The Concept of Environment in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses

Edited by
Georges Tamer

Volume 10

The Concept of Environment in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

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Preface

The present volume of the book series "Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses" (KCID) documents the results of a conference which dealt with the concept of "Environment" in Judaism, Christianity and Islam and was held at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. The conference was organised by the research unit "Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses" and held online on June 17 and 18, 2020, due to the then ongoing pandemic of COVID-19.

The research unit "Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses" was jointly run by the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg and the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt between June 2018 and June 2021. As the title already implies, the joint project focused on interreligious discourse. Its aim was to reflect upon and thereby facilitate a theologically well founded interreligious dialogue. For only if every partner in a conversation has a clear notion of what is discussed, the dialogue can be conducted reasonably. It was the project's ambition to provide such clarification by examining concepts that are of central importance for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, both, historically in terms of their interdependencies, and by setting them in a relation to one another. Common values and origins, but also differences and contradictions between the three monotheistic religions shall be clearly elaborated, by reflecting on and comparing central ideas and beliefs in their historic contexts. By disclosing key concepts of the three closely interconnected religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, a deeper mutual understanding is fostered, prejudices and misunderstandings are counteracted and thus a contribution is made to peaceful interaction based on respect and recognition.

Only through precise knowledge of the central ideas of the foreign as well as of one's own religion a well-founded, objective and constructive interreligious understanding can prevail. Conferences at which international experts from the fields of theology, religious studies and philosophy of religion intensively discussed and clarified core religious ideas from the perspective of the three religions served this purpose. Developments within religious history never proceed in isolation; rather, they interpenetrate each other and are mutually dependent. Thus, the research unit "Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses" pursued fundamental research and aimed at an "archaeology of knowledge" with its comparative conceptual-historical investigations.

Inasmuch as world peace cannot be obtained without religious peace, the project contributed importantly to a peaceful social coexistence and thus corresponds to the obligation that has been newly assigned to the universities in re-

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cent decades, namely, to engage in social concerns in addition to teaching and research. This is expressed by the term “third mission”.

I wish to thank Dr. Wenzel Maximilian Widenka, who not only organised the conference but also edited this volume. In addition to the cooperation partners of the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg and the De Gruyter publishing house for including this volume in the book series “Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses”, we would like to express our sincere thanks to the third-party funders, the Karpos Foundation of the Diocese Eichstätt, Maximilian Bickhoff Foundation and the ProFor Program of the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. Without their support, neither the conference nor the present volume would have been brought into being.

Christoph Böttigheimer

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The Concept of Environment in Judaism

An Ecological Perspective Based on Jewish Tradition

1 Introduction

"Rabbi Amorai asked: 'Where is the Garden of Eden?' He replied: 'It is on earth.'"[1]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes, "Hope is a human virtue, but one with religious underpinnings. At its ultimate it is the belief…[that God] is mindful of our aspirations, with us in our fumbling efforts, that He has given us the means to save us from ourselves; that we are not wrong to dream, wish and work for a better world. Hope is the knowledge that we can choose; that we can learn from our mistakes and act differently next time."[2]

Many people fear that humans have irrevocably destroyed the ecology of "Eden" on earth. But God created the world out of love for life on earth. This chapter, adapted from Eco Bible volume 1: An Ecological Commentary on Genesis and Exodus, explores the deep inspiration we can find in the Hebrew Bible for fulfilling the blessing of all life, for changing course to preserve God's creation, and for sustaining human life in harmony with nature and all of God's creatures.

The Hebrew Bible is also called the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch (and also refers to the Prophets and Writings, which are not addressed in this commentary). How does the Hebrew Bible relate deeply to living in balance with God's creation, through a lifestyle that is not only aware of but protects the natural world? Is concern for environmental stewardship external to the Hebrew Bible, or a central message embedded within it? This chapter reveals a spiritually grounded vision for both long-term sustainability and immediate environmental mindfulness and action.

Some people believe religion is separate and distinct from ecology or care for God's creation. Most Hebrew Bible study, teaching, and preaching occur without addressing the ecological crisis, the greatest crisis facing humanity. This chapter

1 Sefer HaBahir 31.

2 Sacks, Jonathan, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, London: Continuum, 2003, 207.

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applies an ecological perspective to reveal how the Hebrew Bible itself, and thousands of years of Biblical teaching by Jewish rabbis, indeed *embrace* care for God's creation as a fundamental message. An ancient Jewish commentary on the Hebrew Bible, the Midrash, teaches that "God gazed into the Hebrew Bible and created the world."[3] The Divine teaching is a blueprint for all of creation and instructs us about living sustainably in the world God created.

Were it not for the receiving of the Hebrew Bible on Mt. Sinai, the Midrash teaches, God would have returned the world to chaos and void.[4] Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that the ideal of the Hebrew Bible "awaits the generation which will finally have become matured for its ideals to be made into a reality."[5] Applying the teachings of the Hebrew Bible to stewardship of God's creation is not just an idea for today, but essential for a future in which we achieve a balanced, worldwide ecosystem and thrive on a planet viable for all life.

This chapter quotes scores of rabbis and other Jewish thinkers commenting on verses from the Hebrew Bible. *Eco Bible*, including Volume I, Genesis and Exodus, and Volume II, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, was published during a time of accelerating environmental challenges, a worldwide coronavirus pandemic, and widespread protests for racial justice. Ecological disasters and COVID-19's devastating spread are causing the tragic loss of so many lives as well as a profound disruption of natural ecosystems, families, communities, cultures, and the populations of entire nations. Pollution disproportionately impacts people of color and calls for environmental justice are growing.

