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Islam and environmental conservation

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Summary

Over thirty years ago a debate began as to whether religion in general, or the Judaeo-Christian faith in particular, were in some sense responsible for the present environmental predicament. Islam, as a major world religion which shares the same Abrahamic roots as the Judaeo-Christian tradition, has been largely absent from this debate. Most conservationists now believe that it is essential that there be comprehensive discussion not only of environmental policies, but also of the ethics underlying environmental protection. This paper looks at the importance of the environment in the main sources of Islamic instruction, namely the Koran and Prophet's *Hadiths* (teachings). These texts turn out to be on the side of conservation, the emphasis being on respect for creation, the protection of the natural order and avoidance of all wasteful activities which may cause injury to the environment. These positions are contrasted with views expressed by political Islam, which has become influential in a large part of the Muslim world and rejects the conservation measures advocated by Western writers.

Keywords: Islam, political Islam, environmental conservation

Introduction

According to White (1967), the roots of the human ecological crisis can be traced to the rise of Christianity, which separated humankind from nature and then directed the former to a position of supremacy over the latter. With the help of the scientific and technological revolutions that have taken place during the last few centuries humankind has been able to pursue a ruthlessly effective policy of exploitation of natural resources which has led to environmental crises. Another factor that enhanced the exploitative zeal was the triumph of Christianity over paganism, which considered humankind to be part of nature. In White's (1967) analysis, the destruction of pre-Christian European faith was the greatest psychic revolution in the history of human culture and had drastic consequences. Toynbee (1972) argued that the remedy to the environmental predicament lies in reverting from the *Weltanschauung* of monotheism to the *Weltanschauung* of pantheism, which is older than Christianity and once was universal. In this spirit, McHarg (1977) referred to the Bible as an environmentally-unfriendly text which has encouraged a strong utilitarian and ultimately destructive attitude towards nature (see also Passmore 1975).

The response of Christian scholars to these charges was robust. They said that the much-quoted expression in the Old Testament that 'Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth' had been misunderstood by White and his followers (Barr 1972; Attfield 1983; Thomas 1984; Gore 1992; Ferguson & Roach 1993; Livingstone 1994). The Biblical word 'dominion' is not a strong usage as it was used to refer to ruling in general, in particular peaceful ruling; in fact misuse of the natural order created by the Almighty is a sinful activity (Ferguson & Roach 1994). God is a wise conservationist and economist and thus humans in general have been made in the image of God and must thus act as caretakers of God's creation. Indeed, in John Calvin's order, it was emphasized that 'let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by its negligence but let him endeavour to hand it down to posterity as he receives it and let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses' (Livingstone 1994).

It may be true that Christianity failed in the past to consider the environment with sufficient seriousness and indeed, in so far as the Church has been complicit in practices resulting in ecological destruction, it must accept a share of the blame for environmental degradation (Livingstone 1994). There is a need for Judaeo-Christian and other faiths to educate believers to be respectful towards the environment, although Kay (1989) asserted that any environmentalist tones that exist in the Bible must be understood in their own context and this is different from that of current concerns. Christianity's ultimate purpose in life is the salvation of souls which must not be undermined by current environmental issues (Kay 1989).

The debate about religious roots of environmental wrongdoing is continuing in many parts of the world. Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the New Rome, which is the spiritual centre of world Orthodox Christianity, has been conducting regular seminars on religion and the environment since the early 1990s (Phanar Patriarchate 1992; Halki Summer School 1994, 1995, 1999). It is emphasized in these gatherings that Christianity has never implied recklessness towards the environment, and the protection of the environment is a moral duty for all (Phanar Patriarchate 1992). A society oriented towards meeting artificial needs ultimately saps the moral fibre of its members,

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paving the way not only for excessive consumption of the world's limited resources, but also to the diminution of human life (Halki Summer School 1994). The Christian ethos is in sharp contrast to this; it is one of simplicity, of sharing, assuring that all have enough to meet their basic needs including spiritual and cultural needs; attention is focused on the quality of life, not on accumulation of goods (Halki Summer School 1994). While the problems are vast and require structural change, the Christian Church still remains responsible for doing what it can to assure that all have the opportunity to live in the dignity that is their due (Halki Summer School 1995). This can entail challenging, amongst others, production and distribution patterns in a concerted effort to assure greater justice, more care for the environment, and greater respect for the order that exists in God's creation (HRH Prince Phillip 1992).

