet's donkey prove to show even greater spiritual perception than the prophet himself did: "Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the ass, "Because you have made sport of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." And the ass said to Balaam, "Am I not your ass, upon which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No". Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 67:3-4

<sup>2</sup> Koran 16:68-69

saw the angel of the Lord standing in his way, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face. And the angel of the Lord said to him, “Why have you struck your ass these three times? Behold, I have come forth to withstand you, because your way is perverse before me; and the ass saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have slain you and let her live”<sup>1</sup>.

Episodes recording “anthropomorphized” animals are present in the Koran as well. The following is a passage from a Koranic chapter titled “The Ant”: “And assembled for Solomon were his hosts of the jinns, and men, and birds, and they were marshalled until they came upon the valley of the ants. Said an ant, “O ye ants! Go into your dwellings, that Solomon and his hosts crush you not while they do not perceive”. And he smiled, laughing at her speech, and said, “O Lord! Excite me to be thankful for your favor, wherewith you have favored me and my parents, and to do righteousness which may please you, and make me enter into your mercy amongst your righteous servants!”<sup>2</sup>. This episode is followed by an occasion when Solomon and hoopoe talk to each other<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 22:28--32

<sup>2</sup> Koran 27:17--19

<sup>3</sup> Koran 27:22-28



## GOD'S UNSHARED RIGHT OF PROPERTY OVER THE NATURE

There is a commonly accepted view that soil, water, air, forests, sunlight, moonlight, etc. are to be seen as common wealth for all. Eco-theologies teach that it is God who has the unshared right of property over nature. As the Bible reads: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it"<sup>1</sup>; "Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord"<sup>2</sup>. Of the same content are Koranic verses that read: "He holds whatever is in Heaven and whatever is on Earth; God is the Transcendent, the Praiseworthy"<sup>3</sup>; "...God holds the inheritance of Heaven and Earth..."<sup>4</sup>; "...God holds control over Heaven and Earth, as well as anything in between them..."<sup>5</sup>. Neither the Biblical commission for human beings to subdue the earth nor the Koranic status of humans as God's vicegerents on the earth is anything other than an acknowledgement that humankind has no rights of ownership or authority over creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 24:1

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 27:30

<sup>3</sup> Koran 22:64

<sup>4</sup> Koran 3:180

<sup>5</sup> Koran 5:17

Therefore, the moral and ethical repercussions of benefiting from the property belonging to God demand respectful treatment of nature, as human being should never see the environment as a source for their selfish satisfaction, but rather should avoid squandering its resources so that their naturally increasing needs will be met. The sacramental texts also caution against squander because there are some preset limits regulated by divine rules for restoration processes that are applied to losses the environment undergoes. In this regard, God holds human beings particularly responsible for maintaining the ecological balance on earth. We should take into account that unlike other creatures, the human being is the only one who is left free to think and act on his or her own with the status of God's successor on earth, hence being held responsible for wellbeing of the globe. Whether he or she will be punished or blessed depends on how he or she acts: "And He it is Who has made you successors in the land and raised some of you above others by grades, that He might try you by what He has given you; surely your Lord is quick to requite, and He is most surely the Forgiving, the Merciful".<sup>1</sup> We believe God is capable of resuscitation of whatever He has once created in

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 6:165

the sense of His ability to compensate for any losses. Of course, this may happen at His own will, as “He is most surely the Forgiving, the Merciful”<sup>1</sup> and “... commends his love toward us”<sup>2</sup> but there is also a risk for human beings to be requited for wrongdoings as 109 “Lord is quick to requite”<sup>3</sup>. We know that “... whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap”<sup>4</sup>.