These interconnected crises are signals to humanity of the need for restoring balance between people and nature. The Hebrew Bible's Divine wisdom can provide important messages for striving to find this balance. Some of the Hebrew Bible's verses – which first "spoke" to people in ancient times when the Bible was given – may seem cryptic, obscure, or irrelevant to our modern times or lives. The chief function of contemporary commentaries like *Eco Bible*, as with all rabbinic commentaries that have strived to enlighten, is to make the holy book relevant in our own generation and those to come.

This chapter explores how the Hebrew Bible and traditional commentaries relate to a range of critical, contemporary ecological challenges, such as preserving animal and plant biodiversity, ensuring clean air, land, and water, and showing compassion to both domestic and wild animals. Each of us can take many

3 Midrash Genesis Rabbah 1:1.

4 Midrash Exodus Rabbah 47:4.

5 Hirsch, Samson Raphael, commentary to Numbers 8:11, in: *The Pentateuch*, vol. 4: Numbers, Gateshead, England: Judaica Press, 1989.

different kinds of actions that sustain the world and sustain our souls. "Study is not the most important thing, but action,"[6] Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says.

1.1 The Need for Jewish Ecological Ethics

The Ark, which held the Tablets God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai, physically moved with the Israelites during their 40 years in the desert.[7] The word of God contained in the Ark is a revolutionary teaching; to remain dynamic and alive, it has to keep moving with human concerns or it will become reactionary, static, fixed. Commentaries on the Bible must move forward too. This new *Eco Bible* commentary is extremely timely – both grounded in millennia of rabbinic thought and speaking to the greatest challenges facing humanity in the twenty-first century.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first chief rabbi of Israel before its statehood in 1948, spoke of learning the Hebrew Bible "for its sake," where the teachings "become more and more expansive."[8] Rabbi Daniel Kohn understands this to mean that the Hebrew Bible becomes ever more multifaceted, expressive, variegated, and beautified.[9] *Eco Bible* attempts to unfold and reveal the profound Divine teachings of the Hebrew Bible from an ecological perspective, among what Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet recognizes as "the ever-increasing number of fresh understandings of the Bible's verses."[10]

Religion has been a channel for moral and ethical instruction across the ages and the world. Faith can and should help us to address the roots of our planet's ecological crisis. Rabbi Dov Berkowitz says in regard to the Hebrew Bible, "How do we utilize 3,500 years of spiritual consciousness for the betterment of our contemporary society?"[11] When we are faced with the compelling, sustained insights of religious thought and tradition, we can come to see our current life choices in a different and more ecological light.

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6 Ethics of the Fathers 1:17.

7 Numbers 10:35.

8 Kook, Abraham Isaac, "On Torah for its Own Sake," *Orot HaTorah II,* Jerusalem: Sifriat Hava, 2005, §1.

9 Kohn, Daniel, oral teaching, Yeshivat Sulam Yaakov, Jerusalem, May 2011.

10 Rashbam, commentary to Genesis 37:2.

11 Talk at Vayehi Ohr Conference, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, April 5, 2009.

rights, and a conservative mindset.[264] We learn that Isaac set up a small settlement in Beersheba, away from the Philistines.[265] Additionally, property rights had just been established through a pact with the king of the Philistines, Abimelech.[266] The final ingredient, a conservative mindset, was more an aspect of Jacob's personality ("a mild man who stayed in camp") in contrast to Esau's ("a man of the field").[267]

This may be why Jacob became the farmer: Genesis 27:6–9 – "Rebecca said to her son Jacob, 'I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, 'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the Lord's approval, before I die.' Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes.'"

Today, society is structured into large groups, property rights are well established in most countries, and the greatest challenge to greater sustainability is creating a conservationist mindset that thinks long term about preventing future environmental risks. How does humankind become more long-term oriented? This is an important role for religious educators who are accustomed to seeing life patterns over thousands of years, more so than for politicians who typically are focused on the next two or four years.

3.29 Doing All We Can

Isaac's blessing contains a powerful lesson, in Genesis 27:28 – "And may God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, abundance of new grain and wine." Kli Yakar explains that the blessing is introduced with the word "and" because God's blessing is given only after a person has done all they can do. Then, and only then, "nature will complete the miracle."[268]

How can one do all that is possible? The work of achieving sustainability in our lives and on our planet seems infinite, and potentially discouraging to any one person. Group, community, and even interfaith collaboration greatly ex-

264 Gallagher, Elizabeth M. / Shennan, Stephen J. / Thomas, Mark G., "Transition to Farming More Likely for Small, Conservative Groups with Property Rights, but Increased Productivity Is Not Essential," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, 46 (2015), 14218–14223, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1511870112

265 Genesis 26:33.

266 Ibid., 26:28.

267 Ibid., 25:27.

268 Kli Yakar on Genesis 28:27.

pands our capacity. Since 2010, The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development has been revealing the connection between religion and ecology and has been mobilizing people to act. It has co-organized twelve conferences in Israel and the United States, bringing together current and emerging clergy from many faiths for engagement on religion and ecology.[269]

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Kerstin Schlögl-Flierl

The Concept of Environment in Christianity

Environment as a Significant Issue in Christianity – as a Challenge and Option for the Future

The Corona crisis can be considered a stimulant for a new perception of the environment. This results from a lack of attention to the One Health approach, due to which the environmental side of health has been given little consideration in the past. Thus, the risk of zoonotic diseases has been underestimated. This applies also to a religious, more specifically, the Christian tradition in thinking about environmental issues.

In order to get an initial idea of a Christian understanding of environment, a general approach to the issue of environment in Christianity is to start from an interreligious comparison of the topic of nature. Principally, four elementary religious forms of understanding nature can be found. Firstly, nature is understood "as the work of the Creator, who sustains it and to whom people owe an account (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)"[1]. Secondly, the essential equality of human beings, animals, and plants can be postulated. This results in the need for respectful interaction (Buddhism, Hinduism, and other Asian religions). A third approach takes into account the cosmic harmony of the God-given natural order, which must be recognized and taken as the basis for a successful life (for example in Taoism). The fourth approach is the idea of earth-connected gods that human beings encounter in nature and that need to be amended positively through rites (for example tribal religions in Africa, America, and Australia)[2].