It has also been argued that the current Catholic viewpoint about humankind's relationship with the environment is that it must be in the context of love. Pope John Paul (1994) urged that the faithful need to cross 'a threshold of hope' to work for 'a civilization of love'. In this context, environmental philosophies not rooted in love will not go far enough (Schreider 1997).

Looking ahead into the Third Christian Millennium, Polunin (1999) emphasized that one of the most powerful messages of Christianity is that of humility, which is a worthy candidate for any environmental message for the future. Jesus lived humbly and constantly taught humility (Holy Bible; Philippians 2:6–7 and Romans 1: 20–22). This does not mean an impediment towards achieving basic living standards for the world's poor. Christianity has always recognized that people must have enough to eat, clothe and house themselves; the natural functions of production and distribution are necessary to meet those demands. However, market forces geared towards excessive and conspicuous consumption are not only out of step with the Christian ethos, but are also leading to environmental destruction. More than 150 years ago renowned English philosopher and economist Mill (1848) strongly argued in favour of cutting the levels of excessive consumption in rich countries by abandoning the idea of relentless economic growth. According to him, economic growth will neither solve human problems nor improve future conditions, but will impoverish the environment which is the foundation of human well-being. Economic growth is essential only for the developing nations whereas in the developed nations the real issue is the distribution of income, not its growth (Mill 1848).

Islam, as a major world religion appears to have been under-represented in such environmental debates. This may be partly due to the lack of interest of Muslims in ecological issues and partly to other factors. Foltz (1998) contends that in the Muslim world environmental problems, by and large, are seen as an end-product of a social injustice that is prevalent throughout the world. One viewpoint which has been emphasized by some Muslim writers is that the existence of usury-based banking systems, rewarding the few at the expense of the masses, leads to environmental destruction. This is because it encourages the former towards conspicuous and wasteful consumption and the latter towards reckless behaviour out of desperation. Environmental problems are symptoms of the usury-driven global financial structure which should be reformed. According to political Islam current ecological problems are neither, due to overpopulation nor Biblical misunderstanding, but due to Western secular economic principles that have been driving the world economy for a long period of time (Enis 1994; Bulac 1995). Having concluded in this way, a good deal of Islamic energy has been spent on issues such as Islam and science, Islamic economics, law, politics and architecture amongst which environmentalism has not received much attention (Foltz 1998). Even when environmental issues have been discussed by Muslim scholars, the discussion often had a reappropriation of anti-rationalist, anti-modernist, anti-progressive, in short, anti-Western, orientation (Erdur 1997). To put it differently, the current Islamic environmental concern is often more related to the West than to the environment itself.

Instead of taking the route paved by political Islam, the purpose of this paper is to elucidate the significance of 'the environment' in Muslim faith by using the Koran and *Hadiths* (teachings of the Prophet), which are the main sources of instruction in that faith.

The Koran and the environment

Muslim faith commands influence to varying degrees on 18% of the world's population and notionally covers a very large area where some of the greatest environmental problems exist. Destruction of the Aral Sea in Central Asia, desertification in Sub-Saharan Africa, hasty depletion of oil deposits in the Middle East, deforestation and consequently destruction of biodiversity in Indonesia and Malaysia, are some well-publicized resource and environmental problems of the Muslim world.

