

Part V

The Muslim Worker

obeikandi.com

## Stewardship of Nature

IT has been said earlier that man was created to be God's *khalīfah* or vicegerent on earth; that this means that he is expected to transform the world from what it is into what it ought to be. We also said that the will of God in nature is being fulfilled necessarily through the workings of natural law. Finally, let us remember that in the Qur'an, God declared everything in creation is designed and/or redesignable to serve man's happiness and lead to his felicity.

From this it follows that nature is not an enemy. It is not a demonic force challenging man and inciting him to conquer and subdue it. Such a view belongs to those religions whose cosmogonies make the world itself a god, whether good or bad and more often the latter. Such gods, or chthonic forces, must be appeased, if not subdued or manipulated so as to work for man's advantage. Islam regards nature as inert and neutral, a great positive blessing at best, whose joys are advance payments on the rewards of Paradise. It is an orderly cosmos created by God as the theater where man is to do his good deeds, perfectly fitted and equipped by the Creator according to the best measurement, the best form, the best pattern, and is hence absolutely free of any flaws.

In nature, happenings take place in accordance with natural laws, i.e., with the will of God. Hence, it is orderly. But its orderliness

## *Stewardship of Nature*

depends upon its Creator whose will it follows. This will is not whimsical; the Qur'an describes it as eternal and immutable. Hence, causal determination in nature may well be trusted to function. This trust which is the base of nature's orderliness is a function of man's vicegerency. For if man is to perform in nature, the system would have to be trustworthy, capable of receiving man's efficacious interference for the production of given and predictable results. Otherwise, if human causal efficacy could not be trusted to produce the predicted results, then purposiveness is destroyed and with it, the divine assignment of vicegerency.

Muslims have looked upon nature, following these principles, as an open book, a second revelation from God, which anybody could read who has cultivated the requisite knowledge and discipline. The Qur'an, they maintained is easier to read. Its statement of the will of God is direct and eloquent. Nature, on the other hand has to be "treated" to uncover her secret, her law, by scientific investigation and experimentation. But with some preparation, its truth is as public as that of the Qur'an.

This explains why the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, who had never developed any science to mention, fell upon the scientific legacy of classical antiquity with such enthusiasm that around 700 CE, a chemistry or botany manuscript would be travelled for from Eastern Persia to Alexandria, and would be gladly exchanged for a thousand golden pieces. By 800 CE, however, there remained nothing of the scientific and philosophical achievements of antiquity but was well known and mastered by the Muslims. Gradually, this led to the presuppositions of Greek natural science which were found to conflict with the Islamic notion of God.

The problem was not the concern of the scientists who continued with their work unconcerned with those deeper issues. The philosophers took up the problem and, in their hands, the vague assumptions were clarified and pushed to their ultimate conclusions. Cosmic order became cosmic determinism, matter became eternal, divine initiative and providence were denied. The Aristotelian categories were the seemingly irrefutable base. If natural law is truly law, its application must be universal. This gives us a closed cosmos where everything

cannot happen except by a cause sufficient to bring it about. But if such a cause is there, its effect must necessarily follow. Thus, the chain of causality envelops the world. God may have built up the system; but does not run it. Like clockwork, it runs itself. Matter, the presupposition of everything, cannot be destroyed. It only changes form. Hence, it cannot come into being i.e., be created. It is eternal, coeternal with God.

It was the great al-Ghazālī who dealt the death blow to this kind of philosophy. Like David Hume who followed him almost a thousand years later, al-Ghazālī analyzed the causal connection and found it implying no necessity. That A follows *after* B, he reasoned, which is all that the observations of science establish, does not necessarily mean or imply that A happens *by* B. The judgment “B is the cause of A” is only a generalization of probable validity, a validity growing in probability the more often we experience A following upon B but never reaching a perfect validity of 1. If the scientist is absolutely certain that A will follow upon B, whence then does his assurance come? It is his faith that the world order, or ontological equilibrium which brought about the last instance of the claim, will not fail to operate in the future. This faith is the product of religion, not science. Matter may have been at the base of all events and even antedate them. But it could not have brought itself into being. If it has a cause, its cause could not be caused in turn, if an infinite regress is to be avoided. Modern astronomy and space science are not opposed to the doctrine of an expanding universe. This conclusion is equally that of contemporary philosophy of science, the closed cosmos theory being a nineteenth century fad which the twentieth century has exploded.

Nature, we may conclude, is pliable and capable of change. Man is capable to steward its forms to what ought to be. Agriculture, horticulture, engineering and architecture, in short, civilization itself consists precisely in such stewardship. But no alteration performed in vengeance or resentment against nature or without responsibility to the Creator of nature, can remain innocent for long. For if nature is not used as a gift from God given for a moral purpose, its abuse is certain. If the moral purpose of God is denied, may it not be abused? Raped, as modern man has done? In Islam, no such souring of the quest or

## *Stewardship of Nature*

usufruct of nature is possible. For, for the Muslim, the secret working of nature is God's pattern and will; and the utility of nature is a divine gift meant solely for fulfillment of the moral law.

obeikandi.com

---

# 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

## *Wealth*

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 obsoletization 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 *halāl* 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.