Muslim countries should, therefore, build their own reformist strategies and pursue their own agenda in the realm of Muslim family law which should be inspired by the teachings of Islam and the Islamic norms and values that give Muslim family life its distinct tone and tenor.

Muhammad Tahir Mansoori


Is it an Islamic duty to “save the earth”? How can religious faith contribute to establishing a better environment and combating injustice? What is the role of religion in building the “new world order”? How can we honestly be “true to this earth”? These are some of the questions raised in a volume comprising a number of interesting essays which seek to explore the connections between some of the most serious global problems and the challenges they pose to various faiths. Although already a few years old, the book is still topical and important.

The first part of the book is a descriptive presentation of some problems that are actually confronting the world today in the fields of ecology, politics, economics and science. The second part of the book consists of direct or more indirect theological reflections and responses to each one of the chapters of part one, and thus the book is an “interweaving of fact and hope” (p. 8).

In the first chapter Gwyn Prins discusses the ecological issue, which includes an analysis of the “strange death of environmental politics” (pp. 17 ff). The great environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and their political variances (“green parties”) of the 1980s, attract increasingly less interest. This is mainly due to the success of implementing “ecological modernisation” to the general opinion, i.e. the idea that societies can modernise themselves out of the ecological crisis. This is a paradox because the ecological crisis is actually a questioning of the modern premises such as the belief in the market, science and technology, which are nowadays surprisingly presented as the only solutions to human social problems. Religion has still a role to challenge such “modern” solutions. Perhaps we have been once again
dazzled by the introduction of the concept of “sustainable development”, which mainly calls for the conservation of economic development instead of the conservation of nature. Is it really true that economic development is good for the environment as suggested by the Brundtland-report (World Commission for Environment and Development, 1987, *Our Common Future*)?

In Anne Primavesi’s theological response to this chapter she emphasises how the word *adam* (man) should be translated to ground or earth, indicating the absolute link between humans and their physical surroundings. She suggests that faith in the environment is equal to faith in the creation, because it is in the environment that we encounter God (p. 103).

The encounter is mediated and expressed in different ways, but it is the same God we encounter, and always within the environment whose resources sustain our species’ life. The environment is the reason we are alive. It is the reason God is alive for us. Take away the environment and you take away God. It is physically impossible for us to encounter God elsewhere. In her view, faith consists of insight and response, which should be articulated in the environment. This is the general consequence of the ecotheological trends within various religions, which should be contrasted with the common view of religions as detached from worldly matters and focused on a transcendent God, the Hereafter and other “celestial” affairs.

Discussing the challenges of politics, Richard Falk notices that UN’s “embrace of double standards in the form of ‘nuclear apartheid’, retaining nuclear weapons for the managers of the global system, but disallowing their acquisition by those states that seem most inclined to repudiate globalism, especially the so-called backlash states” (p. 35). This is an interesting statement particularly for Muslims, considering the recent Iraqi war. Addressing the Muslim readers I ask: “Should we as Muslims accept nuclear weapons? Is it right according to Islam”? I call for an intensified internal Islamic debate on these issues, including the questioning of the weapon policies of the Muslim countries. Falk hopes for a strong global, grassroot, civil society to resist the global market forces, and identifies such aspirations as “rooted utopianism”.

Konrad Raiser comments in his chapter that the corresponding religious alternative could be labelled “eschatological realism”, which he explains as the following:

...a realism that is rooted in the belief that the whole world stands under the judgement and promise of God who is the ultimate source of purpose in social life, which is expressed in the symbol of the kingdom of God. This perspective of hope is critical against an understanding of politics as a self-contained system, and at the same time it inspires resistance against the temptation of resignation and fatalism (p. 117).
I believe this is an idea attractive to most Muslims. It is a perspective that challenges the understanding of politics as dealing with winning, defending and accumulating power as an end in itself, according to Raiser. Since God is “the ultimate forum of accountability and legitimacy of power” (p. 119), this leaves us with a new critical self-limitation of all absolute claims of power in a new political rationality.

However, religion is not solely seen as a positive factor in the book. Johan Galtung problematises some dualistic and opposed trends present in all religions. In a genuine religion there is a unity between God, human beings and nature, but in a distorted form of the same religion one may find the exclusion of somebody or someone in the construction of unity. Distorted religions divide, particularly those that include singularism (that is, the notion that only one faith is valid), and universalism (viz., that a particular faith is valid for everybody in the whole world) (p. 67). Muslims do understand Islam in such a manner and both these trends are visible among them. This is apparently problematic from the perspective of the outsiders. However, Galtung sees these aspects in all religions, “soft or hard”, saying: “Religions as such cannot be classified as peace- or war-productive per se; one has to analyse their aspects and the interpretations of them” (p. 70). This is a crucial remark because we have to bear in mind that the Islamic sources can lend themselves both to the promotion of peace and to promotion of war. It all depends upon what the Muslims to decide what to pick up from their religious tradition and how this selected material is to be interpreted in the context of the contemporary situation.

In the theological discussions in part two, Alan Race comments on Galtung’s discussion, saying that certain values, apparently without direct basis in the religious tradition, such as democracy, can be absorbed by religions (p. 160). I think this is an important point to bear in mind. Race sums up as follows: “The issue is how religions, from out of their storehouse of tradition, can support the notion of a global ethic clearly poses some tricky hermeneutical questions for the theologians/philosophers of those religions”. Muslims may be engaged in a global debate on ethics and “how to save the planet”, but how can the ideas they espouse be legitimated Islamically? I am convinced that several Islamic concepts are flexible enough to be liable to new interpretations that are appropriate for our current situation. Examples of this rethinking of Islamic concepts are found, for instance, in the writings of Ziauddin Sardar. (A good summary of his work is Islam, Postmodernism and Futures: A Ziauddin Reader, eds., Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell, London: Pluto Press, 2003). However, the worry in all global negotiations is that the most powerful agent, i.e. West, sets the agenda for the rest, who just
have to adapt themselves. The book *True to this Earth* challenges Muslims to respond to the global crisis and turn Islam to a critical inquiry, which I definitely think is one of the original roles of any religion.

Soumaya Pernilla Ouis


Research results spanning the globe from Indonesia to Egypt report of Islamisation processes within Islamic societies that are expressed in more intensified personal, political, and legal applications of Islam. These processes are marked by recurring questions about the role the Islamic religion should play in the manifold areas of the lives of believers in the twenty-first century. Through the prism of individual dramas that are played out in front of the Islamic courts, the book *Islamic Modern Religious Courts and Cultural Politics in Malaysia* brilliantly sets out to address some aspects of this process within the Malaysian context.

Michael Peletz places vivid ethnographic descriptions of actual court cases in the larger context of the Malaysian politics, culture and religion. The reader sees, hears and smells the chambers of the judge and his assistants, including noisy fans, regular tea breaks and playing children. Analyses about the workings of the court serve as guideposts to understand what the Malaysian context considers to be Islamic law, how the courts protect the rights of women, what their role is in modeling a Malay, modern interpretation of Islam, and how the courts can be both instrumental in and used for overarching state projects such as nation building, the consolidation of power and teaching its citizens the right form of Islam. The latter issues, naturally, involve a contest of authorities between the State, local forms of Islam that are influenced by the *Adat* or indigenous law systems, and Middle East-inspired Islamist interpretations of groups such as the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS). Woven through all these issues is the ethnic theme that inextricably binds being a Muslim to being Malay (just over half of the country’s population) that is not of Chinese, Indian, or other descent.