

ISLAM And The Environment, A Precedence By More Than 12 Centuries

Prof. Dr. Z. R. M. EL-NAGGAR
zaghoul_elnaggat@hotmail.com

ملخص

يثبت الإسلام حقيقة أن كل شيء في هذا العالم مخلوق بمقدار وبالكمال والدقة المتناهية والتوازن الدقيق. ويتجلى هذا ما في كل تفاصيل كوكبنا الأرضي، وعلاقاته العديدة مع بقية الكون: التفاعل بين الغلاف الجوي للأرض، والغلاف المائي، والغلاف الصخري والمحيط الحيوي هي أمثلة حية لهذه الدقة. وفي نفس السياق، تم خلق الإنسان في أحسن تكوين، وأعطى ما يكفي من الأسباب والإرادة الحرة، وكلف بكوكب الأرض، واعتبر المسؤول الثاني عليها. ولكي يتحمل هذه المسؤولية خصه الله بالتوجيهات الإلهية. لكن الإنسان بابتعاده عن هذه التوجيهات أصبح عنصرا مدمرا على سطح كوكبنا. من خلال الجهل والجشع والأنانية والإهمال والعدوان والإسراف والعديد من المظالم الأخرى، بدأ الإنسان لتعطيل التوازن الطبيعي لكوكبنا. ونتيجة لذلك، أصبح التدهور التدريجي لبيئات الأرض المختلفة تهديدا حقيقيا للوجود البشري، والحياة - بشكل عام - والحياة النباتية - على وجه الخصوص - نظرا لطبيعة حساسة جدا من النباتات. وبسبب هذا، فإن الإسلام يقضي بأن أي أذى يمارسه الإنسان على سطح كوكبنا سيحسب في هذا العالم وفي العالم. يمكن أن يكون مثل هذا الأذى ذات طبيعة مادية بحتة، ذات طبيعة مجردة، أو كليهما. ويشمل التدهور المادي للبيئة في الأرض تلوثها الفيزيائي والكيميائي والبيولوجي، فضلا عن الاستنفاد المفرط لمواردها. يظهر التدهور التجزيئي بوضوح من خلال فقدان القواعد الصحيحة للإشراف على الإنسان على الأرض. الكلمات المفتاح: المحافظة على البيئة، المسؤولية اتجاه الأرض

ABSTRACT

Islam establishes the fact that everything in this world is created with perfection, precision and exact balancing. This is demonstrated by both the details of our planet, and its numerous relationships with the rest of the cosmos. The interaction between the earth's atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere and biosphere is a living example for such precision.

Similarly, man is created in the best of form, is given enough reason and free will, is entrusted with the planet earth, and is considered to be its vicegerent. To carry out the responsibilities of this vicegerency, man is given the divine guidance.

However, drifting away from such guidance, man started to be a destructive element on the surface of our planet. Through ignorance, greed, selfishness, carelessness, aggression, extravagance and many other injustices, man started to disrupt the natural balance of our planet.

Consequently, the gradual deterioration of the earth's different environments has become a real threat to the human existence, to life – in general – and to the plant life – in particular – due to the very delicate nature of plants. Because of this, Islam rules that any mischief exercised by man on the surface of our planet will be accounted for in this world and in the world-to-come. Such mischief can be of a purely material nature, of an abstract nature, or of both. Material deterioration of the earth's environment includes both its physical, chemical and biological pollution, as well as the excessive exhaustion of its resources. Abstract deterioration is clearly demonstrated by the loss of the proper rules of man's stewardship on earth.

Key words: Conserving the environment, Man's Responsibility about the Earth,

INTRODUCTION

During the winter of 1952, the city of London, England was covered by a thick, black fog for several days. This fog was highly polluted with the industrial waste pouring out into the atmosphere from several chimneys in the city, causing the death of more than 4000 individuals. After the disappearance of this black fog, its pollution lasted for more than 15 days. Such pollution was repeated several times in the atmosphere of London and of other European cities, reaching its worst during the winter of 1962. Only then, Western scholars came to realize the dangers of pollution, and the need for measuring its rates, particularly in heavily populated industrial cities.

However, the glorious Quran has been -for more than 14 centuries- warning from corrupting the environment and advocating a balanced relationship between man and his ecosystem on the basis of both sustainable use and conservation.

Nevertheless, people have generally been drifting away from this guidance, causing great destruction to the different ecosystems of the earth, including habitat corruption, both plant and animal species elimination, desertification, deforestation, devastating climatic changes, exhaustion of the resources, among other negative ways of corruption. This started with the early days of the 18th century industrial revolution, when numerous wasteful and invasive consumer societies have been developing on the surface of our planet, threatening the balance of life on its surface. This has been intensified with the beginning of using fossil fuels such as coal, petroleum and natural gas to generate energy. Burning more than 100 million barrels of oil, 80 million tons of coal added to trillions of cubic feet of natural gas every day has led to the fact that the earth's atmosphere has been continuously polluted by around 100 million tons of CO₂ every day, added to many other poisonous gases. Consequently our planet started to suffer from global warming and its drastic effects, threatening the natural balance of its ecosystems and all forms of life, including man.

The only way out of this dilemma is to adhere to- the Islamic environmental ethics, which are both faith-based and virtue-based. In the Islamic teaching man is considered to be both a vicegerent on earth and a trustee for its ecosystem. The power of religious belief and its ethics are the only control to put conservation into its effective practice, as all utilitarian concepts have failed completely.