Muslim faith shares the same Abrahamic religious roots as Judaeo-Christian doctrine, in which humans are created by the single omnipotent God who has given them everything that they need. The Koran (1909) contains 114 titled *surahs* which are the real divisions in the text. The translation 'chapter' is sometimes used for divisions, but this is not the exact equivalent. The most respected view is that surah derives from the Hebrew word *shurah*, which means a row of bricks in a wall (Bell & Watt 1970). In a surah entitled the Believers it is revealed to the faithful that 'Now of fine clay have we created man; then we placed him, a moist germ, in a safe abode; then made we the moist germ a clot of blood; then made the clotted blood into a piece of flesh; then made the piece of flesh into bones; and we clothed the bones with flesh; then brought forth man of yet another make. Blessed therefore be God, the most excellent Makers; then after this ye shall surely die; then shall you be woken up on the day of resurrection. And we have created over you seven heavens

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and we are not careless of the creation. And we send down water from the Heaven in its due degree, and we cause it to settle on earth; and we have power for its withdrawal; and by it we cause gardens of palm trees, and vineyards to spring forth for you, in which ye have plenteous fruits; and whereof ye eat; and the tree that grows on Mount Sinai; which yieldeth oil and juice for those you eat' (Koran 1909, The Believers, verses 10–20).

The Koran also reveals that 'And the cattle for you hath He created them; in them ye have warm garments and gainful uses; and of them ye eat: And they beseem you well when ye fetch them home and when ye drive them forth to pasture: And they carry your burdens to lands which ye could not else reach but with travail of soul: Truly your Lord is full of goodness, and merciful: And He hath given you horses, mules, and asses, that ye may ride them, and for your ornament: and things of which ye have no knowledge hath he created' (Koran 1909, The Bee, verses 4–8). Furthermore, God has created everything in great variety including humankind. 'And amongst his signs are the creation of the Heavens and of the Earth, and your variety of tongues and colour; herein truly are signs for all men' (Koran 1909, The Greeks, verse 22).

But Man is the most favoured species of God and should not abuse his position as Islam limits his right to rule over nature only by the fact that nature is entrusted to him (Guillaume 1954; Rahman 1980). In Islam, Man, just like in Judaeo-Christian doctrine, is the most honorable of all creatures and the Caliph of God or 'vice-regent' on earth who shall rule on God's behalf (Canan 1995; Izzi-Dien 2000). All that is on earth and in the sky is created for him and given to him to rule by the Almighty. Unwastefulness towards nature is a great virtue just like modesty and justness and God wants him to live a virtuous life (Cragg 1971). In this respect, the faithful must keep their surroundings clean, must not waste the gifts of God and must be gentle and just towards all living things, insects and animals alike (Canan 1995).

Man's position in the cosmic system created by God is unique in rights as well as in responsibilities. Humans alone have a propensity to violate God's laws because, unlike other creatures, they have sufficient power and freedom of choice. This freedom, though contained within the wider field of God's omnipotence and omniscience, is implied in the doctrine of the Day of Judgement, when all men and women will be answerable for their actions towards all living things as well as towards fellow human beings (Canan 1995).

Ruthven (1991) contended that in Islamic philosophy all living things submit to their creator. In effect, Islam in its original meaning is an act of existential choice whereby a being chooses to place its destiny in the hands of God and submits to God's governance. 'Have they not seen how everything which God hath created turned its shadow right and left, prostrating itself before God in all abasement? And all in the Heavens and all on the Earth, each thing that moveth, and the very angels, prostrate them in adoration before God, and are free from pride; They fear their Lord who is above them, and do what they are bidden' (Koran 1909, The Bee, verses 50–52).

When White (1967) charged mainstream Judaeo-Christian belief as being responsible for our environmental ills, he did not deny the existence of other viewpoints within Christianity. For example, St Francis of Assisi, regarded as the patron saint of environmentalism, was more reverential to creation (White 1967). St Francis was committed to a life of simplicity, or even poverty and repentance, who treated all living things as close kin, and emphasized the necessity of communion with creation. A somewhat similar outlook exists in Islam, where it is explained that other creatures worship God. For example, 'Hast thou not seen how all in the Heavens and on the Earth uttereth the praise of God? The very birds as they spread their wings? Every creature knoweth its prayer and its praise! And God knoweth what they do' (Koran 1909, The Light, verse 41). Elsewhere it is said that 'All beings in the Heaven and on the Earth are His; and they who are in his presence disdain not his service, neither are they wearied: They praise Him night and day: they rest not' (Koran 1909, The Prophets, verses 19–20). That is, Man is not unique in worship, although he worships uniquely in his way in awareness of reason, emotion, and discipline.

