

Theme 3: The Beginning and the End: Theological Insights

Presentation: Stewardship of Water

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I start my speech in the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Peace and blessings be on Prophet Muhammad, on his forefather Abraham, on his two brothers Moses and Jesus and on all the prophets and messengers of God, and on those who follow in their footsteps to the Day of Judgment.

Your Eminences, Graces, Scholars, Brothers and Sisters, I greet you with the greeting of Islam; peace be on you all. I would like to thank His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Dr Romano Prodi and the organizers of this Symposium for providing me the opportunity to address you.

I am the director of Abu our Islamic Foundation. I am here to represent my father, the Grand Mufti of Syria, whose frail health prevents him from attending in person.

Today mankind finds himself in a rough sea of corruption, greed and oppression, and indulges in mutual rivalry to produce weapons of mass destruction. Only faith in God and adherence to His teachings provide a lifeboat that allows us, just like the occupants of Noah's Ark, to seek a life free of such immorality. Noah's words are reported in the Quran:

I said: 'Ask Forgiveness from your Lord, for He is Oft-forgiving; He will send rain to you in abundance, give you increase in wealth and offspring, and bestow on you gardens and bestow on you rivers of flowing water.' (Noah, 10-13)

Ever since the time of Adam water has been central to man's interests. This great scientific meeting today concerns water, which has become a very serious issue. Its purpose is to address ways of protecting water from unwise and unfair use and from pollution, and preserving the environment with all its variety of life forms. The Adriatic is an ecological area that typifies the iniquitous effects that have struck our planet. Much depends on our meeting from which future projects and programmers should spring to prevent further deterioration and destruction.

Many institutions today have been oblivious to the strong link between man and his environment. They believe solely in the importance of man's life without paying heed to the interrelationship between mankind, animal life and plant life inasmuch as they are inseparable. God says in the Quran:

We have made from water every living thing. (Prophets, 30)

Even the very start of life evolves from water, as the Quran says:

It is He Who has created man from water, then He has established relationships of lineage and marriage, for thy Lord has power [over all things]. (The Criterion, 54)

Water is mentioned 59 times in Quranic verses. On these occasions God draws our attention to the best uses for water and its importance for sustaining life and producing everything that is bounteous and beautiful. For example, He says:

It is He Who sends down rain from the skies; with it We produce vegetation of all kinds. From some We produce green drops, out of which We produced grain, heaped up. Out of the date palm and its sheaths come clusters of dates hanging low and near, and gardens of grapes, olives and pomegranates, each similar [in kind] yet different [in variety]. When they begin to bear fruit, feast your eyes on the fruit and their ripeness. Behold! In these things there are signs for people who believe. (The Cattle, 99)

It may be useful at the symposium to remind mankind that they must return to pure faith in God, Whose will it is that they be happy on this planet and in the hereafter. He had ordained a path and programme for them so that those who seek happiness, security and prosperity may achieve their goal and purpose.

However, faith is not complete without purity. Islam prescribes water as a means of purification, for worship is rendered null and void unless one's body, clothes and surroundings are fully purified. Although water is necessary for this purification we should not squander it but should use it in a measure that meets the need. While God reminds mankind of His favours in the Quran:

And He caused rain to descend on you from heaven, to clean you therewith. (The Spoils, 11)

He also says:

Eat and drink, but waste not be excess for God loves not the wasters. (The Heights, 31)

Thus, God commands mankind not just to preserve water but also to use it wisely. In ancient times, Saba in the Yeman was the site of a dam, which allowed the region to prosper and which all the neighbouring tribes envied. God comments in the Quran:

There was for Saba, aforetime, a sign in their homeland two Gardens to the right and to the left. 'Eat of the sustenance [provided] by your Lord, and be grateful to Him; a territory fair and happy, and a Lord Oft-Forgiving.' (Saba, 15)

God wants us to go further, by using the resources of this planet fairly for the benefit of all mankind. So isn't it time that the more advanced countries assist, in action and spirit, those deprived of resources, including water, in executing what Prophet Muhammad says in his enlightened message?

He who has an excess of water must give it to he who has no water. He who has an excess of food must give it to he who has no

food. He who has an excess of means of transport must give it to he who has none.

