

## Foreword

Concern for the environment is a central tenet of Islam, yet in contemporary debates over environmental issues there has been virtually no reference made to Islamic teaching. The work by Mawil Izzi Dien should help remedy this situation as he sets out in a very clear and systematic fashion the Islamic view of the subject.

Dr Izzi Dien explain how Islamic theology has implications for environmental management. He examines in detail the position of the Quran, sunna and other sources of Islamic law on environmental issues. He also considers the relevance of Islamic economic justice for environmental economics and questions of environmental protection and public interest. This cross-disciplinary approach involving law, economics and theology provides important insight for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Dr Izzi Dien breaks new ground on the environmental debate and this book must be considered a very welcome addition to environmental literature.

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## Preface

The idea of writing a book on the green environment and Islam has been in my mind for many years. In 1983 I was commissioned by the IUCN<sup>1</sup> and MEPA<sup>2</sup> with four other Islamicist colleagues to write a basic paper on Islam and the natural environment. We were asked to write in a format that would appeal mainly to the Muslim public and traditional scholars. We were then told that the paper might be used to provide grounds for Islamic legislation on the environment. Until today such legislation has not materialised. However the reception of the book was very encouraging. The demand for it from all over the world caused the first edition to go quickly out of print, although more than 85,000 copies were produced in Arabic, English and French. Since then it has been republished twice and again quickly went out of print.<sup>3</sup>

After that basic paper, I became interested in understanding the role that Islam could play in the development of the environment. As one of the world's largest and youngest faiths, Islam could be a staunch force in helping improve people's awareness and respect for the environment. In order to combine my interest in the environment with my academic work I decided to start teaching a course on Religion and the Environment at the University of Wales, Lampeter. The process of researching the course aided me immensely in appreciating the diversity of environmental areas that need to be covered.

I started attending environmental conferences and writing papers on the subject, which made me even more convinced that there was a need for a book on the subject. Today, the issue of conservation within the Muslim world is seen as a topical and important issue. Yet, still there is no serious volume that addresses the central questions posed by environmental problems. Most of the material available within the Muslim world came as a reaction to the consumer goods imported from outside. Often it is a literal translation from Western, American, or even Japanese cultures which have had to deal with or legislate on the environment as their process of industrialisation proceeded. Most of the material reflects regional experience which is detached from the indigenous Islamic culture. There is a need to understand the Islamic view of the environment as an independent voice that contributes to the collective world efforts for conservation.

### *Points of History<sup>4</sup>*

During the third to sixth centuries the eastern Roman and the Persian Sassanian Empires were in continuous conflict for the domination of Syria, Egypt and Asia Minor. With the birth of Muhammad in 571 came a new era of history and a new religion in Arabia that inherited the power and legacy of both civilisations. On the grounds of submitting to God alone and nothing but God, Islam was able to establish a civilisation that expanded much further than its birthplace of Arabia. From that initial phase up to modern times the basic Islamic beliefs have remained unchanged. These beliefs are contained in the Islamic creed or *shahada*: 'I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah', which is a constituent part of the call for prayer, *adhan*, heard five times a day over the entire Islamic world.

Islam embodies a theo-secular law, the Shari'a, which control the entire life of a Muslim. The Shari'a includes the observances known as the 'Five Pillars of the Faith' which bind all adult believers. The observances include the *shahada* or profession of faith; *salat* or the practice of worship five times a day while facing towards the holy city of Makkah; *zakah* or obligatory almsgiving; *sawm* or fasting from dawn to sunset throughout Ramadan (the ninth month of the year, which varies with the lunar calendar); and *hajj* or pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in a lifetime.

After the death of Muhammad, the Orthodox Caliphs or successors of the Prophet succeeded in pushing the Islamic boundaries further. By the eighth century CE Islam had expanded under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties to reach Spain, Sind and Constantinople. Damascus and Cairo had fallen to Islam. Having invaded southern France and Italy, there seemed nothing to prevent Islam from reaching the rest of the European world. But Islam was seen as an enemy of Christianity by European countries during the Crusades, and Christian states united against a Muslim nation as late as the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Although driven from Europe, Islam remained established in North Africa and the Middle East.

While military power stopped at the gates of Europe, Islamic civilisation entered through the keyholes of scientific knowledge, and continued an interchange with European culture and civilisation until the eighteenth century. There is extensive historical evidence of this interchange, including medical treatises by Avicenna, al-Razi and other scholars whose work is still being acknowledged in European universities.

By the nineteenth century the historical pendulum was already moving in the opposite direction. European powers took control of many territories that had previously come under Muslim rule. Britain took Indonesia in 1811, although it was given to the Dutch in 1816. Malaya became a

preserve of the British after a treaty was concluded with the Dutch in 1824. Seven years later French forces occupied Algeria, ending 313 years of Turkish rule. In 1839 British forces occupied Aden and in 1857 the British captured Delhi, ending 1,000 years of Muslim rule. In 1876, Britain purchased shares in the Suez Canal, an involvement that culminated in the military occupation of Egypt in 1882. At almost the same time, Turkey handed Cyprus to Britain and, shortly after, with the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, Turkey lost most of its European territory.

During the twentieth century European expansion continued with French forces occupying Morocco. With the *de facto* collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) abolished the Turkish Sultanate in 1922 and the Caliphate in 1924. In Persia, Reza Shah established the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925. The state's name was changed to Iran in 1935. The dynasty lasted until 1979 when the Shah's son left Iran following the return from exile of Ayatollah Khomeini. After the end of British rule in India in 1947, Pakistan was created in areas of Muslim majority.