Awareness and worship of God by all species including humans have not been a contentious issue in Islam, but this does not mean that all species should be given human status. This, according to most Muslims and Christians, would come close to heresy. What this would mean is that all creatures have the same origin and deserve respect. St Francis of Assisi does not stand alone in Christian literature. A number of other saints expressed similar views, amongst whom St Benedict, a sixth-century priest, believed that all animals should be treated with great kindness as they are of the same origin as ourselves (Livingstone 1994). Islam broadens this view to include all living things, which is in line with the holistic environmental ethics that exist amongst some contemporary environmentalists (Engel & Engel 1990; Bakador *et al.* 1994; Izzi-Dien 2000).

The Bee surah speaks that 'Ye have also teaching from the cattle' (Koran 1909, The Bee, verse 68). An interpretation of this is that Man must learn from other species and from the natural order. This would most certainly not mean that Man ought to worship any particular species or natural phenomenon, but he should praise the single omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God. However, the Koran mentions that man has a tendency towards idol worship and sometimes nature suffers from the iniquities of men (Cragg 1971). The Ant surah in relation to Solomon and the Queen of Saba, states 'I found a woman reigning over them, gifted with everything, and she hath a splendid throne; and I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of God; and Satan hath made works fair seeming to them, so that he hath turned from the Way; where they are not guided' (Koran 1909, The Ant, verses 23–24). In The Bee, it is spelled out that 'Destruction hath appeared by land and by sea on

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account of what men's hands have wrought, that it might make them taste somewhat of the fruit of their doings, that haply they might turn to God' (Koran 1909, The Bee, verse 40). According to Cragg (1971) this refers to distortion of the works of nature by patterns of human self-will, by the idol-shaping propensities of humans who defile nature by disowning the divine to which they are accountable.

The geography of the Koran embraces the harshness of the early Islamic landscape as well as its gentler temper of oases with their groves and gardens where fragility is emphasized (Cragg 1971). Many features of the Prophet's native land, Hijaz, appear in the scriptures. Arabian history is full of recollection of once prosperous communities that disintegrated due to environmental collapse (Ruthven 1991). About 250 years before Mohammed's birth, the trade route between Damascus and Mecca was full of small settlements containing orchards and springs allowing travellers to enjoy water and a variety of fruits during their journey (Ibnu'l- Esir 1970). The same route today is mostly desert. Other examples are the failure of Ma'arib Dam, the loss of topsoil in many regions due to erosion and drying up of water courses that are remembered in the Koran (Cragg 1971). One surah warns the faithful that 'If at early morning your waters have sunk away, who then will give you clear running water' (Koran 1909, The Kingdom, verse 30). The parable of the devastated gardens in another surah turns such fearful conjecture into fact 'Verily, we have proved them (the Meccans) as we proved the owners of the garden, when they swore that at mourning they would cut its fruits; but added no reserve; wherefore an encircling desolation from thy Lord swept round it while they slumbered; and in the morning it was like a garden whose fruits had all been cut; then at dawn they called to each other; go out early to your field, if ye would cut your dates; so on they went whispering to each other; no poor man shall set foot this day within your garden; and they went out at daybreak with this settled purpose; but when they beheld it, they said, truly we have been in fault; yes! we are forbidden our fruits.' (Koran 1909, The Pen, verses 18-27).

Therefore, I think it is fair to argue that in the Koran there are ample instructions as well as warnings to the faithful not to abuse their power in dealing with the environment. Distortion of the natural order and ill-treatment of God's creatures, whatever they are, are considered as sins that lead to punishment.

The Koran reveals apocalyptic events such as widespread smoke which will be sent by God as a punishment to the sinful world. The surah entitled 'the Smoke' states 'But mark them on the day when the Heaven shall give out a palpable smoke; which shall enshroud mankind which will be afflictive torment; They will cry, our Lord relieve us from this torment, see! We are believers. But how did warning avail them, when an undoubted apostle had come to them; and they turned their back on him' (Koran 1909, The Smoke, verses 9-13). Some Islamic scholars see this event as retribution when the Earth becomes like a room in which there is a smoking fireplace without a chimney (Elmalili 1960). Others contend that this kind of punishment is likely to come about as a result of mankind's ill treatment of nature (Canan 1995).

