

## Biblical and Quranic Argumentation for Sustainable Behaviors Toward Nature

### Biblijne i koraniczne argumenty na rzecz zrównoważonych zachowań wobec natury

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#### Abstract

We observe an ever-increasing role of religions in fighting the environmental crisis. Religious argumentation has enormous potential to shape the attitudes of the followers of religions. Applying this argumentation can significantly change attitudes towards the environment in the majority of the human population. Christianity and Islam together have over 4 billion followers. Here, we present seven common Biblical and Quranic issues that are key to human attitudes to nature. The conducted analysis leads to a surprising conclusion. The Bible and Quran similarly encourage their followers to build harmonious relations with the natural world.

**Key words:** religion and ecology, Christianity, Islam, Bible, Quran, environmental crisis, biblical argumentation, quranic argumentation

Słowa kluczowe: religia i ekologia, chrześcijaństwo, islam, Biblia, Koran, kryzys ekologiczny, argumentacja biblijna, argumentacja koraniczna

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#### 1. Introduction

For several decades, we have witnessed the active involvement of religions in the debate on the environmental crisis. The catalyst for this involvement was an article by Lynn White entitled *Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis* (1967). Lynn White expressed the opinion that the Judeo-Christian tradition bears the huge burden of guilt for the ecological crisis. The international debate over the guilt of Christianity for the ecological crisis has extended to the discussion of the positive influence of Christianity on the attitude towards nature over time. With time, the debate took over the role of all religious traditions, both in terms of causing and counteracting the ecological crisis. Over time, the dynamic and tumultuous beginning of this debate has taken on an in-depth form of interdisciplinary and interreligious research. The initiative of Mary Tucker on John Grim, who initiated the Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) in the second half of the 1990s, played an important role in this respect (Grim and Tucker, 2014, 85-95). Thanks to their initiative, it was possible to create a large group of academics representing all the main religious traditions. As part of FORE, many research projects have been carried out and university education programs in the field of religion and ecology have been developed at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels (Monserud, 2002; Foltz, 2006).

The ecological involvement of the world's religions takes place on several levels: academic, pastoral, spiritual, and practical. All these levels are closely related to each other. Research is the starting point for all other activities. Based on scientific research, pastoral programs are developed, the aim of which is the spiritual formation of the believers. Such formation leads to a change in the ecological awareness of the believers and indicates the spiritual dimension of their relationship to creation. As a result of these changes, the believers engage in the protection of

the creation on both spiritual and practical levels. Spiritual commitment manifests itself mainly in individual prayer and community celebrations that take into account the concern for creation. Practical commitment is manifested both in the fact that numerous religious institutions undertake ecological projects and in the creation of religious ecological organizations, in which the faithful undertake activities to protect nature, based on their religious beliefs. In many religious traditions, a new theological reflection is taking place. The new academic approach focuses on the place of man in the world of nature and the role of man in relation to creation. This reflection has already taken a mature form as a scientific discipline known as eco-theology. An important source of eco-theological research is reading the sacred texts from an environmental perspective. Such readings make it possible to see the ecological potential present, among others, in the Bible and the Quran. The ecological approach to the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam allows for completely new interpretations of their holy books. This approach shows the faithful the moral dimension and responsibility of their relationship to nature and supports the formation of a proper relationship with all the creation.

This article aims to show the ecological potential of Biblical and Quranic argumentation in shaping sustainable behavior patterns towards nature. Both the Bible and the Quran can identify several common issues that contribute to shaping the pro-environmental attitudes of Christians and Muslims.<sup>1</sup> These issues include: 1) Creator is the absolute ruler and owner of the world, 2) Creator is concerned for non-human nature, 3) Creation is the space in which God's existence and many of His attributes are revealed, 4) Creation itself praises the Creator, 5) Creator subdued creation to humans, 6) Creator limited humans' power over creation, and 7) Creator will restore the original harmony between humans and creation. The second purpose of this article is to analyze the similarities between the biblical and the quranic arguments for caring for creation.

## 2. Creator is the absolute ruler and owner of the world

### 2.1. Biblical perspective

The Christian approach to the place and role of man in the world is based on the biblical message that God is the creator of the world, its sole ruler and owner, and the entire universe is sustained in existence by God (Sadowski, 2020, 44-46). This message is contrary to the humanistic interpretation of the maxim *Man is the measure of all things* (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος) (Plato, 1986). The biblical message is also contrary to the modern thought that man, thanks to his reasoning abilities, is the supreme ruler of the world. Bill McKibben even states that – in Western thought – humans turn out to be God's equal – or at least, His rivals – able to destroy creation (McKibben, 1989, 78).

The Bible is unequivocal – the Creator of the world, and therefore its absolute owner and ruler, is solely God (Acts 17:24-25). Man is merely one of the creatures. Admittedly, man is a unique creature, but only because God made him so. The proper term for the role of a human being is, therefore, a governor, regent, tenant, or steward. Man has only received from the Creator the permission to use nature. However, the scope of this permission is limited (Ngewa, Reed and Ngaruiya, 2019).

Numerous biblical passages confirm this position. This is most clearly seen in both of the creation stories in Genesis (chapters 1-2). The Bible leaves no doubt that God is the only Lord of the world. This is clearly presented in the Book of Psalms: *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers* (Ps. 24:1-2). The sovereignty over all creation is also confirmed by the First Book of Chronicles: *Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from thee, and thou rules overall. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all* (1 Chron. 29:11-12).

