
Wealth

THERE is no limit in Islam to man's usufruct of nature except the limits of the moral law. This law prohibits such use of nature as may hurt the neighbor which the universalism of Islam identifies with all men present and future. Within the limits of this requirement, man may draw from nature as much as he desires. This means that Islam favors a market system where the combined forces of nature, of human labor, and accumulated science and wealth may be used to the full possible extent without harm to the others. Islam is definitely anti-poverty, which it declares to be the work of the devil. Man is responsible for his poverty, though when he suffers from poverty he is worthy of compassion and charity.

The Puritans believed that a sign of God's pleasure with a person is the good fortune He grants to him. They subscribed to a deterministic view of life, of nature and salvation. God is the decision maker. When He chooses to be pleased with him, He manipulates good material fortune to become his. Despite this divine pre-determinism, Puritanism succeeded in inciting quite an economic revival in America. Anxious to appear blessed, i.e., as a man with whom God is pleased, the Puritan over-exerted himself to become rich and succeeded in winning both wealth and, supposedly, the divine blessing. For he believed in the Puritan doctrine. Seeing himself prospering, his faith encouraged him

to press harder, and the more he exerted himself and produced, the more he succeeded. The Muslim shared this belief and strengthened it with the faith that man stands obliged to remold nature and the world, if the meaning of his vicegerency is to be fulfilled. He understood God as commanding him to produce wealth that he and others may live and prosper. He thanked God if his effort succeeded and he bore in patience if it failed, holding his success and failure not necessarily, i.e., totally and exclusively related, to his effort. He held the decision of God and the result achieved on earth in inverse relation. If he succeeds, and he must do so on his own, God would reward him further. If he does not, he has only himself to blame, not God.

Every Muslim then desires and plans to become a “millionaire” if he takes his Islam seriously. Islam, however, warns him, that in amassing his wealth, he should earn it. He should not cheat his fellow humans of their wealth, but should produce his own. Islam prohibits gambling because it is a game of chance and its wealth, if it brings any, is not the result of effort and productive self-exertion. It constitutes no increase to the wealth of mankind. It urges man to produce new wealth, and holds the “self-made” man in special honor. The acrobatics of modern advertizing and the false enticements to buy the products of industry, to create new unnecessary needs for the new products coming out like a stream, and the planned short obsolescization of all things in order to keep the machines of industry running, are not acceptable to Islam. Other ways, more constructive and less consumptive, more universal in their distribution of products would have to be found.

Islam is against the hoarding of wealth. To discourage it, it has instituted the zakah, which if consistently applied to a hoarded wealth, would “eat it up” in one generation, the years needed for a tax of 2.5 per cent to exhaust the stationary capital. Such wealth ought to be in production, i.e., invested in productive undertakings which increase the general wealth of mankind, in enterprises which provide jobs for more people and bring the earth closer to paradise. To ply wealth back into production is one of the good effects of zakah. To insure this fructification of wealth and hence more employment and more production of real wealth, i.e., of goods and services, Islam prohibits interest.

Interest implies the accumulation of profit without taking risk, this being carried entirely by the borrower. In a sense, the lender too is commonly said to take a risk in lending his money. The fact is, however, that firstly, on the average his wealth is increasing despite a low rate of "bad debts." Otherwise no banker will stay in business for long. Secondly, the lender's risk is more often one of "easy" against "difficult" collection for he must have exacted from the borrower all the collateral and guarantees he possibly could. Islam seeks to eliminate the class of "financier" by goading the money-lender to invest his wealth in production directly. Islam would certainly bless the effort of any group of people who form a cooperative credit and thrift society whose purpose is to store the savings of members and lend money to the needy among them *without interest*, and according to the best judgment of his peers.

Once wealth is produced and appropriated, Islam requires that it be earned again, this time morally. It prescribes the *zakah*, or "sweetening" which once paid to society, makes the wealth in question *ḥalāl* or "sweet," now fully appropriable and investible by its owner in any way he wishes. It urges him to give more, this time at no fixed rate or time and to any one he pleases whom he thinks to be in need. This is called *ṣadaqah*. Unlike *zakah*, it is voluntary and may legitimately be whimsical. By instituting it, Islam sought to give the wealthy the means of making his love-of-neighbor effective in his own immediate vicinity, among his entourage.

Islam is against all "customs." This institution means building a wall or barrier against the free distribution of wealth around the globe. It means planting within the country a protected industry or agriculture for which it is not suited, in a kind of "hot-house" condition. A free world-wide distribution of wealth and goods, however, would not be effective without a free world distribution of labor. Indeed, Islam wishes for all "customs" and "immigration" institutions to disappear. Men and women ought to be free to live and work wherever they wish without checks, lets or hindrances. They should mix freely with one another, intermarry with and learn from one another. The best argument will naturally win the ensuing battle for the minds of men; and the better deeds will eventually win for their doer the leadership he deserves.