Hadiths of Mohammed on environmental conduct

The Koran, according to Muslims, is the word of God revealed to the Prophet Mohammed after he came into contact with the Angel Gabriel during one of his retirements on Mount Hira, near Mecca. It has been made abundantly clear in the scriptures that the Prophet was neither an angel nor God incarnate, but a human being (Ahmad 1996). He was the last of the 124 000 prophets chosen by God to educate the creation's most honourable species, Mankind (Canan 1999). There seems to be an agreement amongst the majority of the Muslims that the Prophet's task was not confined to passing God's message on, but also it was intended that he should set examples to the faithful by his words and deeds (Guillaume 1954; Nasr & Lehman 1996; Hatemi 1998).

Since the Muslim Prophet was a mortal soul, he was expected to make mistakes and these are explained and documented by Canan (1999). When Mohammed realized that he had made an error, he tried to correct it (Canan 1999). However, in spite of the view that the Prophet was a fallible human being, his teachings, the Hadiths, carry a great deal of weight in the Muslim world. Hadiths are not words of God but advice given to the followers by the Prophet who *inter alia* appeared to be concerned about environmental conduct.

One of the most striking Hadiths relates to the rejection of excessive use of commodities, some of which may be directly taken from an over-abundant nature. For example, in Islam, it is required that before prayer the faithful must wash three times his or her mouth, nostrils, face, neck, ears, arms and feet (Williams 1962; Tames 1982). Mosques all over the world thus provide clean water for this purpose. On one occasion, the Prophet observed a Bedouin called Sa'ad who was using more water than necessary for washing before his prayer. He warned the faithful not to use too much water, or anything else for that matter (Canan 1995). Sa'ad objected to this by saying that there is already more than enough water to use and thus what he is doing will not diminish the amount available to others. Mohammed explained to him that even when a Muslim was using the abundant waters of a running river and washed himself four times instead of three, which are sufficient, he was committing an error (Ibn'i-Mace 1952). According to some Islamic scholars, the reason why this type of behaviour has been discouraged in Islam is that it would lead to the development of a wasteful outlook towards the gifts of nature (Canan 1995). In the light of this Hadith excessive use of world non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels, even by those who can well afford it, is totally out of line with Islamic teaching (Canan 1995).

The protection of soil and improvement of derelict land are also encouraged by the Prophet. In one Hadith, Mohammed advised that the faithful should protect the fertility of agricultural land by taking every possible step to

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prevent its impoverishment (Canan 1995). Furthermore, those who improve unclaimed derelict land could and should claim ownership of it (Ibnu'l-Esir 1963).

The protection of water, one of the most precious commodities in the Biblical and Koranic lands, is mentioned in a number of Hadiths. It is forbidden to discharge sewage into streams and rivers (Ibn'i-Mace 1952; Nur-ed-din 1967). All water wells must be protected by excluding all potentially contaminating activities around them and no animals should be kept in close proximity to them (Ibn'i-Hacer 1973).

In the Koran, the word 'trees' is mentioned 26 times; trees are a gift of God to humanity, although there is no instruction to the faithful that they must plant trees (Canan 1995). However, the Prophet in a number of Hadiths advised clearly, not only that existing trees should be protected, but that Muslims should plant new ones for a variety of charitable purposes (Nazmi 1928). When the benefits of his deed are captured by others, including animals and birds, even after death of the faithful, he will be rewarded by God (Muslim 1955; Munavi 1972). The Prophet advised that trees should be planted even towards the end of the World which will come in due course (Nur-ed-din 1967). Canan (1995), by quoting from some suras such as 'the Night Journey', 'the Thunder', 'the Pilgrim' and 'the Merciful' argued that the reason for this is that trees just like other beings worship God and they pray that those who planted them shall be rewarded and this reward will be given.