In recent years Islamic regimes have been established in Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan. Islam is a major force throughout the Arab world and has been a focus for nationalism in the Central Asian Republics. It is also a significant factor in Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia. Islam represents one of the major cultural forces in the contemporary world. On an issue such as the environment and its conservation it is undoubtedly crucial to understand the Islamic viewpoint in order to deliver an effective policy that is not detached from people's convictions and sentiments.

Islam as a faith and as a way of life is increasingly being appreciated as an up-and-coming religion in a contemporary pluralist society. While attending the 1998 conference of the British Association for the Study of Religion in Lampeter, I overheard the remark that 'Islam is a fashionable religion and it is fashionable today to be a Muslim'. Perhaps my book will be worth the effort if it is able to introduce the view of a fashionable religion to support the environmental argument at a time when the environment seems to be losing some of the grounds already won. The environmental momentum, which was started in the 1970s and continued into the 1980s, is now generally considered as a form of exaggerated doom and gloom. The case for the environment is being pushed under the thick carpet of politics and so-called economic constraints. The interest in conserving nature is currently following an arithmetic progression pattern, while the threat to its destruction is growing in an alarming geometric pattern. Many of the environmental issues now seem to be more rooted in nostalgia than in active conscience. Often decisions reached in meetings and conferences are never fully enacted. The fact that the

environmental case has no real defender seems to be one of the main causes that led to this situation. Neither politics nor contemporary economics can help the environment because of their predatory nature. The only hope for the environment lies in formulating its own independent ideology. In order to work this ideology needs the support of people's minds and sentiment. By presenting the Islamic view on the environment it is hoped that a new possibility for the environment will be opened which can help in making the issue one of belief and integral value as well as sentiment.

### *Chapters of the Book*

This book contains an introduction, seven core chapters, and a short concluding chapter. In the first chapter Islam is introduced as a world religion through the Smartian religious 'dimensions'. In order to further link the chapter with the concept of environment, the examples were selected to reflect an environmental application for the concepts discussed. Also a quick introduction is provided to the human environmentalists' experience when compared to the 'religious experience of humankind'.

Chapter 2 focuses on the components/aspects of environment as seen by Islam. This is done as a way of setting the working ground on which the environment can be explored. The components were selected according to the classical environmental texts which often referred to the elements of the environment as being water, earth, air, humans and animals. These elements represent the actual body of the environment. They need to be understood in the Islamic context both as tangible objects and as bearers of intrinsic values.

Chapter 3 presents the Islamic theological view of the environment. The nature of the unseen and the seen as creatures of God is most important in understanding the Islamic environmental doctrine. It is a theology which is based on the assertion that the entire cosmos is united by the oneness of the Creator, *tawhid*. Unlike the chaotic human perception of their surroundings, the *tawhidic* perception provides a focused Divine perception. Human beings are responsible trustees who have no spontaneous rights except those that have been given by God.

In Chapter 4 Islamic ethics are examined in the light of current ethical debates. Among the questions discussed are: 'Why conservation?' and whether or not environmental ethics are about conservation or existence. Also the relationship between humankind and the environment is explored. While addressing these questions, an Islamic environmental theory is suggested. This is termed 'submission to the Divine preference theory' in which ethical preferences are determined according to the will of the

Creator. The suffering of animals, the right of other creatures to exist, and the notion of maximum satisfaction, are all discussed here. Finally the role of the *hisba* system is highlighted as a practical form of Islamic ethics that can be utilised in the service of the environment.

Chapter 5 discusses the legal foundation that can be used to protect the environment. In Islam, the effectiveness of the law is based not only on the power of its sanctions, but also on individuals' commitment to it. The sources of the law including the Quran, *Sunna* and other sources are examined and compared with one another. The universe as a source of legal knowledge for the environment is discussed here in the light of the Quran, which frequently draws the attention of humans to their surroundings, inviting them to establish their own conclusions about who has created this world, and as a consequence who is worthy of sovereignty. Similar conclusions can be drawn from other sources which help to explain the laws that govern the cosmos, such as the law of causation, good and evil, and the principle of analogy.

Chapter 6 looks into the relationship between ecology and economics. In Islam ecology and economics are two systems both of which are part of the Divine cosmic order. The role of human beings is purely to discover these systems for the betterment of life in all its forms. In this chapter we examine the basic principles of Islamic economics such as balancing the use of resources, generation equity, justice and beneficence. We also discuss optimising resources on the basis of charitable planning for the elements of nature and production.

Chapter 7 covers the question of public interest, which is fundamental in any environmental debate. Decision makers quite often justify environmental damage on the grounds of public interest, whether ethical, economic, or even human. This chapter focuses on public interest, trying to define it according to Islamic sources, presenting a paradigm for future legislation as seen through public interest. Finally, the chapter presents a discussion concerning the conservation of endangered species, citing the views of past and present scholars.

Chapter 8 provides a blueprint for an Islamic legislation for the environment which no Muslim government has yet attempted. Islamic ideals and principles are integrated with two major environmental documents selected to reflect the international view on conservation. The documents selected are the World Charter for Nature (WCN) and the Rio Agenda 21. The Islamic document compared with them is the Islamic Principles for the Conservation of the Natural Environment (IPCNE). It is hoped that these observations will help in developing active environmental awareness and legislation not only in the Muslim countries but also in other areas where the large human family resides.

Chapter 9 provides a concluding summary of the Islamic principles on the environment as discussed in this book.