A commonly accepted view about the reasons behind the economic crisis basically comes down to a culture of consumerism reflected in the human mindset and behavior towards the surrounding world, including nature. Sallie McFague refers to it as “the contemporary reincarnation of the deadly sin of greed”<sup>5</sup> devastating the natural world. She also points out that “sin and evil are pretending that we can live outside reality, this reality of interrelationship and interdependence of all things with one another and with God. Sin is refusing to grow into the image of God in which we (and everything else) is made. Sin is refusing to reflect God, become like God, by imagining that we can exist outside of relationship with God

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<sup>1</sup> Koran, 24:21

<sup>2</sup> Bible, Romans, 5:8

<sup>3</sup> Koran, 6:165

<sup>4</sup> Bible, Galatians 6:7

<sup>5</sup> Sallie McFague (2001). *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. p.22

and others, living as if one's life came from oneself"<sup>1</sup>. To uproot consumerism from people's mindset and behavior, Thomas Berry suggests changing the whole philosophy of education in universities, which are called to be generators of ideas that can save our planet from destruction. He warns that since the lack of intimacy with the natural world in all its living forms ever experienced by earlier human traditions and the transition into the alienation of modern civilization have brought us to the point when the devastation of our planet is so overwhelming, there is an urgent need to change the philosophy of all disciplines taught in the universities to one of a functional cosmology content<sup>2</sup>.

Eco--theologians in Judaism, Christianity and Islam voice their concerns over the climate change problem by coming up with a theological response to global warming. It is interesting to note how eco--theologies try to bring the matter into the surface of theology in their attempt to join the scientific consensus that human--caused warming of earth's atmosphere threatens to cause extreme hardship to millions of people around the world, widespread ecological disruption, and species extinction.

Mark X. Jacobs, Founding Director of Coalition

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.183

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Berry (1999). *The Great Work: Our Way Into The Future*. New York: Harmony/Bell Tower. p. 84

on the Environment and Jewish Life, in his testimony to the Subcommittee on Transportation and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the US House of Representatives on February 10, 2000, quoted Deuteronomy 22:8, which reads: “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet [a fence] for your roof, so that you do not bring blood--guilt on your house if anyone should fall from it”. Trying to attach this verse to a challenge about climate change, he focused on Rabbi Moses Maimonides’ commentary that humans “must take action to protect others from any object of potential danger, by which it is likely that a person could be fatally injured, including building a fence on an unprotected roof. In the Mishneh Torah, his great commentary on the Bible, he wrote that a person (not just the owner) must remove a possible danger that could cause fatal harm to another, even, in the case of the parapet, when the danger is not imminent or certain. So too with climate change. We must take action to prevent possible danger. It is simply wrong for us to live today in a manner that may well endanger future generations... We stand before choices that will affect generations to come – biblical choices, between life and death, between blessing and curse. Shall energy be a safe, clean, sustainable

blessing? Or shall our consumption of energy be a curse, causing harm, and even death, to people and other creatures far into the future?”<sup>1</sup>

As for a Christian perspective on clean energy, energy as a whole in the universe is assumed as coming from Christ, who is “sustaining all things by his powerful word”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, as Jim Ball, Executive Director of Evangelical Environmental Network puts it: “Christians, our lives are about using the energy Christ gives us to do God’s will. Whether that energy comes from the food we eat or from the electricity that powers our homes and offices or the fuel that powers our vehicles, it should not result in harm to what Christ loves... The Bible clearly teaches that God has a special concern for the just treatment of the less powerful, and expects government officials and those with power to deal justly with them. Air pollution hurts others, especially children and older people. As Dr. Houghton has claimed, and as the IPCC reports demonstrate, the threat of global climate change will hurt the less powerful of God’s creation---the poor, the children and the unborn or future generations, and non--human creation--- most. Therefore, Christians must continually bear in mind and lift up the principle that every step away from air

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.coejl.org/climatechange/GlobalWarming.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 1:3

pollution and global climate change is a step toward justice and the God of justice. Every effort to create a clean energy future for the world is part of Christ's reconciliation of all of creation, wrought by his blood"<sup>1</sup>.