The question will be what characterizes the concept of Christianity in a further manner. On a purely conceptual level, the idea of ecumenism is guiding. It expresses living together in *one house*, that is, it does not refer to the Christian denominations, but to all fellow creatures. It "takes shape [thus] as an interdenominational, intercultural, interreligious and ecological learning process that cannot be concluded"[3].

Ecology, thus, also forms the framework for religious discourse. Here in the present contribution, the genuinely Christian is formulated, whereby the term Christian also offers a wide field. Pope Benedict XVI – as a risk and a crisis –

1 Vogt, Markus, *Christliche Umweltethik. Grundlagen und zentrale Herausforderungen*, Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2021, 268 [translation K.S.F. with the help of Pia Heutling].

2 Cf. Vogt, *Christliche Umweltethik*, 268.

3 Vogt, *Christliche Umweltethik*, 283 f. [translation K.S.F.].

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110782455-003

pointed to a new covenant between human beings and the environment.[4] This culminated in Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which will be presented in this article.

In particular, it is a Catholic point of view on Environment in Christianity, which seeks to incorporate Protestant and Orthodox views. This also reveals itself to be a challenge and will be addressed in this contribution.

For the purpose of contextualizing, the discussions about the concept of "environment" and its meaning are taking place in times of the Anthropocene. Are humans considered engineers of the biosphere in this context? The term of human beings as engineers, which already existed before, was mentioned by Paul Crutzen[5]. He also explains the term "Anthropocene" and correlates it with analyses that found air trapped in polar ice. This could be dated back to the late 18th century, where the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane began taking place.[6] Crutzen emphasizes the impact of mankind and its behavior towards the environment. Finding environmentally sustainable management tools is crucial for the Anthropocene. Apart from various international programs and large-scale geo-engineering projects, scientists are still largely treading on terra incognita.[7]

The social ethicist, Markus Vogt, points out, that this understanding as human engineers of the environment suggests the human invention (from Latin *ingenium*, invention) of the environment. Dissolving the dualism of man and environment in favor of man and culture, encompasses supposedly everything.[8] This is opposed by a biblical image of the environment.

1 The Bible and the Environment

A glimpse into the biblical text also helps to understand environment in Christianity.

4 Cf. Caritas in Veritate, no. 48–52.
5 Cf. Crutzen, Paul, "The Geology of mankind", *Nature* 415 (2002), 23.
6 Cf. Crutzen, *Geology*, 23.
7 Cf. Crutzen, *Geology*, 23.
8 Cf. Vogt, *Christliche Umweltethik*, 132.

Conclusion

The question of the environment in Christianity is not a simple one. The most urgent one to ask, is the question of moral psychology: How do we get from ought to willingness and acting?

> The overcoming of static models in the understanding of nature or creation also contributes enormously to the conceptual development of environmental ethics. Here, especially process philosophy and theology in the tradition of Alfred North Whitehead have opened up fundamentally new perspectives that are far from being explored in environmental ethics.[182]

The environment serves as a space, in which theologians can move away from the idea of the burden of the thesis that Christianity is responsible for the exploitation of the environment. Vogt stresses the meaning of the cross and the resurrection as trusting elements for the Christian hope. Human failure that is dependent on mercy and the possibility of a new beginning, puts its future in God's hands to reach the kingdom of God.[183]

For the future, the living conditions that are given must not be assumed to be static. They are subject to constant change. This is also noticeable in the fact that the adherence to an always same order structure does not constitute the creation-appropriate organization of the living conditions. Rather, it is the preservation of future viability for the individual and his fellow human beings as well as for subsequent generations. An ethics based on creation as man's self-interpretation regards the natural foundations of life as particularly worthy of protection. The history of human life always takes the form of a life story that relates to what it finds. The extra-human belongs to the self-understanding and self-interpretation of the individual existence of man just as much as the human and, therefore, becomes the subject of ethics and theology.[184]

In addition, because of the environmental crisis, Christians must change their theological teaching. It is only in this way, that they can actively contribute to an overcoming of the crisis. It is necessary to conceive an anthropology that understands the human being together with and in dependence on his co-creation. Man does not exist detached from his environment, more precisely: the non-human. The being-there and being-so of man goes back to a co-evolutionary process of the human and the non-human and expresses mutual dependence.

182 Vogt, *Christliche Umweltethik*, 54 [translation K.S.F.].
183 Cf. Vogt, *Christliche Umweltethik*, 158 [translation K.S.F.].
184 Cf. Anselm, *Schöpfung*, 276 f.

Before any theological interpretation, it is important to realize this as a theologian.[185]

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185 Cf. Enxing, Julia, "Und Gott schuf den Erdling", *Herder Korrespondenz* 74.3 (2020), 24–26, here: 26.

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Yasin Dutton

The Concept of Environment in Islam

Introduction

As is frequent now, and for good reason, we start with the verse in Sūrat ar-Rūm (Qurʾān, 30:41), as do many writers and speakers on environmental matters:

"Corruption *(fasād*) has appeared on the land and the sea because of what people's own hands have brought about, to give them a taste of what they have done, that hopefully they will return."

Fasād is not an easy word to translate. Many people suggest "corruption", but that suggests a moral element, which is not necessarily present. I prefer to think of "messed-up-ness", even if it is not so mellifluous. You can for example, mess up some cooking, or anything else that you can spoil, and *fasād* would be an appropriate word to use for the concept. "Despoliation" is perhaps along the right lines, although it may seem a little too strong for such everyday purposes. Also, I am assuming a meaning of messing up the environment; it may be that the idea of *fasād* does in fact relate to a quality in our actions, and thus our being, and not just the result in the world around us. But the environmental meaning is definitely there.