Special emphasis has been placed on the protection of certain species of fruit trees such as date palms and Arabian cherries in Hadiths (Nur-ed-din 1967). The main reason for this was the importance of these trees in the economy of Koranic lands during the time of the Prophet's life (Canan 1995). The Prophet was also sensitive about the protection of forests, especially near large population centres such as Mecca and Medina. He also instructed the creation of an artificial forest, El-Gabe, some distance from Medina for recreation, soil protection and provision of wood (Belazuri 1958). He ordered that if someone cut down a mature tree for a legitimate use, then he should plant a sapling for replacement (Belazuri 1958). Every effort should be made to avoid cutting down a growing tree (Buhari 1379). An Islamic city should have a green belt where planting of crops, hay making, tree felling and hunting of animals or birds, should be forbidden, but the faithful could use the area for recreational purposes without undermining its order (Canan 1995).

Regarding mankind's relation with the animal kingdom, the Prophet emphasized in a number of Hadiths that there should be no cruelty or insult to any species because all species belong to God. Those who treat animals with kindness and compassion, will be treated by God in the same manner (Ibn'i-Mace 1952). Those who let domestic animals go hungry or ill-treat them by other means, including encouraging or forcing them to fight, will hear their complaint on the Day of Judgement (Canan 1995). Those who kill without a just cause even a tiny bird such as a sparrow will be accountable for it. When disciples enquired about the just cause regarding killing a bird, the Prophet's response was that killing for the purpose of food was permitted (Munavi 1972).

There seems to be agreement between Islamic scholars of both Shia and Sunni persuasions that protection of the environment is one of the most important duties of the state (Hatemi 1996). For example, in the current Iranian Constitution, Article 50 states that 'the protection of the environment for present and future generations is a fundamental duty of the Islamic Republic of Iran' (Hatemi 1981).

One controversial issue in Islam is human population growth. The rapidly- growing human population and its consequences for resource use and the quality of the environment are fundamental to ecological debates. There are even suggestions that aid to developing countries, some of which are Muslim, where birth control is not effectively encouraged, should be stopped (Martel 1994). It is well known in the Islamic World that the Prophet was in favour of the growth of the Muslim population. He encouraged Muslims to have plenty of children by saying that 'I shall be proud of a large number of Muslims on the Day of Judgement' (Enis 1994). In this respect, some Moslem writers contend that family planning is essentially a strategy adopted by the adversaries of Islam (Harrison 1993) and that, therefore, Muslim nations should not be fooled by various arguments about the dangers of population growth and environmental crises (Bulac 1995).

Institutional response to population growth varies from country to country. In Turkey, a secular and pluralist democracy, the State Department of Religious Affairs, which, in the main, represents the Sunni faithful, contend that population growth in Turkey should not be excessive but should not be negative either, which is the case in some European countries. Uncontrolled and rapid population growth will not only create many social problems but will also aggravate the environmental crises (Bayrakdar 1992). In Shia Iran, however, there seems to be no desire to restrict the population growth (Hatemi 1996).

During the time of the Prophet, various methods of birth control and abortion were used in the community, and he did not forbid these practices (Enis 1994: Erdur 1997). Today, abortion is not a controversial issue in the Sunni world, but, unlike in the West, Muslim scholars of Sunni faith do not generally believe that there is a close correlation between any ecological balance that has to be maintained and population growth (Bulac 1995). In Shia tradition, however, abortion is considered to be a sin (Hatemi 1996).

Political Islam and ecology

Islamic Fundamentalists tend to believe that their faith covers everything in time and space, not only by giving clues towards understanding the whole of creation but also by solving all philosophical and social difficulties of Mankind (Ayubi 1991; Easterman 1992). For them, in other words, Muslim faith gives the absolute universal truth by which

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believers should live their lives and indicates appropriate conditions under which they should live. This claim of ownership of truth embraces environmentalism, and this is, essentially, an Islamic product (Uslu 1995). According to Gursel (1989), Islam offers a complete solution to environmental problems with its all-embracing divine knowledge, one that is irreplaceable by any other structure.