The above-mentioned fragments of the Bible confirm the unlimited power of God and the limited power of man over the creation. This, in turn, leads to the conclusion that the transgression of man beyond the competencies assigned to him is inconsistent with the will of God (Moltmann, 1993). Moreover, it is a kind of robbery of the divine property and the usurpation of divine powers. The Bible also confirms the anthropocentric concept of man's relationship to nature. However, this is just moderate anthropocentrism. It is a consequence of the strictly theocentric approach present in the Bible.

### 2.2. Quranic perspective

While the word *creator* is attributed to God in thirteen verses of Quran, *creation* attributed to Him in 236 places. God is the only true reality and sole source of all creation. He created everything for a divine purpose. There is no shortcoming or defect of any sort in any of His creations. The Quran states that God is the *Rabb al Alamin*. It means the *Creator of the Worlds*, the *Ruler of the Universes*, the *Creator and Sustainer of all the living organisms and Universes*.

<sup>1</sup> All biblical fragments are quoted from the Bible available on the website: <https://mycatholic.life/bible/rsvce/> – Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition. All quranic fragments are quoted from the Quran available on the website: [https://mquran.org/component?option=com\\_quran/Itemid,3/](https://mquran.org/component?option=com_quran/Itemid,3/).

God's process of creation is continuous with expansion in scope, range, and variety. Not only does He create to satisfy a purpose but also for perfection. Because of this, He creates everything in the most beautiful and purposeful form and fashion. Numerous verses of the Quran express this position (39:62; 25:2; 10:5; 54:49). No-fault or incongruity can be seen in the creation of the All-Merciful (67:3; 35:3). There are three great descriptors that describe God. One of them is the universe (10:6; 35:1), the other is the Quran and the third is the Prophet. Each of them introduces God to human beings, shows His existence and attributes, and informs us of Him (Nursi, 2013, 287).

Man is placed on the highest pedestal in the hierarchy of creations. Adam was created to be a viceregent of God on earth. But to be God's viceregent, he first had to be God's servant. In other words, people were created to represent God on the face of the earth. Servanthood must precede viceregency. You cannot represent someone without following His commands. Vicegerency is that humans are responsible for the world and should take care and look after it. Numerous verses of the Quran express this position (2:30; 95:4; 17:70; 2:31). God has appointed human being vicegerents over the earth (to improve it and rule over it according to His commandments) and has exalted some of them over others in degrees (of intelligence, capacity, and then wealth and status): thus, He tries you in what He has granted you (6:165; 35:39). The primary reason why humankind was accorded superiority over the angels is that we were *taught the names*. The duty of humankind on the earth is vicegerency or *khilāfah*, meaning succession. As a term, *khilāfah* or vicegerency denotes improving the earth, based on knowledge of things and the laws of creation (which we wrongly call the *laws of nature*) and ruling on the earth according to the dictates of God, thus establishing justice. Carrying out this duty requires scientific knowledge and religion. Humankind can acquire scientific knowledge by studying nature and are given religion through God's Messengers. The names taught to Adam also signify the potentiality of learning bestowed on humankind. Giving a name means knowing, for one can give a name only to something one knows. Vicegerency denotes humankind's ruling on the earth and improving it by using all that is subjected to it in accordance with the dictates of God. If humans attribute to themselves what God has given them of knowledge, power, the ability of learning, and various other capacities, and then attempt to act independently of God, it is then that disorder and bloodshed begin on the earth (The Miraculous Quran).

The Quran mentions several virtues that cultivate piety – *taqwa* (Arabic: تقوى) or that *taqwa* cultivates in a person. *Taqwa* motivates the person who possesses it to perform righteous deeds and avoid forbidden acts. Quranic verses relate *taqwa* to the good life on this earth besides reward in the hereafter (7:96; 10:63-64; 39:10). To live a life of sincerity and piety, it is important to follow a certain discipline by avoiding extremes in all aspects of one's life and to maintain a straight path (Gulen, 2017).

Numerous verses of the Quran express how human beings should behave in the world (67:2; 103:2-3). They are created with a purpose and are not left to themselves (75:36; 75:36). Those who do good deeds in this world will be rewarded (75:36). God appoints the Hereafter unto those who seek not exaltation in the earth nor corruption, and the happy end is for those who have *taqwa* (28:83).

### 3. Creator is concerned for non-human nature

#### 3.1. Biblical perspective

The Bible confirms that the Creator loves all creation (Wis 11:26). He cares for both humans and non-human nature (Davidson, 2016, 510-511). The first story of creation illustrates this very well. Each of the first five creation days ends with the statement, *God saw that it was good* (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Such an approach clearly shows the value of nature assigned by the Creator. It is worth noting that this value is in no way related to man, as the man was created on the sixth day (Davidson, 2016, 506).

God's covenant with Noah also confirms care for the non-human nature. The parties to this covenant, in addition to Noah and his descendants, are all living creatures, fowl, and domestic and wild animals (Gen. 9: 9). Many biblical passages indicate that God's concern for non-human nature does not result from its usefulness to humans. Since the Creator cares for wild animals and plants, even if they are not used by humans (Ps. 104:10-11; Job. 12:10; Job. 38:25-27; Job. 39; Ps. 145:9). Concern for non-human nature also manifests itself in the fact that the Bible imposes numerous restrictions on the use of animals (Lev. 17:3-4; Isa. 66:3; Ex. 23:4-5; Deut. 22:6; 22:10; 25:4; Prov. 12:10; Jon. 4:11).