Whatever a good translation might be, there is no doubt that we are spoiling our environment. We are polluting the land and the sea, including the earth and the soil beneath us, the rivers and the lakes around us, and even the air we breathe. Our inner cities may be obviously polluted, but so too is our countryside and farmland, including the very soil we use to grow our crops, and therefore to feed our cattle and, directly or indirectly, ourselves. And the run-off from the fields, with all its pesticide and/or fertilizer residues, goes into our rivers and eventually the sea.

The above verse – "Corruption (*fasād*) has appeared on the land and the sea because of what men's hands have done" – indicates firstly the concept of the environment, referred to here as "the land and the sea". It also indicates that "the land and the sea" is the arena for man's actions. So what is it that we have done? And how might one be able to counteract it? In other words, is there a diagnosis and, if so, what is the cure?

Before we consider this broader question, let us look first at the basic terminology and the sources for the concept of the environment in the textual sources of the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīṯ*.

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7 Ways Forward?

Kate Raworth, in her book *Doughnut Economics* (2017), refers to "the ingenious twentieth-century inventor" Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) as saying: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete".[32]

Raworth also notes, in a section entitled "Avoiding collapse":

> We have transgressed at least four planetary boundaries (climate change, chemical pollution, ocean acidification and biodiversity loss), billions of people still face extreme deprivation, and the richest 1% own half of the world's financial wealth. These are ideal conditions for driving ourselves towards collapse. If we are to avoid such a fate for our global civilization, we clearly need a transformation and it can be summed up like this:
>
> "Today's economy is divisive and degenerative by default. Tomorrow's economy must be distributive and regenerative by design."[33]

In other words, we need to look at the situation in a different way.

We cannot expect to be able to change the divisive and degenerative banking system and its chimera of constant growth. Let Allah do that: "Be informed of a war from Allah and His Messenger." But it is possible to offer something else on the economic front: regenerative halal trade, i.e. trade without usury, and distributive zakāt, especially correctly collected and distributed zakāt. For zakāt in particular, this should not be online, but hand to hand, and not international, or even national, but local, as it was initially in the time of the first Muslims, who would collect it and then distribute it in the place where they had collected it. This then allows the possibility of bringing local communities to life without having to rely on impersonal, centralized institutions who do not know what the situation is on the ground. An organization called *The Local Zakāt Initiative* has recently been established along these lines in Britain,[34] but the possibility exists wherever zakāt is seen as a means of revivifying local communities. In the environmental context there are many such activities throughout the world where people try to do the best with zakāt despite the circumstances we are all obliged to live in.[35]

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32 Raworth, Kate, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*, New York: Random House, 2017, 4.

33 Raworth, *Doughnut Economics*, 155–156.

34 Cf, for example, *The Local Zakāt Initiative*, https://localzakat.co.uk.

35 One example that highlights the importance of decentralizing and de-politicizing the collection of zakāt is documented in: Machado, Anna Carolina / Bilo, Charlotte / Helmy, Imane, "The

Let us conclude with the assessment of Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), six times appointed judge in the law courts, where he outlines the social dimension of the Islamic identity. Alongside, and as important as the acts of worship – ritual prayers, Ramadan, zakāt and hajj – Ibn Khaldun considers that the doctrine which charters the social and political nature of a Muslim society is that which defines what man is in Islam. He calls this *istikhlāf* (being appointed "caliph" / taking on stewardship). As Ian Dallas puts it:

> This means that man is the guardian of the world.
> Allah, the Creator of the Universe, has set man on earth to worship Him and to be the guardian of the world.
> To man is given the task of defending the earth, the ocean and the sky, from destruction, pollution and over-exploitation.
> He has to answer for the usage of what is on the earth, and under it.
> Man's charge is that he must abolish usury – even to a blade of grass.[36]

We must also recognize that, as indicated earlier, the inward and the outward are necessarily connected, and the one is not healthy unless the other is. To further emphasize this meaning, we note the words of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir as-Sufi in his introduction to the translation of Shaykh ʿAlī al-Jamal's (d. 1780) *The Meaning of Man*, where he says:

> We live in an age where the meaning of man itself is in danger, therefore man is in danger, therefore his environment, this Earth is in danger. We live in a society that is determined to destroy man and make him the servant of the lowest aspects of himself, instead of the master of the highest aspects of himself.[37]

We saw before that how we are with the world is how the world is with us. And we saw that it is important for us to think well about the world, and to have a good opinion of Allah.

To end on a positive note, and to encourage us to realign our inward with our outward, and to indicate a path that leads us to the highest rather than the lowest aspects of ourselves, we finish with a poem about the environment by one of the most influential Sufi shaykhs of the 20th century, Shaykh Muḥam-

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Role of Zakāt in the Provision of Social Protection: A Comparison between Jordan, Palestine and Sudan", *Working Paper, No. 168*, Brasilia: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), 2018.