The eco--theological potential of the Koranic text also embraces the notion of clean energy. Making a departure from the Koranic text to the modern Islamic theology view, the God--being is a "High Source of Unlimited Energy". This view holds that all motions and movements happening in the skies and the earth (even our bodily movements) are governed by an energy coming from its main source – God. This energy, expressed in religious terms as "spirit", is believed to be part of the whole included in God's actions. Referring to this is a Koranic verse that reads: "They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say: "The Spirit is one from works (or orders) of my Lord. And of knowledge you have been given only a little" <sup>2</sup> . The other Koranic verse referred to as one that indicates the view of modern Islamic theologians that God himself is the High Energy Source reads: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is as a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would also glow

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<sup>1</sup> <http://creationcare.org/magazine/spring00.php>

<sup>2</sup> Koran 17:85

forth, though no fire touched it. Light upon light! God guides to His light whom He wills..."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, searching for God's bounty, the human being is called by Koranic logic to take to consideration the holiness of energy itself and to think of not squandering it in a destructive way to the detriment of God's creation.

Muslim believers are offered to seek God's grace and mercy in their earthly lives as manifestations of the creative High Spirit/High Energy. Electricity, solar energy, and wind energy can be viewed as blessed alternatives in light of God's oath to the sun and its splendor<sup>2</sup>, in light of the story of how God made wind obedient to Solomon<sup>3</sup>, and the verse which reads: "Among His Signs is this that He sends the winds as heralds of Glad Tidings, giving you a taste of His Grace and Mercy..."<sup>4</sup>

Clean alternatives at this point can be adopted to replace those which, functioning by exploding or burning, are easily associated with both Biblical and Koranic descriptions of Hell, where "fire is not quenched"<sup>5</sup>, and if "allayed" God will "add to... burning" of disbelievers<sup>6</sup>.

One of the remarkable features of eco--theologies

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 91:1

<sup>2</sup> Koran 24:35

<sup>3</sup> Koran 21:81; 34:12

<sup>4</sup> Koran 30:46

<sup>5</sup> Mark 9:44

<sup>6</sup> Koran 17:97



is that almost all of them stand for the idea that ecological concerns as a matter of universal context should be considered as relating to the humanity and all the living things on our planet in their unity. In this sense they all seem to go beyond the traditional understanding of the concept of religious community. The growing number of the contemporary Christian theologians suggest that in light of human and planetary history, the boundaries of understanding of the Christian community should be expanded to include all the community of the living.

This approach, however, by implication goes back to Thomas Berry, who has been considering environmental ethics as derivative from what is dictated by the needs of great community of the Earth, a comprehensive community of all the living and non-living components of the planet. Calling the human project itself a component of the Earth project, he suggested that “our intimacy with the Earth is our way to intimacy with each other In his remarkable book *The Great Work: Our Way Into The Future*, T. Berry insists that “a single integral community of the Earth that includes all its component members whether human or other than human” is a reality we should not depart from, because “in this community every being

has its own role to fulfill, its own dignity, its inner spontaneity; every being has its own voice; every being declares itself to the entire universe; every being enters into communion with other beings..." He goes on, saying: "So too every being has a right to be recognized and revered. Trees have tree rights, insects have insect rights, rivers have river rights, mountains have mountain rights. So too with entire range of beings throughout the universe. All rights are limited and relative. So too with humans. We have human rights. We have rights to the nourishment and shelter we need. We have rights to habitat. But we have no rights to deprive other species of their proper habitat. We have no rights to interfere with their migration routes. We have no rights to disturb the basic functioning of the bio--systems of the planet. We can not own the Earth or any part of the Earth in any absolute manner. We own property in accord with the level of well--being of the property and for the benefit of the larger community as well as ourselves"<sup>1</sup>.

