

Islam and the Environment: Towards an “Islamic” Ecumenical View (*)

Mawil Izzi Dien (**)

ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to shed lights on this matter through selected Muslim scholars and philosophers. Sayyid Hussein Nasr is chosen here as the main thinker on the issue of the environment studies amongst the contemporary Muslim thinkers. By adopting an analytical method; this article found that the environmental concern is deep-rooted in Islam: Its creeds, practices and world-view. The concept of *Tawhid* (Unity of Allah), the relation of human to the Creator, the Sufi concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud*, etc... all these support the argument that natural environment and its conservation is a core concern of Islam. Although some of the contemporary Muslim scholars have addressed this issue from various perspectives, there is still a gap needs to be fulfilled. Hence, in order to address this existing gap, this study explores an Islamic ecumenical view in general.

Keywords: *Natural Environment, Environmental issues, ecumenical view, Islam, Wahdat al Wujud, Sayyid Hussein Nasr.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In search for an Islamic ecumenical view on the environment I looked at the contributions of three well known traditional Sunni muftis and scholars¹ on selected environmental issues and contrasted them with the views of Sayyid Hussein Nasr.² I selected Nasr in particular because he represented a well-known Philosopher and Sufi scholar with a Shi'a background and is considered by many to be amongst the leading and influential writers on the subject in the West. He informs us that he has been writing on the environmental issues since the early 1950s (Nasr 2003, p. 85). Most of his writings were in English, some of which could be seen by Muslim orthodoxy as a diversion from the main stream of Islam belief, particularly his views on *wahdat al-wujud* (Nasr, 1996, p.62; Schwenke, 2009, p.60). The other three selected scholars are: Shaykh ʿAlī

h ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Uthaymin,³ Shaykh Ali Jum⁴ and Shaykh Yousuf al Qaradawi.⁵ The main value of the contributions of those scholars is that they represent an important section of the ‘ulama whose views make an impact on the Islamic world. This view is supported by Nasr, who states that the ‘ulama “are the custodians of Islam and who has the ear of a vast majority of Muslims in all matters” (Nasr, 2003, p. 92). It is also observed that none of those scholars are mentioned or referred to by Nasr who criticized their lack of awareness and contributions to the environmental issues despite the fact that some of these writings were published well before Nasr’s (2003, p. 92) statement. They also seem to be unknown to most writers on Islam and environment in the West.

I will also refer to some of my previous contributions on the field since I have been writing on the subject since 1982 and am humbled to be considered as one of the main writers on the field (Foltz *et al* 2003, p. 258; Schwenke, 2012, p. 14-19). My selection of those scholars is restricted by the word limit of my article and does not mean a none recognition of other contributors to the field⁶ who could add to this challenge in finding a general and agreeable Islamic view on an environment that cannot survive the crises while its healers speak different “languages” and often do not hear one another. On a personal level, my journey with environmental issues started with the publication of the Islamic Principles for the Conservation of Nature (IPCN) in 1982 (Ba Kader *et al* 1982).⁷ This short paper received a much unexpected popularity and interest in the Islamic world⁸. At that time our aim was to spell out the basic general view of Islam in a subject which was hardly known to most Muslims.

Looking at it now, I can state that it was written to provide an early “traditional” view from within the “mainstream Islam”⁹ on the subject of environment. This was clearly observed on the terminology and style used to balance the environmental questions with the traditional terminology accepted by Islamic orthodoxy. However even now, it remains one of the few Islamic papers that has an environmental breadth and aims to answer some detailed questions that the environmentalists wanted to know. This was largely due to the fortunate help and advice given to us by Professor Wolfgang Bourehne who is one of the world leading environmental experts.¹⁰ With the valuable help

of another expert Mr Othman Llewellyn¹¹ a new edition of the paper was published in 1994 (Llewellyn & Izzi Dien, 1994).¹² The second edition added more details and practical concepts that we hoped to make it richer in the environmental flavour and more palatable to Western readers. But still there was room for additions and many further questions to be asked which are still in need of answers.