Islamic controls for conserving the environment:

A- Allah (all glory be to Him) is the Creator of everything, and hence everything is His possession. The Glorious Quran reads:

"Allah is the Creator of everything, and He is the Guardian and Disposer of everything*" (39:62)

B- Allah's creation is perfect and well-balanced, the Quran reads:

(Verily, We created everything with due measure*) (54:49)

C -Man is clearly and irrevocably interwoven into the fabric of his environment. By corrupting its ecosystem, he is clearly damaging himself. Consequently a balanced relationship between man and the environment becomes both a religious and a utilitarian obligation. The Noble Quran reads:

"There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a bird that flies by its two wings, but (form part of) communities like you (human beings). Nothing have We left out from the Book, and they (all) shall then be gathered to their Lord*" (6:38)

D- Man's Responsibility About The Earth

Man is created as the vicegerent, guardian and steward of the earth. Hence, he is allowed to reap its rewards and preserve it from any pollutants .The Quran reads:

"He (Allah) is the One Who made you (Human Beings) vicegerents on the earth 35:39).((successors, generation after generation)...*"

E- Forbidding the corruption of the earth's environment

- Material corruption of the earth

(Chemical pollution of the environment), (Physical pollution of the environment).

(Biological corruption of the earth).

F- Abuse of the earth's environment is Islamically prohibited, and hence, is punishable in this world and in the world-to-come . The Quran reads:

Corruption has appeared in (both) the land and the sea by what the hands of human beings have committed , that He (Allah) may make them taste a part of what they have done, so that they may return*) (30:41).

And do not do mischief on the earth, after it was set in order, and invoke Him with fear and hope. Surely, Allah's Mercy is (ever) near unto the good-doers*) (7:56).

"...and seek not mischief on the earth, verily, Allah likes not the mischief-makers*" (28:77).

"Would you then, if you were given the authority, do mischief on the earth, and sever your ties of kinship?*" (47:22).

G- Wasteful extravagance is one of the grave damages to the earth's environment . The Quran states:

(And do not obey the bidding of the extravagant* Who make mischief on the earth and do not act aright*) (26:151,152).

"...But waste not by excess: for Allah does not love the wasters*" (6:141)"

"Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those extremes*" (25:67).."

Summary and Conclusions

Man was created and entrusted with the earth as its vicegerent, guardian and steward. Hence, he is allowed to reap its rewards without waste or extravagance, and conserve its environments against mischief, corruption or destruction. This is an Islamic obligation because the earth's environment is so well balanced, that if disturbed it requires a considerable time to adjust. Consequently, conservation has always been part and parcel of the Islamic teachings since the very early days of Islam, while the recent call for the conservation of the environment only started in the latter half of the 20th century.

Islam advocates the dignity of nature, as the work of the Creator, and teaches that it must be well-preserved and protected from any damage. Human beings are deeply interwoven into the fabric of their environments, and hence its corruption will reflect on them.

For the conservation of the environment, Islam teaches the following principles:

- 1- Allah (all glory be to Him) is the Creator of everything and hence, everything is His possession, and man cannot transgress on the divine property.
- 2- Allah's creation is perfect and well- balanced, and hence, should never be disturbed.
- 3- Every form of Allah's creation (animate or inanimate) has a certain degree of sense, feeling, reaction and expression and hence, it knows its Creator, worships and glorifies Him. It can react to defend itself, and its reaction can be harmful to man. By corrupting his ecosystem man is actually damaging himself. Consequently a balanced relationship between man and his environment becomes both a religious obligation and a utilitarian need.
- 4- Man s responsibility about the earth is over emphasized in all the divine revelations. However, the recent trend of drifting away from religion has developed human selfishness and greed. These are currently destroying all the earth's ecosystems and exhausting its resources. Consequently, corruption of the earth's environment is categorically forbidden in Islam, is prohibited, and is punishable in this world and in the world-to-come:
- 5- Wasteful extravagance is one of the grave damages to the earth's environment, and is threatening that the depletion of the recourses of the earth is getting very close.

References

- 1- Bruthland, G H (1987). World Commission on Environment and Development. Our Common Future. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 2- Foltz, R C (2010). The Environmental Crisis and Global Violence: A Matter of Misplaced Values. *Journal of Islamic Perspective*, (3), pp 131–141
- 3- Gore, A (1992). *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*. Jakarta, Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- 4- Hassan, A & Cajee, Z A (2002). *Islam, Muslim and sustainable Development: A Message from Johannesburg*, Available from: www.imase.org/reading/reading-list-mainmenu-34/27.
- 5 - Khalid, F M & O'Brien, J (eds) (1992). *Islam and Ecology*. London, Cassell.
- 6- Khalid, F M (2002). Islam and the Environment in Timmerman, P (ed), *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change: Social and Economic Dimensions of Global Environmental Change*. Vol 5, pp 332-339. Chichester, John Wiley & Sons.
- 7- Nasr, S H (2003). Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World and the Environment. In Foltz, R, Denny F M and Baharuddin, A (eds). *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. pp. 86-105. Massachusetts, Harvard University Press..
- 8- Sardar, Z (1985). *Toward an Islamic Theory of Environment*. In Sardar, Z, *Islamic Futures: A Shape of Ideas to Come*. London, Mansell Publishing.
- 9 - World Commission on Environment (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 10- Yahya, H (2002). *Design in Nature*. London, Ta-Ha Publishers.
- 11- Yasien, M (1996). *The Definition of Fitrah*. In *Fitrah: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature*. London, Ta-Ha Publisher