Some messages of both the Bible and Koran seem to encourage eco--theologies to look at our planet and the whole universe as a place of spiritual unity where all of the components are ineluctably interconnected,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry (1999). *The Great Work: Our Way Into The Future*. New York: Harmony/Bell Tower. p. 45

yet interdependent under God’s supervision. Both the Bible and Koran, referring to the spiritual relatedness between humans and all other living creatures, point to its divine source as having been put forth by God Himself who has breathed spirit to everything He has created as mentioned above. Moreover, “the universe carries in itself the norm of authenticity of every spiritual as well as every physical activity within it”, which “are two dimensions of the single reality that is the universe itself” as Thomas Berry puts it<sup>1</sup>.

It is noteworthy that we are also offered to see in the creation story of holy texts that the interconnectedness of the particular elements of the universe emerges as a spiritual event by virtue of their direct participation in the creation process at God’s behest. God’s commands in Biblical Genesis “let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”<sup>2</sup>, “let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth”<sup>3</sup>, and “let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night...”<sup>4</sup> are fulfilled by “the positive performance of the elements”, which to some extent

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Berry (1999). *The Great Work: Our Way Into The Future*. New York: Harmony/Bell Tower. p. 49-50

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:9

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:11

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:14

appear to be “collaborators with God”, who through the divine word “enlists them to contribute to the ongoing process of creation”<sup>1</sup>. As for God’s commands in the creation process described in the Koran, they are simply of the same content as the Biblical “let it be”: “Devisor of Heaven and Earth, whenever He decrees some affair, He merely tells it: “Be!” and it is”<sup>2</sup>. And “the positive performance of the elements” that are “collaborators with God” is also there: “...Then He soared up to Heaven while it was still a haze, and told both it and the earth: “Come, either obediently or reluctantly.” They both said: “We shall come willingly!” He determined there should be seven heavens within two days, and inspired its own order in each heaven. We have beautified the lowest heaven with lamps and a safeguard. Such is the design of the Powerful, the Aware!”<sup>3</sup>

Interconnectedness of the elements of the universe as a spiritual event is conditioned by their God--given assignments which humans, incorporated into this designed circle of the universe, are offered to enjoy. For example, both the Bible and Koran refer to the sun and the moon as being assigned to help people

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<sup>1</sup> William P. Brown (1999). *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible*. Michigan/Cambridge. p.41

<sup>2</sup> Koran 2:117

<sup>3</sup> Koran 41:11--12

be able to mark the time: "...let them be for signs and for 119 seasons and for days and years..."<sup>1</sup>; and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth"; "He it is Who has placed the sun for radiance and the moon for light, and measured it out in phases so you may know how to count out the years and reckoning"<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, holy texts also teach that humans are not excluded from collaboration with God in creation activities, meaning this the second stage of creation following by destructive flood. For example, "Noah, a life preserver amid divine judgment" "ensures the genesis of a new generation of life in toto" by fulfilling God's creative command "in collaborative effort"<sup>3</sup>: "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth"<sup>4</sup>; "...Load her (ark) up with two apiece from every species, and your own family -- except for anyone against

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:14

<sup>2</sup> Koran 10:5

<sup>3</sup> William P. Brown (1999). *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible*. Michigan/Cambridge. p.55

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 7:1--3

whom the sentence has already been pronounced -- as well as anyone who believes..."<sup>1</sup>.

Sallie McFague, considering both humans' and all other beings' existence in the Spirit, questions the way we are differentiated from God. "In this story" – she says, – "we are the body of God, we are God "spread out", we are God incarnate. We (the universe) come from God and return to God, and in the interim, we live in the presence of God – even when we don't know or don't acknowledge it... God incarnate means God going out from the divine self to create "another", the world, which in a sense is over against God: the billions of particular, different creatures and entities that constitute it. But the world's "being" and its "well-being" and even its "reason for being" is to live in intimate relationship with God, which, of course, means living in intimate relationship with all other parts of divine embodiment as well"<sup>2</sup> . It is also interesting to note how similar all these judgments of a Christian theologian sound to the Koranic teaching about the history of creation. God in the Koran "is the First and the Last"<sup>3</sup>, to whom "all affairs are returned" <sup>4</sup>, "shall all come back"<sup>5</sup> .