During the period leading to the year 2000, I published few articles on the field and started teaching two undergraduate modules at the University of Wales Lampeter on Islam and Environment and Religion and Environment (2004-2006), I supervised two PhD theses on the field, and attended many conferences relevant to the area. In the year 2000, I published "The environmental dimensions of Islam" (Izzi Dien, 2000) which aimed to examine the topic focussing on both the legal and eco theology of traditional main stream Islam. I followed that producing a few articles on the field, all of which were in English. This year (2012) I published 11 articles in Arabic in *Al Sharq Al Awsat* newspaper, covering various practical aspects of the environment in the Arabic society.¹³

On the note of environmental writing in the Arabic society, one can observe that up to the year 2000 such writings were rather limited in general. This is particularly true in reference to scholars who are considered to be authorities in Islam and whose view could make a marked impact on the Muslim mass and their view on the environment and its conservation. This could well be ascribed to the deterioration of social and political conditions in the region which detracted scholar's interest away from the environmental issues. Nasr informs us of a few reasons behind the 'ulama's unawareness and lack of preparation for the environment during the past two centuries: "Islam was attacked by intrusive colonialists and aggressively proselytized by the Christian or secularist missionaries from the West. Much of the energy of Muslim religious scholars was spent defending Islam from those attacks and preserving the people religious identity" (Nasr, 2003, p.92). Despite the fact that those scholars responses to the environmental questions came late and did not address all the questions posed, their responses were important steps towards the establishment of a collective Islamic view on the environment that can be termed an Islamic eco theology.

God's essence, names and a creation that is not sacred

I will start with ‘Uthaymin since his sample of thoughts on the environment represents an early and rare Salafi¹⁴ contribution to the debate on environmental crises. ‘Uthaymin’s response came in a public lecture delivered at the University of Ibn Sa‘ud on the 1st January 1998. Although this was a one hour and a half public lecture, it provided an important specific focus on the question of the natural environment and its conservation, with a significant insight into the subject matter given by an authority that has a wide recognition in the Islamic world due to his politically independent personality¹⁵. This lecture was a clear indication that the environmental concern had started to gain interest among the core traditional Muslim scholars. ‘Uthaymin’s main approach was to reiterate the Islamic “*salafi*” views on life and natural environment. He maintains that “conservation in Islam starts by protecting the Islamic creed ‘*aqida* from what contradicts its essence. (‘Uthaymin, 1998) Adding that “True understanding” of the essence of God (*dhÉt Allah*) would lead to a proper environmental conservation.” (‘Uthaymin 1998) One can observe here that ‘Uthaymin while reiterating a “puritan” Islamic doctrine he was confirming his group’s main eco theological principle on the environment which rejects all forms of devotion to nature or animism. As often practiced by *Salafi* scholars, to support his views ‘Uthaymin cited Ibn Taymiyya¹⁶ and his student Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyya.¹⁷ Also we found that most of ‘Uthaymin’s ideas on God, life and nature are clear reflections for the views of Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab thoughts as stated in his book *Kitāb al Taw hīd* to which ‘Uthaymin has written a detailed commentary (‘Uthaymin, 1995).

The emphasis that ‘Uthaymin made on God’s “names” and “essence” of God could also be understood as a reference to the rejection of pantheism and incarnation which is often associated with “extreme sufism” and often appears in public when Muslim scholars discuss the environment and nature. However he confirms that respect and conservation of the environment is a duty upon all Muslims (‘Uthaymin, 1998). This is an important confirmation for the position that the environment holds within an order of life articulated by a core scholar of Islam. The topic of environment has also been the concern the writer Nasr who has been extensively discussing it in the past. Nasr’s view on creation reflects his acceptance for the respect that the Quran awards to the environment but never seeing it as Divine: “...in the Quranic view Creation is sacred but not divine, for divinity belongs to God alone” (Nasr, 2003, p.96). This could

be a good starting point for a collective environmental discussion and ask further questions relevant to the creation such as the essence of God and the derivation of environmental ethics from God as a creator. According to ‘Uthaymin the connection between awareness of God and environmental conservation is like a cause and its affect “..the “correct” understanding of Allah as encapsulated in his names/ Attributes *asmā*’ would lead to environmental care and conservation” (‘Uthaymin, 1998). ‘Uthaymin’s main concern here is to maintain the actual nature of Allah from being misconceived or corrupted by human misinterpretation which could influence the position of man as a trustee of God towards nature. The main controlling mechanism for such trusteeship is *Akhlaq* or ethics to which ‘Uthaymin declares: “..bad ethics *akhlaq safila* would lead to bad environment...exaggerated affluence and wealth would cause environmental damage” (‘Uthaymin, 1998).

Nasr in his turn provides us with a similar view but with a totally different language and methodology that reflects a philosopher’s deep Sufis affinity:

“Islamic gnosis (*al-‘irfān*) revolves nearly always around the two axes of unity (*al-tawḥīd*), dealing with God and His Names and Qualities, and *al-insān al-kāmil*, dealing with man and the cosmos. The first is concerned with the Origin and Source of creation and the second with manifestation and the return of things to the Source” (Nasr, 2007, p. 65).