36 Dallas, Ian, *The Time of the Bedouin*, Cape Town: Budgate Press, 2006, 302–303.

37 as-Sufi, Abd al-Qadir, *Introduction,* in: Shaykh ʻAli al-Jamal, *The Meaning of Man: The Foundations of the Science of Knowledge*, 5, Norwich: Diwan Press, 1977.

mad ibn al-Ḥabīb (1876–1972). The poem is entitled "Reflection", and is a reminder to reflect on the majesty and beauty of creation, and thus the Majesty and Beauty of the Creator:

Reflect upon the beauty of the workmanship with which the land and the sea are made,
And openly and secretly busy yourself with the attributes of Allah.
In the self and on the horizon is the greatest witness
To the limitless perfections of Allah.
If you were to concern yourself with the physical bodies and their perfection of form
And their inner connection, like a string of pearls;
If you were to concern yourself with the secrets of the tongue and its articulation,
And its expression of what you conceal in your breast;
If you were to concern yourself with the secrets of all the limbs
And the ease with which they obey the heart;
If you were to concern yourself with the turning of the hearts to obedience,
And how they sometimes move to disobedience;
If you were to concern yourself with the earth and the variety of its plants
And the great expanse of smooth and rugged land that it contains;
If you were to concern yourself with the secrets of the seas and the fish in them,
And the endless waves held back by an unconquerable barrier;
If you were to concern yourself with the secrets of the winds, and how
They bring mists and clouds which bring down rain;
And if you were to concern yourself with the secrets of all the heavens
And the Throne and the Footstool and the spirit of the Command,
Then you would believe in *tawḥīd* with a firm belief
And would turn from illusions, doubt and the other.
You would say: "My God, You are my desire and my goal
And my fortress against evils, injustice and deceit.
You are my hope in providing for my needs
And You are the One who rescues us from evil and wickedness.
You are the Compassionate, the Answerer to whoever calls upon You.
And you are the One who makes up for the poverty of the poor.
To you, Oh Exalted, I have raised my pleas,
So hasten the Opening and the Secret, Oh my God,
By the rank of the one who is hoped for on the day of grief and distress,
And the day when people come to the Place of Gathering.
May the blessings of Allah be upon him as long as there is a gnostic
Who concerns himself with the lights of His Essence in every manifestation,
And upon his family and Companions and every one who follows
His glorious sunna in prohibition and command.[38]

38 Shaykh Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥabīb, *Dīwān*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001/1422, 54; for the translation, cf.: *The Diwans of the Darqawa*, trans. 'Aisha 'Abd ar-Rahman at-Tarjumana, 65–66, Norwich: Diwan Press, 1980.

Finally, we recall two ḥadīṯs which point to our common future:

1. "No time comes upon you but that the one coming after it is worse than it."[39]
2. "If the Day of Rising comes and you are planting a palm tree, continue planting it."[40]

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Christoph Böttigheimer and Wenzel M. Widenka

Epilogue

Introduction

As multifarious as God's creation are the ways of investigating this concept. The articles that are assembled in this volume thus present very different approaches to the idea of "Environment" in the three faiths. Rabbi Yonatan Neril's and Rabbi Leo Dee's essay on "The Concept of Environment in Judaism" presents an investigation and a very rabbinic approach based on the Holy Scriptures, on rabbinic teaching, on religious contemplation. It is more than a mere scholarly text and this is the basis of its fascination. Kerstin Schlögl-Flier's strictly systematical investigation in the understanding of environment from a Christian perspective encompasses both the historical development of the concept, approaches of systematical theology and current challenges. Yasin Dutton's starting point is the Qurʾān but his essay focuses on current ecological challenges and the possible answers Islamic thinking can give to them. Whatever the approach, none of the three faiths can ignore that a fundamental entity as the environment points towards a greater concept, read: it is creation that surrounds the believer in his and her everyday life. It is thus legit to rather speak of environment as a part of speaking of creation. The term "creation" is a theological one, whereas "environment" represents a secular approach. What is more, "nature" refers only to a certain environment on a single planet, not to the whole of all the created universe. It is thus stunning that all three religions denote this tension between a theological and a secular thinking when speaking of environment. Dealing with environment is more than keeping care of nature. It is the challenging handling of the complex relation between creator, creation and its most delicate creature, man.

The Concept of Environment from a Jewish Perspective

Judaism is not a religion of systematised doctrines, but rather a lively, ongoing debate by means of religious law (halacha) and textual approaches (agada). Therefore we should not be surprised that Jewish approaches to ecology and environment are a many-voiced choir of explorations into text and tradition that, however, enable to draw a broad picture of Judaism's main thoughts and concerns about the created world. The Garden of Eden, the origin of human encoun-

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ter with creation, is threatened. Judaism sees the ecological crisis of our days not merely as a current event, but addresses it in the light of creation itself, as a question of metaphysical dimension. Focal is the Torah, the five books of Moses. Its teachings, though seemingly cryptic, are of fundamental value for the treatment of recent questions. The elaborated method of rabbinic commenting on the Bible's teaching enables a current "updating" of a wisdom a thousand years old, that was never meant to be static. Thus, it seems clear for Judaism that the ecological crisis has spiritual roots. The aim is not to draw an apocalyptic vision of creation collapsing but to offer a perspective of hope and repentance. Man is responsible for God's creation, including his fellow beings. The idea of stewardship is crucial for the Jewish understanding of the concept of environment. Man is set into the garden to take care of it and to work it. The question is not individual concern, but collective responsibility, as Judaism normally thinks in terms of standing as a people before God and not as an individual believer. Man is bound to God's plan for this earth and is part of the constant struggle for upholding the structure and balance of creation. The creation could not bring forth life if there were not man to till the ground and harvest its fruits. Man, being formed of soil, is part of creation. Here, the words "creation" and "environment" fall into each other and are used equally and nearly interchangeably. Focal is one thought that combines all attempts towards creation and environment: God's creation is "very good", there is no failure or evil spark. It is wholly accepted and loved by its creator. This positive approach towards the created world is fundamental and a sharp contrast to any gnostic idea of an ill-natured matter.