Muslim Fundamentalists, as a rule, do not directly criticize other religions; this would be considered to be an improper conduct in the Islamic world, where Muslims have always lived side-by-side with people from different traditions. Their fire is carefully targeted at the secular Western culture which, according to them, has caused the whole of Mankind to face one of the most intricate difficulties of our time, namely environmental problems (Uslu 1995; Bulac 1995). In a society where God is relegated to the second division, there cannot be any real value to guide man's attitudes and control his desires (Gurdogan 1993). Western secularism, together with science and monopolistic capitalism, have created the environmental problems which will intensify as long as the West remains in the driving seat. In Islam, Mankind which is the 'microcosm', is the reflection of nature which is the 'macrocosm', and the deterioration of the latter is due to the corruption of Mankind by secular Western politics and way of life (Bulac 1995). Therefore, the answers to environmental as well as other problems cannot be found in any secular tradition.

Islam contains principles that regulate a faithful's relationship to God (*ibadat*) and principles that regulate his or her relationship to other humans and nature (*muamalat*). The original sources of Islam, the Koran and Hadiths, had almost nothing to say on matters of government. However, with the passage of time Muslim communities decided to innovate and improvize principles with regard to the form and nature of government. As the time progressed, a body of jurisprudence called the *Sharia* (religious law) was created by many Muslim communities for managing their own affairs. According to Nasr (1971) it is difficult for Westerners to understand the Sharia which integrates a divinely inspired law containing not only universal moral principles but details of how the faithful should conduct their lives; how they should clean themselves, eat, drink, procreate and sleep; how they should engage in market transaction; and how they should pray. Others, such as Ozturk (1999*a*) and Beyaz (1991, 2000), contend that the Sharia is only inspired in small parts by the Koran but in the main it is driven by fictitious Hadiths and ancient Bedouin tradition, which has no place in a modern Islamic society. That is, the Sharia is not the law of God but the law of some communities (Beyaz 1991).

According to some writers the emphasis in the Sharia is, or should be, on the collective enforcement of public morals (Ayubi 1991). Furthermore, a social project that takes environmental protection as one of its objectives would be in perfect accordance with the Sharia (Gursel 1989; Uslu 1995). However, when we look for evidence it becomes difficult to support this viewpoint. There are a number of Islamic countries where subjects are ruled by the Sharia. Unfortunately, it is quite hard to find in these countries environmental conduct that is better than in secular Western nations. In effect, in some of the countries ruled by the Sharia there are appalling cases of environmental abuse, over-indulgent lifestyles and waste (Ibrahim 1984; Meyers & Kent 1998). For example, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the government has been encouraging large-scale wheat production in the desert by the use of expensive groundwater. The country is now a major wheat producer and exporter (Postel 1993). In 1992, the King of Saudi Arabia authorized payments totalling US$2.1 billion as a subsidy for wheat crop, which was worth one-fourth as much at the world market price (Al-Ibrahim 1991; Nicholson 1992). As a result, the groundwater levels in Saudi Arabia are rapidly falling and the water is becoming salty, making it difficult to use for essential purposes such as drinking. Furthermore, due to over-subsidized Saudi wheat, many countries, which are naturally suited to wheat production, are denied their fair share in the world market (Postel 1993). Therefore, it would be rather naive to think that embracing the Sharia will guarantee environmental protection.

According to Erdur (1997), the real purpose behind the arguments of political Islam is to use environmental problems as a stick to beat the West, which is seen as a threatening adversary. Political Islam, by frequently using ecological themes, pretends to be concerned about the global environment, but in fact this is part of a larger ideological framework, namely the struggle against Western politics and a secular lifestyle (Erdur 1997).