Scholars representing both the Judaic and Christian traditions agree that the Bible provides many arguments in favor of man's relationship with the natural world and his responsibility for all creation (Moritz, 2009; Schochet, 1984; Bołoz et al., 2016). Moreover, the Christian interpretation of the Bible draws attention to Jesus' attitude towards animals, showing His concern for creation (Bauckham, 1998a; Bauckham, 1998b). Christians' attitude to non-human nature is influenced by the reference to the symbolism of plants and animals in Jesus' teachings: the lost sheep (Lk. 15:4-7), the lamb (Jn. 1:29, 36), the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11-18), and the fig tree (Lk. 13:6-9). These highlight the differences between the Judaic and Christian approaches, especially in the context of animal sacrifice and the division into ritually clean and unclean animals (Grant, 1999; Frayne, 2018; Gilhus, 2006, 161-182).

The New Testament presents God's care for animals and plants. A good example of this is the Gospel according to St. Luke, which in several passages presents this concern. *Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them* (Lk. 12:24). The evangelist Luke also points to responsibility for animals, even if it clashes with religious regulations - *Which of you, having an ass [a] or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a sabbath day?* (Lk. 14:5).

One of the most beautiful biblical passages presenting the Creator's concern for non-human nature is the Book of Wisdom, which shows the Creator's wisdom, His love for all creation, and concern for satisfying its needs. *For thou lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it* (Wis 11:24).

The biblical tradition unequivocally encourages Jewish and Christians to imitate God. His concern for nonhuman nature thus encourages people who identify with the Bible to adopt such attitudes.

### 3.2. Quranic perspective

God has stated in the Quran that He did not create the heavens and the earth and all that is between them as a play and game (21:16, 38:27). As it is expressed in the Quran, all beings glorify and sanctify the Almighty Creator in their own language. The seven heavens and the earth, and whoever is therein, glorify Him. There is nothing that does not glorify Him with His praise (proclaiming that He alone is God, without peer or partner, and all praise belongs to Him exclusively) (17:44). They fulfil the duties entrusted to them with great pleasure and enthusiasm. Moreover, if the universe had not been created, the infinite perfection and beauty of His attributes and names would not have been known. This knowledge would be reserved for God alone. God wanted to witness His own beauty and perfection in His creations (Nursi, 2013, 697). The beauty of creation is a reminder of God. When we respect any part of God's creation, be it nature or another human being, we are seeing value in what God created and admiring the creator.

There are many verses of the Quran stating that many things and events in the universe point to the existence of God. These proofs are called natural verses of God (Nursi, 2013, 569). This means that heaven and earth stand firm and subsist by the laws issuing from the pure realm of His commands that originate from His Attributes of Power and Will. All-Glorified is He in Whose Hand is the absolute dominion of all things (36:83). Among His signs are that the heaven and the earth stand firm (subsisting) by His Command (30:25), the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors (30:22), His displaying the lightning, to give rise to both fear and hopeful expectation, and sending down water from the sky, and reviving with it the earth after its death (30:24).

Quran is the most exalted expounder and the most eloquent translator of this universe. It is the Criterion that instructs jinn and humanity in the truths of creation – Divine laws regarding the creation and the universe's operation – inscribed by the Pen of Power on the sheets of the universe and pages of time (Nursi, 2013, 167).

## 4. Creation is the space in which God's existence and many of His attributes are revealed

### 4.1. Biblical perspective

The biblical tradition presents the problem of recognizing God's presence in nature very carefully. Because Judaism was born in the Middle East, where religions often identified their deities with the forces of nature or celestial bodies (Gądecki, 2010, 34). The Bible separates the Creator from the creature. According to the Bible, granting nature divine attributes is considered idolatry. This sin is an offense against the first commandment of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:3-5). Numerous passages from the Bible clearly show that God is one and that only He can be worshiped (Isa. 44:6; Isa 45:5; Deut. 5:7-9; Deut. 4:15-19). The worship of the divine forces of nature or animals is unequivocally condemned (Wis 13:1-9; Wis 15:14-19). Such behaviors were so contrary to the biblical doctrine that the rabbinical tradition considered the cult of nature to be the first of the three cardinal sins, and it was punished with death (Gądecki, 2010, 38).

Taking into account the dangers associated with pantheism and zoolatry, the Bible indicates that nature, without having a divine character, is nevertheless space for discovering the existence of the Creator and His numerous attributes. *For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable, from the good things that are seen, to know Him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works* (Wis 13:1; see also Isa. 49:26). Christian biblical tradition also affirms that a person can recognize the Creator by admiring His works. *Ever since the creation of the world, His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse* (Rom. 1:20).

Although the Judeo-Christian tradition unequivocally rejects pantheism, it recognizes that creation represents the power of the Creator. The prophet Amos illustrates this well. *He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name* (Am 5:8). Although nature does not have a divine character, it is nevertheless filled with the presence of God and reveals Him (Moo and Moo, 2018, 64-69; Davidson

2016, 508-509). The prophet Habakkuk puts it this way. *God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise* (Hab 3:3).

The destruction of nature is therefore unacceptable from the biblical point of view. Depriving nature of its beauty makes it difficult or even impossible to recognize the existence of the Creator and His many attributes.

#### 4.2. Quranic perspective

God is mentioned by various attributes in the Quran, such as Ar-Rahman (The Most Compassionate), Ar-Rahim (The Most Merciful), Al-Khaliq (The Creator), and Al-Nur (The Light), among many other attributes. It is said that God has ninety-nine names in the Quran, although this refers to some of the qualities or attributes of God (Naqvi, 2012, 25). Some verses in the Qur'an end with some of the names of God. This means that the subjects in the verse are ultimately tied to these names and attributes (Bakkal, 2016).

Ali Unal, whose translation has been noted for its use of contemporary English, which makes it more readable than some classical Quran translations, states that the inanimate matter which is converted into living forms is a direct gift of the Creator. As we know, the body in which our soul dwells works without our conscious effort or decision – the brain, heart, lungs, stomach, senses, limbs, etc. Very little of what man has, is his own doing – if he was left to manage only his own body, unaided by the Creator, he could not do it and so could not survive (Unal, 2018).

