Spiritual Reading Guide on Shared Nature

Commonalities in Bible and Koran from Ecotheology Perspectives

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Foreword, Or How Faith Experiences Brought Me To This Research

...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...”

These lines are some excerpts from that poem.

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 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 “Babayurdu” (“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, although Islamic eco-theology--like Jewish and Christian eco-theologies--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 Izzidien, 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.

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!”¹, 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!”².

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

¹ Koran, 2:201
² Koran, 51:12-14
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”\(^1\).

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 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.

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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.

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\(^1\) Koran, 29:46
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\(^1\).

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 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\(^2\). 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 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”\(^3\).

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\(^4\) 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

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\(^2\) Thomas Berry, “Christianity’s Role in the Earth Project”, in the volume *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans /* edited by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p.128.

\(^3\) “Theology and Ecology” by John B. Cobb, [http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1492](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1492)

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 Judaeo-Christian traditions to the tasks of environmental concerns, 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 cult of consumerism and promoting uncontrolled consumerist attitudes towards nature.

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’”¹.

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…”².

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 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

² Koran, 2:30
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”¹.

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.

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”². Moreover, according to the Bible, Adam was created as “a pattern of the coming one”³ 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 adammah, the Hebrew for "earth"⁴. 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"⁵. Therefore, the only way that the earth can be relieved of its curse which is believed to have been caused because of Adam’s sin⁶ 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

¹ Koran, 22:5  
² 1 Corinthians 15:47-49  
³ Romans 5:14  
⁴ Jones James, Jesus and the Earth, London, p 1-16  
⁵ Matthew 6:10  
⁶ Genesis 3:17
those who disbelieve seen how the heavens and the earth were once one mass which We separated?\textsuperscript{1}

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-Adam divinity unity that reads “The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam”\textsuperscript{2} 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 eco-theologians 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”\textsuperscript{3}.

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\textsuperscript{4}, so a particle from it is installed in each of us as a sacred material used by God when He created the first human\textsuperscript{5}, 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\textsuperscript{6}, at the same time directs our attention to the spiritual component and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{1} Koran, 21:30
\bibitem{2} Koran, 3:59
\bibitem{3} Koran, 4:171
\bibitem{4} Koran, 2:253
\bibitem{5} Koran, 32:9
\bibitem{6} Koran, 23:12-14
\end{thebibliography}
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 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.

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”

Interpreting the Holy Spirit as the breath of God from the Islamic point of view, Muhyyiddin 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”.

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

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1 Even angels are to worship human being according to the Koran, 15:28-31
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 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!"1.

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?”2. “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"3.

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 tasting 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”

1 Koran, 3:190-191
2 Koran, 51:20-21
3 Mathew 22:37
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."\(^1\)

The same flood story is present in the Koran but 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”\(^2\).

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 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”\(^3\).

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

\(^1\) Genesis 9:9-17  
\(^2\) Koran, 13:3-4  
\(^3\) Tom Murphy, Blog of Sermons and Writings, http://tommurphe.blogspot.com/ 2009/03/gods-covenant-with-creation.html
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 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…”¹.

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…”². 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…”³. 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 way⁴. Referring also to this, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a famous Islamic eco-theologian, 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”⁵.

¹ Koran, 2:164-165
² Koran, 22:18
³ Koran, 17:44
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 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”\(^1\). 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”\(^2\). 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”\(^3\).

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 We are expanding”\(^4\). 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”\(^5\).

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.

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\(^{1}\) Psalm 19:1
\(^{2}\) Sallie McFague, Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril, Minneapolis, 2001, p. 183.
\(^{3}\) Koran, 24:41
\(^{4}\) Koran, 51:47
According to the Bible, nature gives lessons to learn more about God, because everyone has some internal knowledge of God and also has "a measure of faith"¹ 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…”².

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/his monotheistic one, keep your face set towards the religion – God's nature upon which He has patterned mankind…”³. 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”⁴. 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 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 Carver⁵.

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

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¹ Romans 12:3
² Romans 1:19-20
³ Koran, 30:30
⁵ http://www.greatest-inspirational-quotes.com/inspirational-quotes-nature.html
articulation is an Oral Torah... All that 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”\(^1\)

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 tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book”\(^2\). 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, pre-designed by God’s law for decent and faithful lives to be pursued with regard to divine commandments concerning the “unwritten Koran” as well.

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2 Revelation 22:18-19
According to the Bible, the seal of God is given not only to Jesus Christ but also to the followers, and can be put on other fellow believers. 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...” 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.”

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” – 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 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; 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; And thus God made the beasts of the

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1 John 6:27  
2 2 Corinthians 1:22  
3 2 Timothy 2:19  
4 Koran, 3:55  
5 Revelation 9:4  
6 Koran, 2:138  
7 Genesis 1:10  
8 Genesis 1:16-18
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\(^1\); God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good\(^2\).

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 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!”\(^3\).

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”\(^4\). 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 superessential 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”\(^5\).

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 beautified/made beautiful/perfected everything He created…”\(^6\). 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”\(^7\). God reveals Himself as all beautiful by Koranic text as well. God’s names,

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\(^1\) Genesis 1:25
\(^2\) Genesis 1:31
\(^3\) Koran, 23:12-14
\(^4\) Koran, 3:11
\(^6\) Koran, 32:7
\(^7\) Song of Solomon 4:7
characteristics which are commonly believed to come to 99 in number, are called in Koranic original as “al-asmaʼu-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…”1. 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 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”.

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”2.

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 themselves3. 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.

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”4.