Thus God commends us to use water carefully, wisely and fairly.

On his first day in his new city to which he had migrated from Mecca, Muhammad, the messenger of God, worked on caring for water because it is the foundation for everything in life. He ordered that river and torrent beds, and also wells, should always be kept clean and free of human waste and filth.. He made people partners in water, forbidding them from monopolizing it and depriving others of it.

Modern civilization is wholly responsible for the damage to which life on earth has been exposed. Despite its accomplishments in all fields of science, it has disregarded the question of balance, and the perfect integration, between one man and another as well as between man and the creatures he lives with in his environment. Scientists well know that any change in one part of the equation causes a change in the other, as exemplified by the ecological disasters that have necessitated this Symposium. Thus, we need to discuss the duties we must shoulder to regain the balance to life on this planet.

Some entrepreneurs have been so involved in their own grand projects that they have overlooked the serious risks that their unjust investments have caused to life in general. The emissions and gases that issue from factory chimneys have polluted the air that we breathe. They have mixed with the water vapour in the atmosphere, which has fallen as acid rain, destroying forests and making arable land useless. Many plants and marine animals have come close to extinction because of industrial waste pouring into rivers and seas.

Dear colleagues and scientists, I now want to address the central issue. We all know that water is indispensable to life, and without it we would quickly perish. However, should we not ponder over what sustains and illuminates our spirits? Water is essential for physical growth and we have learned to harness it for our external wellbeing and development. Yet, what attention have we given to our spiritual growth? Unless mankind cares for his spiritual side, he constricts his situation in life and his desires will never be controlled. It is only through the teachings of God, which He imparted to us through His prophets and messengers, that we can save our world. Spiritual growth comes through faith in God, moral education and refined wisdom, which combine to provide a comprehensive vision, transcending individual interests and working for the general welfare of life in all its forms. Once our souls have been purified and spiritually nourished we become eligible for the stewardship of this planet. A tradition of Prophet Muhammad says:

Each one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock – the ruler for his subjects, the man for his family, and the wife for the family home. So verily you are all shepherds and each is responsible for his flock.

Mankind through the ages has always been favoured with the Divine Providence of God, Who sent him messengers and prophets. They conveyed the Divine Guidance, which nourishes the spirit and urges man to accept his responsibilities. God has put

mankind on the highest level among all creatures; He has honoured him and made everything subservient to him. God says in the Quran:

We have honoured the children of Adam and provided them with transport on land and sea. (The Night Journey, 70)

He also says:

It is He Who has made the ships subject to you, that you may sail through the sea by His command, and the rivers [also] has He made subject to you. (Abraham, 32)

Dear scholars and scientists, dear brothers, who truly work towards preserving the ecology of our planet, allow me to liken you to those who believed in the Prophet of God, Noah, peace be upon him. They resisted corruption and greed by taking refuge with Noah on the Ark, to preserve life in kind and quality. They were the true supporters of life on this earth. God says in the Quran, addressing mankind:

We, when the water [of Noah's flood] overflowed beyond its limits, carried you [mankind] in the floating ark that We might make it a message unto you, and that ears that retain memory should bear its [lessons] in remembrance. (The Certain Reality, 11-12)

This meeting, and your efforts to rescue humanity and the life of the planet from their predicament, makes your work an offering to God and to Noah, and to those who believed in Him. It is like the allegiance of children to their parents. Those who believe in the teachings of God and act upon them according to the Divine Plan have the right to be on board this lifeboat to be saved from the flood. Man's safety is in his own hands. We should not be shackled by falsehood, oppression or corruption, otherwise we will be drowned in them. It is God's light that nourishes our spirits and makes life abound with His gifts. Only under His guidance can we carry out our most serious work for today and tomorrow.

Dear colleagues, I value your work and pray to God the Almighty that He may help you make your voyage successful. So that when you return to the Adriatic you will find its marine life restored. Future generations will remember you and glorify God for your work. He will reward you profusely. May our symposium see your deliberations and work come to fruition and be a model for others to follow all over the world.

We praise God and thank Him.

Peace and blessings and the Mercy of God be with you and on you.