Said Nursi's endeavor was to prove and demonstrate that Islam is compatible with modern sciences and progress. According to him, the Holy Book was the source of true progress and civilization. He wrote the *Risale-i Nur Collection*, a body of Quranic commentary exceeding six thousand pages (Markham and Pirim, 2011, 194). In his book *The Flashes Collection*, he wrote that a perfect work self-evidently points to a perfect act. A perfect act necessarily points to a perfect name and a perfect performer of the act. And a perfect name doubtlessly points to a perfect attribute. A perfect attribute indubitably points to a perfect quality. And a perfect quality certainly points in a way worthy of such a one, to the perfection of His essence. God is All-Just, the Pre-Eternal All-Wise Arbiter and Sovereign, who established the universe in accordance with the principles of His wisdom and will. He set the universe in order through the laws of His practices. He illumined all the world through the manifestations of His names and attributes. All this is testified to by the order and regularity of His artefacts, their mutual assistance and cooperation, their embracing one another, and the conscious, skilful art in all things specified by Divine Determining. All the flowers, fruits, plants, trees, animals, and stones and even grains found in all valleys, all mountains, all deserts indicate the existence of God and the manifestations of His names (Nursi, 2009, 383-385).

Many of the verses of the Quran state that the beings and events in the universe point to the existence and attributes of God. For example: And it is He Who has spread the earth wide and set therein firm mountains and rivers, and of the fruit of every kind He has made mated pairs. He covers the day with the night. Surely in that are signs (manifesting the truth) for people who reflect. And on the earth are tracts close by one another (and yet different from one another), and gardens of vines, and cultivated fields, and date-palms growing in clusters from one root but standing alone, (all) watered with the same water; and yet, as sustenance, we have made some preferable to others (in certain respects). Surely in that are signs of truth for a people who use their reason (13:3-4). Or He Who has created the heavens and the earth, and sends down for you water from the sky? – We cause to grow with it gardens full of loveliness and delight: it is not in your power to cause their trees to grow. Is there another deity besides God? No, but they are a people who veer away (from the truth) (27:60).

Some verses in the Quran end with some of the names of God. This means that the subjects in the verse are ultimately tied to these names and attributes (Bakkal, 2016).

In a verse, it is stated that God increases in creation what He wills (35:1). This means that God's process of creation is continuous with expansion in scope, range, and variety. It also means that He not only creates to satisfy a purpose, but also for perfection. Because of this, He creates whatever He creates in the best, and the most beautiful and purposeful form and fashion.

## 5. Creation itself praises the Creator

### 5.1. Biblical perspective

In the biblical tradition, nature, on the one hand, praises the Creator by its very existence, and on the other hand, encourages man to join her in praising the Creator. The Bible is abundant in passages indicating that inanimate and animate beings praise their Creator (Coad, 2009; Vischer and Birch, 1997, 5). Psalm 148 confirms that and states that the choir praising the Creator consists of the sun, moon, stars, fire, hail, snow, fog, sea, as well as land animals, trees, birds, and man (Calduch-Benages 2008; see also Ps. 66:1-4).

The idea of praising the Creator through creation is also present in the New Testament. St. John in the Book of Revelation puts it this way. *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, «To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!»* (Rev 5:13). Nature not only honors the Creator itself but also encourages man to do likewise. *Look upon the rainbow, and praise Him who made it, exceedingly beautiful in its brightness* (Sir 43:11).

It seems that one of the most beautiful passages of the Bible showing nature praising its Creator is the Cantic of the Three Jews. This cantic lists many elements of inanimate and animate nature and encourages people to worship the Creator (Dan. 3:28-68).

Since the creature worships the Creator, man should not destroy it recklessly because the destruction of nature will deprive God of worship and diminish His glory.

### 5.2. *Quranic perspective*

Since it is the One God who creates, sustains, maintains, and administers the whole universe with all in it, all praise is due to Him, and so the whole of creation praises Him exclusively. While conscious, believing beings praise Him consciously – verbally, actively, and by heart – the bodies of all beings also praise Him through the satisfaction of their needs and contentment of their senses and faculties. Quran expresses this truth as follows: *The seven heavens and the earth, and whoever is therein, glorify Him. There is nothing that does not glorify Him with His praise (proclaiming that He alone is God, without peer or partner, and all praise belongs to Him exclusively), but you cannot comprehend their glorification* (17:44) The expression *thing* includes all living and non-living beings. *Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth glorifies God. To Him belongs the sovereignty (absolute ownership and dominion of everything), and for Him are all praise and gratitude; and He has full power over everything* (64:1), *And We subdued the mountains, as well as birds, to glorify Us along with David. It is We Who do all these things* (21:79). It is stated here that everything animate and inanimate glorifies God. The verse points out that Almighty God gave David's glorifications such strength and such a resonant and pleasing tone that they brought ecstasy to the mountains. Like a huge sound system, each mountain formed a circle around the chief reciter David and repeated His glorifications. This is a reality, for every mountain with caves can *speak*. If you declare before a mountain: *All praise, be to God*, the mountain will echo it back. God endowed David with both Messengership and the Caliphate in an exceptional form. Thus, He made this seed of ability flourish as a miracle with that comprehensive Messengership and magnificent sovereignty, causing the great mountains to follow him like soldiers, students, or disciples. Under his direction and in his tongue, they glorified the All-Majestic Creator and repeated whatever he said. Moreover, each mountain has a collective personality and corporate identity, and offers glorifications and worship particular to it. Just as each one through echoes glorifies in the tongue of humankind, it also glorifies the All-Majestic Creator in its own particular tongue (Nursi, 2013, 318-319).

