

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS VALUES IN DEALING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Background: Environmental crisis is one of the major problems of the contemporary world which no doubt affects the health of individuals and society. In reference to environmental crisis, religious scholars are often criticized for having lost contact with the changing conditions of contemporary life in that they have been unable to relate the resources of religion to modern situation especially in relation to protection and maintaining of a healthy environment. There are various challenges of the post industrial world and age of information explosion, with the crisis of global warming or climate change, yet the religious scholars do not seriously understand the religion when dealing with these crisis.

Assumption: It was assumed that the world of religions is the root causes of environmental problems. This assumption based on the conclusion that what people think about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny, that is: by religion.

Discussions, Responses and Results: In order to discuss and analyze religious values towards an environment, attempts will be made to discuss the following concepts and theories: Changing the attitude and belief of man towards a healthy environment; Freedom is the choice of good; Harm that threatens the essential values of creatures must be eliminated and; Role of Religion Towards a Healthy Environment. It is found that religious values play a role in the preservation of the quality of a precious environment by changing the attitude and the belief of man towards environment. Religiously, not only God has absolute sovereignty over man's life and death, but man has no dominion over his own life or non-human life. Consequently, man cannot act as owner over the environmental elements. This is one of the ultimate teachings of religion in changing the attitude and belief of man towards a healthy environment.

Key words: Environment; Crisis; Religion.

1. Background

It is accepted that environmental crisis is one of the major problems of the contemporary world which no doubt affect the life and health of individuals and society at large (Kemp David D. 2004). To cite as example, the earth is currently challenged by the crisis of

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climate change. The climate Change Conference in Copenhagen organized by United Nation, from 6 December to 18 December 2009 was held with delegations from 192 countries most notably scientists and expertise. The conference was organized with the aim to commit and establish a new global treaty on climate change which plays a vital role to reduce the carbon green house emission gases from the earth surface. The earth is globally warming by the effect of Green House Effect Gases (GHEG) known as Global Warming. We know that Global Warming is hot issue in these days, and even it is even in danger position for all living creatures, if the Carbon GHES are not reduced right now.

2. Assumption: World of religions are the root causes of environmental problems

Although it is commonly held that environmental crisis is mainly caused by scientific and technological mismanagement and misapplication of resources, Lynn White (1907– 1987), a professor of medieval History at Princeton, Stanford and, for many years, University of California, Los Angeles), in his article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”, has alleged for the first time that world of religions are the root causes of environmental problems. In this article, she argues that what people think about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny, that is: by religion. (Lynn White, 1967).

It is clear from the foregoing opinion that, according to White, what individuals and communities do to their environment depends upon how they see themselves in relation to nature. Thus, the current environmental crisis is largely a result of man’s view of life and his attitude towards nature, both of which have roots in his culture and religion. The dualistic nature of monotheistic religions has caused the separation of human beings from the rest of nature and thereby paved a way for the beginning of environmental crisis. Arguing on similar lines, Arnold Toynbee, a famous historian writes that:

Some of the major maladies of the present day world—for instance the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature’s irreplaceable treasures and the pollution of those of them that man has not already devoured—can be traced back in the last analysis to a religious cause and that this cause is the rise of monotheism (Arnold Toynbee, 1972).

3. Discussions, Responses and Results

3.1 Role of Islamic Religious Values in Changing the attitude and belief of man towards a healthy environment

Attempts have been made to solve environmental crisis by changing the existing institutional mechanisms through laws and public policy and not seriously by changing

the attitudes and the beliefs of man towards environment. Many religious scholars have attempted to provide solutions to environmental crisis by looking at the attitude and beliefs of man towards environment. They have observed that protecting the environment from corruption cannot be practiced without constantly striving to improve every aspect of man towards perfection as a man of *Adab*. A man of *Adab* (*insan adabi*) is: "the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God who understands and fulfills his obligations to himself and others in his society with justice; who constantly strives to improve every aspect of himself towards perfection as a man of *Adab*" (W.M.N Wan Daud, 1998; S.M.N. Al-Attas, 2001; S.M.N Al-Attas, 1980).

As man of *Adab*, he has been granted stewardship to manage the earth in accordance with the purposes intended by his Creator; to utilize it for his own benefit and the benefit of other created beings, and for the fulfillment of his interests and theirs. He must fulfill that trust which he accepted when he bore witness to God's Lordship in the pre-eternal covenant (*al-mithaq*) to which the *Qur'an* refers in the famous verse, "Am I not your Lord? Thy say: ye, we bear witness." Surah al-'Araf (7): 172).