The Book of Genesis is the starting point of all endeavours to highlight the special features of the Jewish concept of environment, resp. creation. The latter is a both divine and ongoing process wherein man is an integrative part of. God initiated a perfect creation man has to maintain. This divine order links man's acting within creation to a spiritual act. The rabbis believe that this world may not be the first world ever created. God had created several other worlds, which he rejected and destroyed. The last one is the perfect creation, which must not be damaged by man's agency. Yet the famous dominion order of Gen 1:28 remains. This task to dominate is however based on the well-behaviour of mankind. If man does not merit dominion, the mandate can be withdrawn and he may be overthrown. This unworthiness can occur by pillaging the environment or the unnecessary killing of animals. The first humans in the Garden of Eden are believed to having had a vegetarian diet and having lived in a state of comprehensive harmony. This lost harmony is a state man yearns to re-establish. Thus, the above mentioned dominion mandate is a moral one. For the garden and the entire creation belong to the creator, God, and man is set into it to uphold the beau-

ty of all created things, to take care of creation and to guarantee the historical continuity of the created world as God's steward.

The first point of comparison similar to the current crisis is the story of Noah and the ark. Like today, the lack of spiritual pleasure caused a materialistic, hedonistic substitute to emerge. God granted a time of warning before unleashing the flood, for man is capable of self-restraint, a feature he oftentimes lacks. Since man did not respond, the catastrophe occurred. Today's ecological crisis has not yet developed that far and Judaism still sees man as being capable of avoiding the crash, if he sticks to the fundamental key principles of Jewish ecological thinking. These are the commandment not to waste or destroy, the Oneness of God's creation, the keeping of the Sabbat, esp. the idea of the fallow year, and the commandments regarding the ethical treatment of animals. Animals possess a special relationship towards man. The biblical story of Adam's naming of every animal reflects a wisdom on both sides: it is by heart that Adam knows the nature of the animal and the animal serves as a teacher of human behaviour. Creation is thus connected part by part. This is a reflection of the initial state of creation before eating the forbidden fruit, where everything was linked and whereby man is responsible for creation and all creatures, a status that cannot be ignored and leads back to the steward paradigm. The very material man is formed of, dust, reveals this connectedness with the soil. If man forgets this, he follows the example of Cain who was forced to wander the earth. On the positive side, the example of Noah shows a man who lives in a harmonious and productive relation with nature even under the direst of circumstances. God's symbol to Noah, the rainbow, spans a new canopy above mankind to preserve him from divine wrath. But the ark is not completed, man has the freedom to destroy creation again.

Yet this new established order is prone to pride. The story of the tower of babel reflects the human misconception of an order being solely man-made and independent from God, where man puts his faith in technology rather than in the creator. This leads to disaster. The palace of creation is on fire and man is held responsible for it.

Judaism, being a religion with a deep devotion to the land that God gave to Israel, sees a deep interconnectedness of man with the soil. Hence finding God in nature is a recurrent topic of religious story and thought. The interdependence of man and nature leads to the ideal of leading a modest lifestyle that will not harm others, including animals, and that takes a strong interest in charity, lifting up the poor and executing justice towards the other. Man is made of clay and dust, thus he is part of nature and can find peace and serenity therein. Nature is also a place where man can encounter God. The Hebrew words for soil (adama) and man (adam) stem from the same root, a definite sign of their strong

nexus. Even eating becomes a holy agency when it is done with awareness and a spiritual mind-set. The Hebrew Bible strongly refuses any waste of food or wanton water destruction.

The Bible knows two great catastrophes in the Book of Genesis: the flood and the fiery rain over Sodom. The latter was once a lush place full of blossoming vegetation which was turned into the desolate void which is known today. All this because of man's inability to take care of the other and of nature. The overall attitude of Judaism towards nature is thus a conservative one, where man is obliged to plan diligently for the future, not just rejoice in the delights of the present. This means more than just taking care for the environment. The other is also part of this environment, so taking care of nature and promoting peace and justice are deeply connected. Sustainability means both an ecological and a political level. The will for peace is signified by the act of planting a tree. Peace and sustainability are active purposes. Judaism's attitude towards the concept of environment may be a conservative one, but it is under no means passive. It forces man to act.

The Concept of Environment from a Christian Perspective

Christianity's central sacred text, the Bible, offers a primal approach to what "Environment" means in Christian terms. The central theme is the story of the creation and man's place in paradise. The tragic yet inevitable dispel from paradise is not only a catastrophe for mankind but also puts man in a special place and responsibility for the creation. Man, as he is forced to bear the burdens of birth and the need to till the soil, becomes an active co-worker in the process of creation. With participation comes responsibility. It is upon man to preserve God's creation, a creation he should not dominate, as the famous creation imperative or dominion order in Gen 1 is often interpreted, but rather maintain as a faithful steward or royal agent of the Creator God. It is here that we first encounter the famous narrative of the good shepherd who cares for his flock that was later used to describe Christ's work an earth. However, for the most time of church history the dominion order was seen as it classically sounded: as an imperative for the "crown of creation" to rule and subdue. It is only in recent history that the focus falls on the cooperation between man and creation. Man has a special place in creation and God puts him in place to give names to the created animals (for man is the only creature that knows these names), but man is

also created by the same decree and the same words as are the animals. Therefore, there is no ontological separation between creation and man.

The book of psalms praises God's creation and treats man as a king installed to rule by gentle hands. A responsible, ideal king, caring for his fellow beings, only slightly inferior to his creator, because only the latter can have access to the kingdom of animals, a world concealed to man. Creation is a dialogue between creator and the created, everything and everyone has its place therein and it is this creation where God reveals himself as a healer and saviour.

In comparison to the book shared to the greatest part by both Jews and Christians, the Hebrew Bible resp. Old Testament, the books of the New Testament offer a relatively minuscule amount of passages dealing with creation. Creation here becomes soteriological, cosmic rather than environmental. In Jesus Christ, creation happens anew and Christ himself becomes a mediator of creation. If the two scriptures are read together, they build up a framework of creational work, a lasting command to protect and preserve creation and a fair warning not to trespass against it, which will only cause harm.