Also, there is another verse like, *Whatever in the heavens and the earth glorifies God; and He is the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise* (57:1). Conscious beings glorify God and express with their tongues that He is free from all kinds of deficiencies and things that do not suit His lofty glory. The glorification of unconscious and inanimate beings should be understood as His creativity and power over everything. The existence of these things shows the majesty of Allah. This state of theirs is their glorification. That is, all things, with their existence, their lives, maintenance, and functions, show that God is above having any defects or any partners in His Divinity, Lordship, and Sovereignty.

Some scholars have also said that inanimate beings, like living beings, remember God, and there is a vitality in everything that is thought to be inanimate, which people cannot discern. All things are made up of atoms. Electrons around the nucleus of the atom are spinning at a speed that would astonish the mind. Everything is in submission to His command.

In addition, all beings prostrate to God. *Do you not see that what is in the heavens and the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals, and most of the people, are prostrating to Allah?* (22:18) verse clearly expresses this. The duty of man is to understand the praise of creation, to see it with the eyes of the mind and heart, to witness it, and to express it with his tongue. The reason why many human beings are specifically mentioned, even though they are included in all those who are on the earth, is that all human beings prostrate to God in the sense that they cannot escape God's laws of *nature* or creation and the operation of the universe in many respects, such as their coming into and leaving the world, the operation of their bodies, the appointment of their families and races, and their physique, etc. However, many human beings prostrate before God of their free volition, they believe in Him and worship and live according to His commandments.

*The All-Merciful; He has taught the Quran; He has created human; He has taught him speech; The sun and the moon are by an exact calculation; And the stars and the trees both prostrate (before God in perfect submission to His laws)* (55:1-6) verse also indicates this, it is the duty of man to declare this by saying *Glory be to God*.

## 6. Creator subdued creation to humans

### 6.1. *Biblical perspective*

The Bible, describing the world and man's position among other creatures, leaves no doubt that man is unique and privileged. When defining the position of man in the natural world and his relationship to the environment, it should be stated that they are certainly anthropocentric. This does not mean, however, that it is justified to blame the Bible for encouraging the devastation of nature (White, 1967).

The Book of Genesis is the most evident of all the books in the Bible about man's relationship to nature. The first two chapters of this book present two stories of the creation of the world. The ecological message of these stories varies significantly. However, these are stories that complement each other.

The first story of creation (Gen. 1:1-2:4) is treated as an apotheosis of man's domination over the world. This description is often cited as an allegation of man's alleged right to his unlimited power over the world. Man himself is referred to as *the crown of creation* (Ps. 8:5-9). The following arguments prove the uniqueness of man concerning other creatures. A man was created at the end of the sixth day as the last of creatures (Gen. 1:26). So, it can be presumed that man is the most perfect creature. Moreover, it is only man who was created as *imago Dei* (Gen. 1:26; Najda 2004, 144-145). In this story, the Creator even states *let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth* (Gen. 1:26). Man's power over the world is also evidenced by the following excerpt: *Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth* (Gen. 1:28).

In order to recognize the real message of these passages, we need to refer to experts who have studied these passages in the original languages. The results of these studies are extremely interesting. The Hebrew verb *rāda* (have dominion) used in these passages appears in the Bible in the context of the domination of the head of the family over domestic servants or in the context of kingship (Lev. 25:42-43; 1 Kgs. 5:4; Ps. 72(71):8; Numbers 24:18-19). On the other hand, the Hebrew verb *kābaš* (subdue) means to rule, to show someone your power and authority. This verb is even stronger than *rāda*. The term is often used in a military context and in connection to a king who demonstrates his authority over his subjects (Num. 32:20-22; Jer. 34:11).

Experts who interpret the model of human power over the world contained in the first story of creation argue that this power is a gentle concern, not a despotic tyranny (Davis, 2008, 42-65; Steffen, 1992). Even if the man is considered to be the crown of creation, in ruling the world man follows the pattern of God, the ruler, and owner of the world. The task of man is therefore to care for creation, which is to lead to a harmonious balance (Pardee, 2013, 126-127).

The second story of creation is much shorter and more synthetic (Gen. 2:4-7). This story also confirms the uniqueness of man, but it does it differently. While all beings were created from the soil, the man was created from the dust of the soil, i.e., a more noble material (Gen. 2:19; Gen. 2:7; Hiebert, 2000, 139). Man's superiority is also evidenced by the fact that God allowed man to name animals (Gen. 2:19-20). However, a proper understanding of the role that God has assigned to man requires a linguistic analysis of this passage. Key in this regard is the passage *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it* (Gen. 2:15).

The Hebrew verb *ābad* (till) means to serve. In the Bible, the verb *ābad* is a term that expresses the service of a slave to his master (Gen. 12:6) or the service of one nation to another (Ex. 5:9). On the other hand, the Hebrew verb *šamar* (keep) means to guard, protect, care for, and preserve (Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, 2008, 546-549; Greenspoon 2008, 165). The analysis of the terms allows concluding that this fragment presents man not as the master of the garden, but as the servant of the garden (Hiebert, 2000, 136-145).

It can, therefore, be concluded that the Bible confirms the unique position of man. However, man has not been given the power to be a tyrant or a satrap who can freely use the resources of nature (Attfield, 1991, 31). Rather, man is its manager or steward, whose task is to care for the world entrusted to him by the Creator. Destroying nature is, therefore, contrary to biblical teaching.