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 11:40

<sup>2</sup> Sallie McFague (2001). *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Koran 57:3

<sup>4</sup> Koran 57:5

<sup>5</sup> Koran 21:93

God's embodiment is viewed in writings by Jalaleddin Rumi, a great Muslim Sufi--mystic, as existing in all things that constitute the universe as parts of "a veil" through which God reveals Himself to the world of interdependency. He says: "God has created these veils for a good purpose. For if God's beauty were displayed without a veil, we would not have the power to endure it. Through the intermediary of these veils we derive life and enjoyment. Look at the sun. Through its light we can distinguish good from bad, and find warmth. Trees and orchards become fruitful from its heat, and their fruits—unripe, sour and bitter, become mature and sweet. Through its influence, mines of gold and silver, rubies and carnelians are produced. But if the sun were to come nearer it would bring no benefit whatsoever. On the contrary, the whole world and every creature would be burned up and destroyed. When God reveals Itself through a veil to the mountain, those slopes become fully arrayed in trees and flowers and verdure. However, when God brings revelation without a veil, It destroys the mountain and breaks it into atoms."<sup>1</sup> By the way, the last sentence refers by implication to a Koranic verse<sup>2</sup> that narrates the story of Moses when he, under the

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<sup>1</sup> Discourses of Rumi (Or "Fihi Ma Fihi") based on the original translation by A. J. Arberry. Ames, Iowa. p. 65-66

<sup>2</sup> Koran 7:143

influence of his compatriots who justified their disbelief in God by their lack of any real and materialistic vision of God, asks the Lord to show Himself, which results in God causing an earthquake and destroying a mountain. The teaching component of this verse is that divine embodiment in the natural world, if not seen with the vision of inner faith, may turn into a manifestation of His punishing power against disbelievers. Koranic verses also consider all parts of nature in its connectedness as an extension of God's mercy.

The text of Biblical Psalm 104 illustrates this mutual connectedness and dependence of all creatures in all their beauties. Here are some excerpts: "...He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart... There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the conies... The lions roar for their prey and



seek their food from God... How many are your works, o Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small... When You hide your face, they are terrified; when You take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When You send your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth...”

Similarly, a Koranic verse explicitly alludes to non-human living creatures as part of the earth community and thus calls on human beings to meditate on the intimacy with other creatures on earth: “There is no animal on earth nor any bird flying on its wings unless they exist as communities like yourselves. We have not neglected anything in the Book; then to their Lord will they be summoned”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the verse points out that non-human animals are held accountable before God as well as humans are.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 6:38

## HUMAN-CENTERED MESSAGES AND GOD-CENTERED REALITIES TO LEAD TO BOTH HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY SALVATION

One of the stimuli that led to the emergence of eco--theologies as an ambitious theological discipline, along with of the need for a response to the challenging ecological crisis, was to rebuff the blame being put on monotheistic religions by critics for being the cause of environmental mistreatment. Scientific communities incapable of perceiving the essence of sacramental texts offered simplistic views of religions, in which these religions seem to constitute a system of values enforcing a human--centered worldview, neglecting care for the environment. Much blame was particularly put on Christianity which, in the views of those critics, had an influence on Western culture in regard to shaping negative attitudes towards nature.

In the beginning of this research I briefly mentioned the historically negative role of the religiously misinterpreted dominion of humans over nature. Suffice it to say that eco-- theologies have succeeded in bringing religious thought close to the essence of sacramental texts, thus taking the blame off of religions.

Now it is becoming more and more clear that

anthropocentrism, for which Christianity was and still is criticized, is present in Christianity, as in Judaism and Islam, simply in the form of a divine framework set for humans, giving them a moral framework for their treatment of all the creatures, for which people are held accountable before the Creator. Anthropocentrism as such, being an inherent characteristic of monotheistic religions in its entirety, is to be viewed as totally subjected to the control of God, addressing humans within His everlasting Covenant as His chosen stewards on earth by divine will. Human--centered messages of divine origin are but instructions of divine teaching about God--centered realities existing permanently in lives of all His creatures.