Catholic tradition, Church Fathers like Augustine or Thomas Aquinas in the West and Basil of Caesarea in the East, values the goodness of creation, a creation God made perfect and in which everything has a single value and an undeniable beauty, thus leaving an impact for today's appreciation of nature. Yet this beauty surpasses mere immanent nature, it is in itself of sacramental character, a means of divine communication and a representation of God's unending wisdom and mercy. It is not surprising that medieval conceptions of nature and creation conceive the creational structure as a static, geocentric design with man as the "crown of creation" standing in the middle or on top. Others, like Francis of Assisi, focused more on the loving-kindness towards the fellow being and the overwhelming joy humans experience in embracing nature. All these approaches plus several mystical ones maintained a lasting impact and a message for today's environmental problems.

Systematically, the question of man and the environment is both a question of relationship and of responsibility. Most Christian concepts of the relation between man and nature focus on an anthropocentric view that enables more or less normative moral restrictions for other beings. Current systematical approaches, like process theology, try to establish a holistic view of the abovementioned relationship to distinguish it from a strict dualism that sees man outside of nature. Nature is creation and is thus oriented towards the creator, i. e. God. It has a value of its own.

To apply these thoughts to recent problems that long for a solution, biodiversity and sustainability can be mentioned. Man is called to maintain creation since he did not create it in the first place. He himself is a creature and thus lim-

ited and obliged to adore creation, not to exploit and destroy it. One of the most striking examples of current Catholic environmental thinking is Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The encyclical captures both ecology, economy and ecumenism. It pictures an illustrative image of our mutual "house", which is creation, and what man has done to her. The "Gospel of Creation" that Francis formulates here opts for a holistic ecology in both a practical and a spiritual sense. The cry of God's creation is linked to the cry of the poor and to injustice in an ever-colder world. The Pope, who's akin to liberation theology approaches, turns the focus from an anthropocentric to a biocentric view and places man again in a biblical context. On the practical side, *Laudato Si'* defines climate and nature as collective goods and stresses the responsibility of all people for the common house as well as a mandatory change of lifestyle. Man is again the gardener in Paradise. The encyclical is contentious and not valuated by everyone, same as the so-called Amazon-Synod, which once again proved the close bonds between spiritual renewal and political action that underlines the fraternal approach to environment and the idea of dignity and justice for all people that *Laudato Si'* focused on. This is based on a long history of long-term-thinking within the Christian churches, deriving, among others, from monastic spirituality and the idea of asceticism. Catholic teaching sees man in a superior, yet relative position with the other fields of creation. As a result, man is responsible for his fellow creatures. A close ally of Pope Francis is the "Green Patriarch" Bartholomew I., speaking for the Orthodox side. Orthodoxy distinguishes sharply between the Creator and the created and holds creation as a gift of divine love. This gift must not be wasted and man plays a crucial role in preserving the gift. He is seen not only as the crown of creation, but as creation's high priest; a creation that constantly praises its creator. Thus, the human responsibility for creation has a dimension concerning the whole cosmos, man sustains creation in a way that surpasses mere questions of consume or political questions. It is a mystical approach that however forms direct practical outcomes. As with Pope Francis, a change might not come with a change of mind but of spirit.

What unites all of Christianity's approaches to the concept of environment is the high adoration Christianity holds for creation. From this adoration stems the special dignity of man, as the image of God and as a result, the special responsibility man upholds for the created world. He is more than a mere creature; he is the co-creator and has to have a deep respect for his fellow beings. At the same time, he is not separated from nature. Man is an integral part of creation, there is no dualism that would place man outside or against nature.

The Concept of Environment in Islam

A comprehensive illustration of the main ideas of Islamic treatment of "environment" must be based on the holy scripture of Islam, the Qurʾān. Here we meet the disturbing fact that neither the Qurʾān nor the classical Arabic language has a word for "environment". The modern "biʾa" refers to "home, dwelling" which can be linked to the Greek *oikos*, which is the stem room of ecology. The image of creation as a house wherein man lives and is thus responsible for is crucial to Islamic ecological understanding. This house has been built by God for man to dwell in, like everything that was created was created for man. Since God not only creates everything, but encompasses everything, creation is not just the house man lives in, but the very face of God himself. That means man's connection to his environment and thus to creation is a direct image of man's relation to God.

In qurʾānic understanding man upholds a position as a steward, or to speak in Arabic terms, as *khalif*. Man is therefore responsible for the state of creation and held accountable on it. This is not just in individual forms but always in terms of man as a part of a social body, as a community of created beings, of believers. All within this body are subject to Islamic law, to scripture and *hadith*. But by relating on these scriptures to evaluate the accountability of man, a rift of potential authority could open up: are today's environmental problems to be solved by tradition, scripture and the ways of Islamic law or should the believer rely on modern science? Islamic tradition handles this problem by assigning that its proper topics complement each other and by thus making no real difference (and therefore creating no conflict) between religious and scientific knowledge. At least theoretically. Benefit and harm both stem from the same root, which is always God. And God's law, the *sharia*, is unsurpassable and is treated as holding the best possible solutions for whatever problem, be it current or historical. The faithful believer is in the lucky situation to be able to have both religious and scientific knowledge, whereas the unbeliever can only rely on unstable science.

Coming back to the idea of stewardship, it can be stated that, due to his position, man has no absolute freedom to do whatever he wants to creation. God, not man, is the master of creation and man might be the *khalifa* enjoying the pleasures of creation, but always remains a slave to the almighty. And to the almighty he owes allegiance. God's laws concerning the environment are bound up in the principle of "No harm or reciprocation of harm", which means that every creature must be able to take benefit from creation. It is a striking fact that the second most serious sin in Islamic thought, next to the famous ban

on associating anything else to God and far more serious than the sin against the blood, is the taking of usury which is laid out much stricter than in Jewish, let alone Christian thought. Yet corruption that flourishes economically has also an ecological imprint, for both are seen as corruption against creation. Human greed that sustains economic and ecological corruption is trespassing against God's laws who told his creature to look after his "house", i.e. creation and not to waste and pollute it.