## 6.2. Quranic perspective

The blessing of provision and the universe and all it contains being subject to the service of man. God put man at the center of worldly authority, having made the world swift to serve him beneficially and continuously throughout his life. This is expressed in Quran as *It is He Who (prepared the earth for your life before He gave your life, and) created all that is in the world for you (to create you – the human species – and make the earth suitable for your life) (2:29). He also affirmed that whatever is in existence works to serve man. God says: He has also made of service to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth; all is from Him (a gift of His Grace). Surely in this, there are (clear) signs for a people who reflect (45:13). He also says: Do you not see that God has made all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth of service to you, and lavished on you His favors, outward and inward? (31:20). About subdue the creation to humans are other verses like He has made the night and the day and the sun and the moon to be of service to you, and the stars are made subservient by His command. Surely in that are signs for people who reason and understand. And whatsoever He has created for you on earth of varying colors (and diverse forms and qualities): surely in that is a sign for people who reflect and are mindful. And He it is Who has made the sea to be of service (to you) so that you eat from it fresh meat and draw out from it ornaments that you wear. And you see the ships plowing their course through it so that you may go forth in quest of His bounty and give thanks (to Him Who has created all this). And He has cast firm mountains on the earth lest it should shake with you (with its movement), and rivers, and roads, so that you may find your way (16:12-15). God is He Who has created the heavens and the earth and sends down water from the sky with which He brings forth fruits for your provision. And He has made the ships serviceable for you, so that they run upon the sea by His command;*



and He has made the rivers serviceable for you; And He has made the sun and the moon constant in their courses, (and so) serviceable for you; and He has made the night and the day of service to you. He has granted you from all that you ask Him. Were you to attempt to count God's blessings, you could not compute them? But for sure, humankind is much prone to wrongdoing (sins and errors of judgment) and to ingratitude (14:32-34).

At the blessings outlined in Quran, the first passage started with the creation of the universe and everything that is in it for the sake of mankind. It can be understood that the Creator subdued creation for all people. The purpose of creating animals was then explained; that they were created for the benefit of man: for consumption, clothing, warmth, riding, carrying loads, and as beauty to behold. Then the discussion turned to the descent of rain, that man may drink thereof, and then its benefit to the growth of trees upon which animals graze and from which various fruits are borne. All of that is for the sake of mankind. Then came the creation of seas and rivers, which ships course through to transport God's blessings of goods and provision to mankind, and in which are fish with tender meat and pearls to adorn. The passage ended by speaking about a great honor that God conferred upon man, that He gives him all that he asks Him of (Al-Muslih, 2019).

## 7. Creator limited humans' power over creation

### 7.1. Biblical perspective

While the Bible affirms man's uniqueness and authority over nature, that authority is limited in various ways. Pope John Paul II describes it as follows. *The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to «use and misuse», or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to «eat of the fruit of the tree»* (Gen. 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity (John Paul II, 1987, no 34; Bołoz, 2008). The Bible, therefore, shows that man can exercise his power over nature only when he meets high moral standards.

*O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word, and by thy wisdom hast formed man, to have dominion over the creatures thou hast made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul* (Wis 9:1-3).

The Book of Wisdom teaches that man's power over creation is dependent upon the holiness, righteousness, and uprightness of his soul. Only a noble and good man can rule over creatures. Only then man will be able to fulfil the obligations entrusted to him by the Creator towards the world. Only a morally mature man can impose limitations on himself and thus he will not abuse or destroy nature.

To emphasize that man's power over the world is limited, the Bible points out numerous restrictions. These restrictions confirm that God is the only lord and owner of the world, and man is only its regent and tenant. The most important of these restrictions are those related to the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23-30; Ex. 20:8-10; Lev. 23:1-3; Deut. 5:12-15), the sabbath year (Ex. 23:10-13); Lev. 25:1-7; Deut. 15:1-18), a jubilee year (Lev. 26:13-22), and the division of animals into clean and unclean (Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3-20). The limitations quoted here confirm that God did not give man unlimited power over the world.

The biblical teaching on the limitation of the human right to use nature indicates that the way and scope of using natural resources should be restricted. Man is not allowed to use carelessly natural resources to fulfil his whims, for it can lead to disturbing the balance of nature.

### 7.2. Quranic perspective

In many verses of the Quran, some limits have been drawn within the scope of human intervention in the natural structure in different types of beings such as animals, plants, nature, and the universe. One of the main goals of Islam is to reform societies and put an end to all kinds of corruption (Özdemir, 2017). Many verses forbid making mischief on earth (7:56,74). As revealed in the Quran, one of the ways Satan leads people astray from the right path is by leading them to superstitious beliefs and inspiring them to change and corrupt God's creation. Those who abandon God's command and act in accordance with Satan's will are clearly disappointed (4:119).

Humans should behave within certain limits in nature. Human beings who have severed their ties from the divine realm; he started to think that he could dominate the environment and nature and that he was the only authority to dominate. Thinking like this, he started to use nature rudely and consume it seriously. As a result of this consumption style, it led to many bad consequences that he could not think of. Man has exceeded his limits and bad results have appeared. To give an opportunity to return to the right path and to the right attitude, the Quran informs us that God causes people to experience some bad consequences: Corruption and disorder have appeared on land and in the sea because of what the hands of people have (done and) earned (of evil deeds). Thus, He causes them to taste the consequence of some of what they have done, so that they may (take heed, repent, and reform, and so) return (to the right way) (30:41). While interpreting this verse, Kadi Beydavi associates the emergence of mischief with the processing of environmental disasters. According to him, these disasters are the barrenness and infertility



of the land, mass deaths, forest fires, the deterioration of the seas, the disappearance of fertility, the increase of all kinds of harm and damage, the emergence of perversions and all kinds of cruelty (Eren, 2010, 499).