Population growth is a hotly debated issue in the Muslim world (Erdur 1997). Political Islamists contend that family planning is a way of stopping growth of the Muslim population (Bulac 1995). Ideas about voluntary repatriation of Muslims from Western Europe, and recent strife in Eastern Europe aimed at ethnic cleansing of indigenous Muslim populations are used by Islamists as examples of a hostility towards Muslims that has always existed in Europe (Malcolm 1994). Bulac (1995) argued that it is not the growing world population, but the over-consumption of the Western countries, which is causing the ecological degradation. Therefore, Muslims should not be fooled by the arguments about the necessity of birth control, because the real purpose behind this need is not to allow demographic balances in the world to be disturbed against Western interests (Gursel 1989; Uslu 1995). This view has to some extent been shared even by Western writers such as Martel (1994) and Henson (1994), who consider that environmental problems have more to do with the consumption in advanced countries than consumption in the developing ones; the former are described as being ecologically over-populated. For example, the 1.75 million annual increase in the population of the USA is causing more harm to the ecosystem than the 85 million increase in the developing world (Henson 1994).

Fundamentalist writers argue that there is a substantial role for Muslim women to play in defeating Western supremacy. On the one hand, by refusing Western

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modernism and its tools and by introducing the Prophet's simple lifestyle in her home, a woman will increase Muslim power by means of population, which is the real bomb of the Islamic world (Bulac 1995). Indeed, there are cases of phenomenal growth in human numbers in some Muslim countries. In the Islamic Republic of Iran the population was a mere 16 million in 1950; by 2030 there may be 183 million, an astonishing 11.5-fold increase in 80 years (Worldwatch Institute 1994). Two centuries ago it was argued that, if unchecked, the human population had a tendency to double itself every 25 years (Malthus 1798). In the Islamic Republic of Iran, population growth now exceeds the Malthusian prediction. By the year 2030, four Muslim countries alone, namely Iran, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan, will have a combined population of about one billion, and this appears to be delighting Political Islam (Bulac 1995). Environmental conservationists, Muslim or otherwise, consider this a worrying trend (Erdur 1997; Kula 1998).

What do Muslim writers think about the consequences of industrialization and consumer revolution upon the environment? There is nothing in the Koran or in the teachings of the Prophet about industrialization. However, modern Muslim writers such as Beyaz (1999) and Ozturk (1999*b*) contend that Muslims must face up to the realities of their times and take part fully in the progress of human society. In this respect they should adopt modern production and distribution methods, dress code, democratic principles and other necessities of the time but must avoid injury to the environment. Regarding consumerism, Muslims must not fall into the trap of conspicuous and wasteful consumption, for this would be against the Islamic ethos (Ozdemir & Yukselmis 1997; Hatemi 1998).

Conclusions

Just like other major world religions, Islam rests upon timeless universal values such as just conduct, compassion, charity, forgiveness and respect for creation. Islam transformed the wandering Bedouins of Hijaz as if by a magician's wand into the pioneers of great civilizations. Muslims throughout their history have built great empires and wealthy cities teeming with cultural life, become the collectors of more libraries than they initially destroyed, produced eminent philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, architects and writers. Islam thus has the capability of helping to solve one of the greatest problems of our time, namely that of 'the environment'. Islam need not be a hindrance, but could be a great help, in educating the faithful about good environmental conduct.

There is no doubt that the Muslim faith, like other monotheist religions, is anthropocentric in orientation; the Koran makes it abundantly clear that God created everything for humans. The Koran also states, however, that all of God's creation is holy and thus deserves respect from humankind. There is nothing in the Koran which might give the impression that the environment is a mere object to be recklessly exploited. On the contrary, recklessness and cruelty are punishable in this as well as in the next world. The Prophet's Hadiths, clearly instruct the faithful not to be excessive in their dealings with the environment.

Regarding the population issue there is no suggestion in the Koran that the mankind should multiply fast to overwhelm the Earth. The Prophet's feeling that he would be proud of seeing as many Muslims as possible on the Day of Judgement (Enis 1994) was revealed at the time when the world's population was small and Muslims were very few in number. Fundamentalist writers appear to be using this Hadith to encourage Muslim communities to grow as fast as possible to subdue the West. It appears that some Muslim countries have already adopted a policy of maximizing the growth of their populations regardless of the environmental and other consequences for the world. If Moslems are seeking inspiration towards good environmental conduct, they are likely to find it in the original sources of their faith, namely the Koran and Hadiths, rather than in the doctrine of political Islam.

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