Environment is God's Trust (*Amanah*) to man. Several verses of the *Qur'an* mention:

We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it-He was indeed unjust and foolish. (Surah Al-Ahzab (33): 72).

O ye that believe! betray not the trust of Allah and the messenger, nor misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you. And know ye that your possessions and your progeny are but a trial; and that it is Allah with whom lies your reward. (Surah Al-Anfal (8): 27-28).

3.2 Freedom in Islam is the choice of good

Religiously speaking, man has a freedom to do and develop the environment. But, the freedom and the exercise of human power on earth is allowed only on condition that it is according to God's laws. That is why while Islamic law is tolerant and grants man freedom of action and knowledge, he must fulfill all his individual and social obligations. The concept of freedom in Islam -- as reflected from the term *al-Ikhtiyar* -- is the choice of good. This is subject to the principle of not causing harm. In relation to this, S.M.N. al-Attas, in many places, stresses that:

We maintain that *ikhtiyar* does not simply mean 'choice'. The word *khayr*, meaning 'good' which is bound in meaning with *ikhtiyar* and being derived from the same root, determines that the choice meant is towards what is

good. This is most important when aligned to the philosophical question of freedom. A so-called 'choice' towards what is bad is therefore not a choice. Since we affirm that freedom is to act our real and true nature demands, only the exercise of that choice which is good can properly be called a 'free choice'. A choice for better is an exercise of freedom. It presupposes knowledge of good and evil. A 'choice' for the worse is not a choice, as it is based upon ignorance and on the instigation of the soul that inclines towards the blameworthy aspects of the animal powers. (S.M.N Al-Attas, 1993a).

3.3 Harm that threatens the essential values of creatures must be eliminated

It must be known that under Islamic law, harm, injury, wrong or crime shouldn't be committed against any creature. The legal maxim like "*la darar wa la dirar fi al-Islam* (no injury should be imposed nor an injury to be inflicted as a penalty for another injury)" and "*harm must be eliminated (al-darar yuzal)*" indicate that harm that threatens the essential values of creatures must be eliminated as a matter of priority. This is regardless of the nature of such a creature, whether human, animal or otherwise. When there is an injustice or crime against another creature, one not only has to try to repair the damage by compensation to the victim of one's violation of the right which had been taken away from him, but he also has to beg for the forgiveness of God. On the basis of these rules, activities against animals and the natural environment are crimes against one's immediate victim, and also a crime against God, since the criminal conduct in question constitutes a violation of Divine prescriptions. In connection with this, the jurists maintain that conservation of environment is one of the rights of God to which man is responsible. Man would be liable to reckoning and punishment if he behaves in a manner not acceptable to the Lord. This is because the consequence of misusing the natural environment is not only an injustice committed to man himself and his generation but also an injustice committed against future generations which are entitled to benefit from the natural environment.

3.4 Role of Religion Towards a Healthy Environment

Beside the mentioned role of religion, its role in preserving a healthy environment can be understood from the Quran: *Surah al-Tariq* (86), verse 11, *Wa al-Sama' Dhati al-Raj'*: *By the Firmament which giveth the returning rain.* S.M.N. Al-Attas, a competent in several academic areas such as theology, philosophy and metaphysics, history, and literature, and has contributed original and authoritative works of significance particularly in the fields of Islamic and Malay civilizations, found that word *din* (religion) is returning rain which brings benefit to the earth by bringing life to it and by causing good growth which is beneficial to life. As rain gives life to the earth which would otherwise be dead, so does *din* (religion) gives life to man, without which man would be dead. (S.M.N. Al-

Attas, 1993b). For this reason, soil, which is one of the components of the earth, has been entrusted to man and he must take care of it by preserving and protecting it since it supports plant and animal' life. The soil begets plants, which are the origin of the main food resources consumed by both man and animals. The Quran says:

A sign for them is the earth that is dead. We do give it life, and produce grain therefrom, of which ye do eat; and We produce therein orchards with date palms and vines, and we cause springs to gush forth therein: that they may enjoy the fruits of this (artistry): it was not their hands that made this: will they not then give thanks? (Surah Yasin (36): 33-35).

4. Conclusion

The religion may play a role in the preservation of the quality of a precious environment by changing the attitude and the belief of man towards environment. Religiously, not only God has absolute sovereignty over man's life and death, but man has no dominion over his own life or non-human life. Consequently, man cannot act as owner over the environmental elements. This is one of the ultimate teachings of religion in changing the attitude and belief of man towards a healthy environment.

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