Islamic thought imagines man as co-worker and steward in God's ongoing creation-process. Thus, it is able to share the burden of mandatory change of behaviour. God will do his part in changing an unjust reality whereas man is obliged to do his share. This happens in keeping the commandments; especially the above mentioned two most important ones. Since man is the guardian of the world and at the same instant part of the world, he must realise that every harm that is done to creation causes harm against man himself. If this fact is ignored, man acting against creation is culpable of the sin of ignoring or insulting God's rightful decision to create.

Common features and differences

If an inquiry is made about the understanding of the key concept of "environment" in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, not only does the concept of creation immediately arise, but there is also a lot in common in the religious convictions. This is due to the fact that all three religions assume that man's environment, like the whole of reality, is not the ultimate but only the penultimate, insofar as it does not carry the reason for its being in itself but was created. In its being created, it refers to something greater, God. In addition to this fundamental agreement on the religious dimensions of the environment, a closer look reveals differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in their religious attitudes towards the environment. In conclusion, the commonalities and differences are to be named in an overview.

As already mentioned, all three major revelatory religions assume that the reality of the world owes its existence to a divine cause and that, because it always originates from God, it is on the one hand fundamentally good and on the other hand characterised by a revelatory character. Because no anti-divine principle is involved in the process of creation, a dualism therefore fundamentally excluded, creation not only has nothing negative to offer, but is also characterised by beauty and orderliness, wherefore it is appreciated and religiously revered by man. Because it was originally created good, the ambivalence of the world does not come from God, but from man.

In a religious context, when we speak of the environment, we are speaking of the special relationship of human beings to divine creation. According to the theology of creation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, human beings were first created as part of creation, i.e. as God's creature to communicate with. Thus he is integrated into creation together with all other co-creatures. The relationship to creation, his bodily integration into the environment is essential for man. He can neither distance nor detach himself from it; he does not stand outside the world that surrounds him. Despite the mutual reference to the world, man differs from other creatures in that he is the one to whom this creation has been entrusted. Thus, in all three religions, man has a special position, which has sometimes led to anthropocentrism in Jewish, Christian and Islamic theology. Analogous to the task and function of the gardener, man is given responsibility for God's creation, the Garden of Eden, so that he may work and cultivate it, nurture and care for it. The relationship between man and his environment is thus described in all three monotheistic religions not, as is often misunderstood, in terms of domination and exploitation, but rather in the image of stewardship. The care for the created world is given to man as a steward; he is to live in peace and harmony with it, but this does not exclude exploration of nature and interventions in it. Based on man's creation mandate and his co-creative action, environmental protection and animal welfare, sustainability and justice etc. are fundamentally inscribed in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, although this does not mean that they have always been seen and implemented in this way.

Even if the original state of creation could not be preserved, Judaism, Christianity and Islam assume that the paradisiacal state is also the object of divine promise. The idea of paradise therefore does not only have a backward-looking meaning, but rather a salvific future is promised to creation; creation and creatures will not perish into nothingness.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam not only share the conviction that the world was well created by God and entrusted to human beings, but all three religions also share the insight that human beings have failed to live up to their responsibility for creation. The paradise narrative combined with the expulsion from paradise is found in all three monotheistic religions. The consequence is a manifold deformation of the environment, which is reflected in the ecological or socio-ecological crisis of our days, which is interpreted in all three religions as a failure of man with regard to his mission of creation. Today, the ecological crisis affects the three great religions of revelation in equal measure, and together they have a common responsibility before God with regard to the preservation of creation.

At this point, however, the differences also become clear. Although Judaism, Christianity and Islam agree on the paradise narrative, they differ in their under-

standing of the expulsion from paradise. While this is understood by Christians as the fall of man and is linked to a so-called doctrine of original sin, such an idea is foreign to both Judaism and Islam. Instead, both religions assume that there is a tendency towards both good and evil in human beings and that people are responsible for their actions in their freedom. God's instructions enable him to orientate himself towards the good, for the benefit of his own life, his fellow human beings, fellow creatures and the environment.

With regard to the idea of freedom, another difference can be identified in the fact that according to the Christian understanding, a far greater distinction is made between the Creator God and creation than in Islam. According to the Muslim view, God is always present in his creation, he sustains and causes everything. While this view is shared in principle in the Christian faith, on the Christian side not only man but also the whole of creation is granted a certain autonomy – the differentiation between God as the first cause and the laws of nature as the second causes has become classical in Western theology. This difference is also continued with regard to the future, insofar as, according to Islamic understanding, there will be a community of people among themselves in the gardens of paradise, but not, as assumed in Christianity, a community with God. The paradisiacal gardens of the Koran are not the kingdom of God or heaven, but this world in its ideal state.

If we attempt to draw a conclusion regarding the religious classification of man in his environment, knowing full well that Judaism, Christianity and Islam do not exist in this form and that genetic statements are always problematic, we can nevertheless say that with regard to the key concept of "environment", the common ground between the three great religions of revelation is greater than the differences.

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Leo Dee received a Master's in Engineering from Cambridge University, a Master's in Public Health from Hebrew University, and rabbinical ordination in Israel. A trip around the least affluent countries in Asia and South America woke him up to the tremendous poverty that exists in the world. Encountering people who owned not much more than the clothes on their back, he began to understand the huge impact of lack of food, water and power suffered by half of humanity. So, following six years as a community Rabbi in the United Kingdom, he moved to Israel where he has developed a passion for changing hearts and minds in order to encourage sustainable development – initially among the Israeli financial community, and then within the field of Responsible Investment. He served as director of programs at The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development. He lives near Jerusalem with his wife, Lucy, and their five children.

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