Man has never been given the absolute power of disposition in the universe. One must know his limits. We realize that man has exceeded this limit in a very serious way, especially in the modern period. Man has reached the delusion that he has unlimited authority over the whole world by exceeding his own limit and has started to engage in many activities with this delusion. With his actions, irreversible damage appeared on the earth. Climates have changed. Ecosystems are disrupted. Living species began to disappear.

As we examine environmental problems, we see that the real problem is not caused by the environment, but by people. Environmental pollution has unseen real dimensions stemming from a human moral stance. We can call this the contamination of modern culture, the contamination of the human spirit. In fact, environmental pollution looks like an iceberg. There's the part of the iceberg that's above the water, and there's the part that's underwater that's invisible. The visible part of the water is environmental problems, water pollution, nature pollution, air pollution, and soil pollution. The part that remains underwater is the contamination of culture and the deterioration of human thought. The problems we face today are due to the contamination of our worldview. The biggest factors in this pollution are greed and insatiability (Gürdoğan 2006). As a matter of fact, it is stated in the Quran that excessive consumption and wastefulness are not welcomed by God: O children of Adam! Dress cleanly and beautifully for every act of worship; and (without making unlawful the things God has made lawful to you) eat and drink, but do not be wasteful (by over-eating or consuming in unnecessary ways): indeed, He does not love the wasteful (7:31). The All-Compassionate Creator desires thanks in return for the bounties He bestows on mankind. Wastefulness is contrary to thanks and slights the bounty and causes loss. Frugality, however, shows respect for the bounty and is profitable. Frugality is both a sort of thanks and shows respect towards the divine mercy manifested in the bounties, and most definitely is the cause of plenty. As for wastefulness, since it is opposed to these instances of wisdom, it has grave consequences (Nursi, 2019, 219).

By mentioning balance in three successive verses (55:7-9), the Quran shows the importance attached to it. It clearly states that there is a very sensitive balance in the creation and the relationships among its parts. The wonderful accord observed in the universe and its maintenance is thanks to this most sensitively computed balance. It is also indispensable to human life, both individually and socially. With respect to human education and perfection, this balance requires that everything is given its due importance in life and that the basic faculties or impulses of anger, desire or appetite, and reason be trained, disciplined, and employed to develop them into the virtues of courage, moderation and chastity, and wisdom (Unal, 2021, 1689).

## 8. Creator will restore the original harmony between humans and creation

### 8.1. Biblical perspective

The Bible teaches that the world that God created was originally in perfect harmony. The basis of this harmony was the strong bond between God and man. This harmony, however, also extended to nature. The situation changed radically with the committing of original sin by Adam and Eve. Initially, humans did not hunt animals, and animals did not attack humans. Both man and animals ate only plants as food (Gen. 1:29-30; Gen. 2:16-17; Gen. 3:2-3). On the other hand, breaking the friendship with God resulted in the disturbance of the harmonious coexistence of man with nature (Gen. 3:17). As a result, the man began to eat animals (Gen. 9:3-4).

Therefore, it seems that man's relationship to nature depends on his moral condition. People who obey God attain an orderly vision of harmony with the natural world. Those who confront God's plans trigger environmental disorder and ultimate retaliation (Kay, 1989, 220).

The Bible foretells the restoration of the original harmony of all creation. The prophets foretell the coming of the messianic times, in which man will live again in harmony with nature. Especially the prophet Isaiah stresses the restoration of the original harmony (Isa. 11:5-9).

The thesis that sin causes disturbance of the harmonious coexistence of man and the world of animals and plants is confirmed by the description of Jesus in the desert (Mk. 1:13). The Bible also teaches about the *restoration of all things* (Acts 3:21). The New Testament explicitly says that Christians *wait for new heavens and a new earth* (2 Pet. 3:13; see also Rev 21: 3). Thus, both Judaism and Christianity expect that man's original harmony with nature will be restored. All this shows the value and importance of nature and encourages care for it.

### 8.2. Quranic perspective

The change that other creatures than humans – plants, and animals – can bring about in nature is limited, and this change is brought back to its original state in accordance with the laws that God has set in the universe. Human beings can bring about unlimited changes in the universe, and these changes are often irreversible. For example, because of excessive consumption of fossil fuels, acid rain, global warming, and climate change occur and the harmony and balance in nature is disturbed. In the Quran, the corruption caused by human beings is expressed in many verses with the term *fasad* (فساد) (2:11,12,27,30,60,205; 5:32-33; 7:56,127; 8:73; 10:40,81; 11:85,116; 12:73;

13:25; 17:4; 18:94; 21:22; 23:71; 26:152,183; 29:30,36; 38:28; 47:22; 89:12). In one of these verses, God says: *Do not cause disorder and corruption on the earth seeing that it has been so well ordered* (7:56).

Quran gives a lot of examples from the old nations that made these corruptions, and the disasters that happened to them because of their disobedience to God's orders are explained (5:64; 7:74,85,86,103; 10:91; 16:88; 30:41). The purpose of these narratives is to remind people to live in harmony with God's orders and laws in nature. Man is held responsible by God not only for not doing evil but also for preventing it. There are many verses in the Qur'an regarding the task of preventing evil and directing them to the right behavior (3:104; 7:199; 9:71). God praised the societies that fulfil this duty in Quran (3:110; 7:165).

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad said, *Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his language; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith* (Sunnah.com 2022). He also said that when people see evil things done and they do nothing to change it, then they run the risk of being included by God among those who are punished for doing the evil (Oxford Islamic Studies Online 2022).