The privileged position of humans with the Creator as made in His own image according to the Bible<sup>1</sup> or as granted to be worshiped by angels according to the Koran<sup>2</sup> is believed to have been provided by God to fit the role of God's vicegerent for human to play on earth. And this privileged status is confined to being burdened with countless responsibilities humans must hold because they have been entrusted with taking care of the earth.

Therefore, the human being, while granted this high divine status, is also reminded in scriptures of

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>2</sup> Koran 15:28-29

his faith duty to humble himself to behold that his superiority in the community of creatures is conditioned by his responsibilities for the fate of his fellow creatures with whom he or she is in a single community. In order to keep humans from being lured into arrogance, the Koran brings our attention to the fact that the creation of the cosmos is a greater reality than the creation of humankind: “Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is a greater than the creation of men. Yet most men do not understand”<sup>1</sup>. A similar interpretation speaks for itself at the tongue of the Biblical Psalmist: “When I look up at the heavens, which your fingers made, and see the moon and the stars, which you set in place, of what importance is the human race, that you should notice them? Of what importance is mankind, that you should pay attention to them...”<sup>2</sup>. Of course, this by no means implies only the obvious physical smallness of humans in comparison to the universe, the moral implication of which is obviously meant to teach us to constantly be mindful of God’s majesty: “O Lord, our Lord, how magnificent is your reputation throughout the earth!”<sup>3</sup>. The God--centered reality in Psalms, presented in connection with crowning “mankind honor and majesty”<sup>4</sup>, is clearly intended to

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 40:57

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 8:3--4

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 8:9

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 8:5

show what a high status mankind has in the eyes of God. No doubt, this status is high only because it is burdened with creative responsibilities to be taken before God to rule the earth. Humans in this status are obliged to be tuned to rather creative activities because of being vicegerents of God the Creator in the Koran and in the image of God the Creator in the Bible. Moreover, as was expressly stated initially when man was created, when viewed in the context of human sins committed, including the first ecological disobedience: it should be assumed that this, humans' initial status, is the highest tier predestined for man, from which he fell, and to which he is encouraged to ascend again.

Therefore, anthropocentrism as such in holy books is not a privilege humans can take allowing them to satisfy their greed at the expense of other beings on earth, like a sin that the first human couple once committed when they could not curb their desire to touch a banned tree. Referring to this Biblical fall story which is similar to the related Koranic one, Steven Bouma-- Prediger points to human finitude and faultiness as features embedded in human nature. This can be rendered harmless if we humans take on earth--keeping with "respect, receptivity, self--restraint, frugality, humility, honesty, wisdom, hope, patience, serenity, benevolence, love, justice, and courage"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger. Response to Louke van Wensveen: A Constructive Proposal. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions. 2000. p.179-181

Truly, as the Koran points out, “...man was created weak”<sup>1</sup> along with the high status he was granted the day he was made. Both Biblical and Koranic teachings show the ways in which human weaknesses can be overcome by the embodiment of the moral virtues, including but not limited to those listed above, in human’s lives. Human-centered messages in holy books reflect a religiously educational context that sets certain moral values to which treatment of nature should be limited. Other beings, as it seems from both holy texts and life of the natural world, seem much more ecologically “educated” than humans.

The high status granted initially to humans by God, if measured against their current ecological mentality, loses value in light of other creatures’ certain risk of being entirely devalued and consequently lost unless human’s ecologically educational disadvantage before other creatures is balanced in practice. I believe, just as humans first committed an environmental sin with their failure to obey God, that what we are to do in the first place now is repent of current environmental disobediences and try to bring forth this repentance into action leading inseparably to both heavenly and earthly salvation. Both the Bible and Koran can serve as precious guiding sources of divine vision in this spiritual journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Koran 4:28

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