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-

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1 Koran, 17:110
2 Song of Solomon 4:13-14
4 Koran, 3:37
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”

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 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”. I cannot help but to liken this scene to the Koranic description of paradise with every fruit at hand 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 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”

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

1 Koran, 3:42
2 Koran, 55:54
3 Koran, 36:32-36
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”1.

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 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”2.

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”3. 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”4. 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 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”5 and if they do not keep being faithful to the eternal covenant. The consequence of corruption on

1 Genesis 1:29-30
3 Koran, 6:141
4 Koran, 6:140
5 Koran, 2:60
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 left”\(^1\).

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”\(^2\).

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”\(^3\).

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 inevitable that the punishment is shared by the first man who “was a botanist responsible for tending the garden”\(^4\).

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”)\(^5\) as a compensation for his work to “tend and keep” the garden, rightly concludes: “It is within the space between

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\(^1\) Isaiah 24:4-6  
\(^3\) Koran, 30:41  
\(^5\) Koran, 2:35
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”\(^1\)

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 point of a dynamic journey for God’s people from the Garden of Eden to the City of Gold\(^2\), 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\(^3\), 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\(^4\), 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”\(^5\). 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 divine status in relationships between mankind and God.

Although it is obvious is 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\(^6\), while date-palms, pomegranates\(^7\), and vines\(^8\) 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

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\(^2\) Revelation 21:18

\(^3\) Koran, 9:72 and the following ten verses

\(^4\) John 14:3

\(^5\) Koran, 14:47-48

\(^6\) Deuteronomy 8:8

\(^7\) Koran, 55:68

\(^8\) Koran, 78:32
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”\(^1\). 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”\(^2\) and the abovementioned “City of Gold”\(^3\).

In the context of its final destination of God’s 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\(^4\) 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”\(^5\); “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”\(^6\).

Having been created by God “in the finest stature”\(^7\) and grown like “a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form”\(^8\), 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 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”\(^9\), in contrast to the one blessed to live eternal life with his

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\(^1\) Koran, 95:1-4  
\(^2\) Psalm 68:8  
\(^3\) Revelation 21:18  
\(^4\) Koran, 4:171  
\(^5\) Psalm 1:3  
\(^6\) Koran, 14:24-25  
\(^7\) Koran 95:1-4  
\(^8\) Bible, Jeremiah 11:16  
\(^9\) Koran, 111:3-5
wife, who “will be like a fruitful vine within his house”, and his children, who “will be like olive shoots around his table”\(^1\).

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\(^2\) 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 of a man, it searches out his inmost being”\(^3\).

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”\(^4\)

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!”\(^5\).

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\(^6\) where believers granted eternal life will wear green clothes\(^7\) and recline on green cushions\(^8\) as if claiming to be absorbed in lush greenery. What makes the religious thought turn to environment protection is that believers

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1. Psalm 128:3  
2. Koran, 95:1  
3. Proverbs 20:27  
5. Koran, 24:35  
6. Koran, 55:64  
7. Koran, 76:21, 18:31  
8. Koran, 55:76
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”\(^1\); “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!”\(^2\) The phrase about “date-palm clusters hanging
low of nature and near” creates an association with fruits within easy reach in the
paradise of greenery\(^3\). Moreover, every kind of fruit made by God in pairs on earth\(^4\)
is present as part of the whole greenery in paradise\(^5\) 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”\(^6\), it is further seen as the color of the rainbow over the throne of God, “like an
emerald in appearance”\(^7\). The rainbow as a sign of a covenant that God has made
permanently with creation\(^8\) 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\(^9\), 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”\(^10\).

(To be continued)

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1 Koran, 6:99
2 Koran, 22:63-64
3 Koran, 55:54
4 Koran, 13:3
5 Koran, 55:52
6 Genesis 1:30
7 Revelation 4:3
8 Genesis 9:16
9 Revelation 4:9
10 Leviticus 23:40
Asking empowering questions in a spiritual psychic reading can lead to “aha” moments that will knock your fuzzy socks off! Here’s a list of the 50 most empowering questions that you can ask in a reading. I’ve compiled this list over 18 years and thousands of readings. In fact, the best kind of questions to ask during a spiritual psychic reading start with either “how,” “what,” “where” or “why” (NOT “when,” “who” or “will”). These questions are open ended and allow you to discover the most about yourself—say hello to empowerment! Need some inspiration? Why do I feel so frustrated at work? What do my Spirit Guides want me to know? Why am I feeling disconnected at work? How can I gain clarity in my relationship? Everyone has a spirit guide (or several spirit guides), and each of us has the ability to listen to them. They communicate with us in a whisper because they are at a higher frequency, so we have to be very still, silent, open and accepting. This purple, brilliant crystal is associated with the Third Eye Chakra—located at the brow between the eyes, associated with intuition and the higher self. When you meditate with amethyst and place the crystal directly on your brow, you will instantly feel increased spiritual awareness as you elevate to a higher state of consciousness. Strengthening our intuition is a direct gateway to our spirit guides. 3. Get out in nature. I always feel closest to my guides when I am in nature. Poems on the Spiritual connecting with Nature. The Beauty of Nature is strongly related to the Spiritual. Poems about Nature help us get in touch and connect with the spiritual and our inner spirit. It seems that it is in man’s nature to live a spiritual lifestyle. We need very much to live a meaningful life and therefore we look to find purpose in our lives. Religion is simply a system devised to live your life according to the meaning that you have envisioned for your life. Others find the structure of organized religion to be stifling. They find that going into nature is the best way to get in touch with the spirit. It seems that the trees, and the grass and flowers never lose sight of their purpose. In the same way, nature helps us get in touch with our inner spirit that never fo