According to Islamic belief, life in our world is limited. After the total social deterioration that occurred because of not following God's orders, the apocalypse will break, this world will disappear, and eternal life will begin for people in new living spaces called Heaven and Hell. At the end of the social deterioration before the apocalypse, there will be harmony with nature and social recovery for a short time – some say 40 years. According to this belief, this improvement and harmony will happen with the cooperation of Jesus and the Mahdi, whom Muslims believe in. In this regard, there are many sayings of Prophet Muhammad (The Muslim Vibe 2022).

Nursi states that, with the Mahdi, God will dispel evil in the world. In terms of the continuity of divine laws, with his perfect mercy, God sends enlighteners who will invite societies to the right path in times of corruption, or blessed persons like the Mahdi. Through them, corruption will be eliminated. He will remove it, reform society, and protect his divine religion. He will appoint a luminous person who will rule and guide people to the right path in the time of great mischief before the Day of Judgment, and thus He will fulfil His promise (Nursi, 2014, 385-386).

As a result, according to the Islamic belief, before the Doomsday comes, the harmony of man with God and therefore with nature will be realized by the joint efforts of the Christians and Muslims.

## 9. Conclusion

The conducted analysis of the holy books of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam leads to the surprising conclusion that the teaching of the Bible and the Quran in the context of human relations with the environment is surprisingly convergent. This study identifies seven key issues that constitute the basis of the ecological approach to nature by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and shapes the pattern of sustainable behaviors towards nature.

**Issue 1:** *The Creator is the absolute ruler and owner of the world.* The Bible and Quran proclaim in this regard very similar opinions. According to the Bible, God is the creator of the world, its sole ruler and owner, and the entire universe is sustained in existence by God. According to the Quran, God is the only true reality and sole source of all creation.

**Issue 2:** *The Creator is concerned for non-human nature.* The Bible (both the Old and New Testament) presents God's corner for non-human nature not because of their usefulness to humans but because of the intrinsic value of non-human nature. On the other hand, Quran says that also non-human nature glorifies God, and He wants nature to witness His beauty and perfection.

**Issue 3:** *The creation is the space in which God's existence and many of his attributes are revealed.* The Bible indicates that nature, without having a divine character, is nevertheless space for discovering the existence of the Creator and his numerous attributes. The Quran teaches that the whole universe (all creatures and events) reveals the existence and numerous attributes of God.

**Issue 4:** *Creation itself praises the Creator.* The Bible points out that nature, on the one hand, praises the Creator by its very existence, and on the other hand, encourages man to join it in praising the Creator. The quranic approach to this issue is very similar. According to the Quran, the whole of creation praises God exclusively. While conscious, believing beings praise Him consciously – verbally, actively, and by heart – the bodies of all beings also praise Him through the satisfaction of their needs and contentment of their senses and faculties.

**Issue 5:** *Creator subdued creation to humans.* The Bible, describing the world and man's position among other creatures, leaves no doubt that man is unique and privileged. According to the Bible, man - as the crown of creation – has the right to govern and use nature. Although man is not the owner of the Earth but just a regent, tenant, or steward, to whom the Creator entrusted it. The analysis of some biblical passages justifies the statement that man is not the master of the Garden of Eden, but just its servant and gardener. The Quran teaches in a similar way. God is the lord and owner of the universe; man is just a viceregent or *khilāfah*. According to both biblical and quranic perspectives, man can use creation to fulfil his needs, but at the same time, man should care for the creation, and his power over it is not unlimited.

**Issue 6:** *The Creator limited humans' power over creation.* The Bible teaches that man has the right to rule over the Earth only if he meets high moral standards. If so, he uses creation and cares for it properly. Because only a righteous man can limit himself in using nature and thus fulfil the duty of caring for the Earth entrusted to him by the Creator. Moreover, the Bible imposes many restrictions on man to prevent creation from being abused and overused. Similarly, the Quran imposes numerous restrictions on man's use of nature. The Quran encourages the followers of Islam to behave in moderation, within the proper limits. A man should respect the balance of nature and not disturb it. This is the reason for these limitations.

**Issue 7:** *Creator will restore the original harmony between humans and creation.* Bible, like the Quran, teaches that there will eventually be perfect harmony in the world between God, man, and nature. The Bible foretells the restoration of the original harmony of all creation, which took place before the original sin. In the coming of the messianic times, *new heavens and a new earth* will be restored, and man will live again in perfect harmony with God and nature. According to the Islamic belief, before the Doomsday comes, the harmony of man with God and therefore, also with nature will be realized by the joint efforts of the Christians and Muslims.

In conclusion, it is surprising that there are no significant differences in the approach to creation from the biblical and quranic perspectives. The holy books are the basis for shaping the worldviews of their adherents. Because worldview is a crucial factor influencing human's relationship with the world, it creates the base for joint ecological initiatives by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Hopefully, environmental interpretation of the Bible and Quran will cause numerous joint activities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims to build a sustainable world for future generations.

It is worth emphasizing here that the religious factor is only one of many factors influencing human decisions and behavior. Economic, legal, political, social, aesthetic, and traditional factors also play an essential role in a complex decision-making process and sustainable development. The final decision is, therefore, the result of a complex game of factors. This decision often depends on the person's current wishes, abilities, and preferences and may change with time and life circumstances. Thus, the significance of religious argumentation, while vital for shaping a pattern of sustainable behavior towards nature, is only one of many factors. The significance of the religious factor depends on religious maturity, the depth of religious life, and identification with religious teaching. However, many actors still underestimate the importance of the religious factor in shaping a sustainable approach to the environment. According to the study's authors, the potential of religious argumentation may play a much more significant role in this regard.

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