Highlighting the importance of Islamic principles in providing a “monotheistic solutions” to the environmental crisis. Nasr informs us in another publication that “The theme of responsibility based on our being the vicegerent of God on Earth in a world created by Him”. (1994, p. 213). Nasr’s reference to responsibility and human vicegerent sound similar to what many Muslim scholars assert about God’s relationship with the environment including Shaykh Ali Jum‘a the Mufti of Egypt which we will also discuss shortly. Jum‘a maintains the following:

God made the human a responsible trustee *amīn* and simply an agent who should preserve the universe and not exclusively monopolise or dominate it. This is because God has made this universe a shared right between all creatures therefore man should not deprive others from using it including the animals. (Ali Jum‘a, 2009, p. 11)

The value of resources

The environmental resources actual value according to ‘Uthaymin is made not on the basis of monetary ground but is measured by its “actual value” when compared to what is similar to it *bimithlih* (‘Uthaymin, 1998). This concept of similarity of value *al mithliyya fi al qīma* is the primary ground upon which the entire Islamic economic value is based. Many contemporary Muslim scholars maintain that the environmental problems in the Islamic world are the problem of misguided value which is imported from the material world:

The schism between the spiritual and the scientific was imported into the Muslim mind and land when the material, industrial culture was introduced, effectively separating the political system from the traditions of the community. (Izzi Dien, 1977, p 50)¹⁸

While talking about the ethical values Nasr informs us here that:

A number of Muslim scholars have also been fully aware of the relation between the "values" underlying modern science and the technology, which as its application is responsible directly for the environmental crisis, and have written critically on this issue with the aim of substituting Islamic values in Muslims' encounters with the natural environment (Nasr, 1996, p. 214).

‘Uthaymin emphasised a few prophetic instructions that aims to draw the believer’s attention to conservational matters. This includes Muhammad statement “..beware of the three causes for peoples curse which he explained that he meant never to do ones natural need a shade; on a public road or by water sources. All of which are shared public areas which should be kept clean. On a similar note, Nasr reiterates such a concept while discussing how Shari’a “insist on making natural resources public and not private property and guarding and protecting them.” (Nasr 2003: 99)

Welfare, Care and balanced conservation

In 2001 Yousuf al Qaradawi¹⁹ wrote a book on the subject of environment. Qaradawi is little known as an environmental writer but his book could be seen as one of the important traditional contributions on the field in Arabic. It could also be seen as a representation for the view of one of the largest and most influential movements in the Islamic world which is leading the government of Egypt now. Evidently Nasr is unaware of this book when he said:

Strangely enough movements in the Islamic world which have sought to revive the Islamic teachings, often in opposition to existing political orders, have been for the most part blind to Islamic teachings about the natural environment. (Nasr, 2003, p. 91)

In his book Qaradawi followed a similar approach to the IPCN's approach in the classification of the elements of environment and addressing its problem. His contribution was a further addition to answer the questions often posed by the environmentalists who came in the traditional methodology which insists on providing annotated references to both the Quranic, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) sources including analogy (*qiyas*) without being restricted by one particular school of *fiqh*. At the outset Qaradawi confirms that "a group of eminent writers preceded him in writing on the subject to offer the Islamic view but still there is more room for further addition" (Qaradawi, 2001, p.8). From the start, the reader would find that the environmental welfare is one of the book's main concerns that the author claims to address. The title that he chose for his book is: "*The Welfare of the Environment in Islam: Ri'āyat al Bi'āfi al Islam*. According to the author the word *ri'āya* welfare / maintenance is more appropriate than the word protection *himāya* for a book examining the environmental crises, because "protection", would indicate a reactive action whereby *ri'āya* indicates a preventive and active preservation. To Qaradawi this is a "positive preservation which implies improving, developing and reforming the existence *wuj-d* of environment and protecting it against the destruction '*adam* caused by any form of harm or damage such as pollution or corruption *fasād*" (Qaradaw, 2001, p. 8). Qaradawi later on in his book states that the origin of such an idea belongs to Al Imam al Shaṭibi²⁰ who informed us in his book of *muwafaqāt* that all public interests ought to be cared for in a developmental and reformative manner (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 8).²¹ It is observed that such an understanding of the human role towards the environment is parallel to the term "sustainable development" which became widely used among environmentalist since the early nineties.²²

The main thesis of Qaradawi's book is summarised in his concluding chapter which maintains that:

the environment was created in a balanced and better order than what humans caused it to be. The remedy for the environmental crisis could only be achieved by first reforming the humans from within and

second by resorting to legal implementation of sanction to prevent the environmental corrupters from damaging the environment (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 257-58).

Qaradawi further claims that “faith (*Imān*) is the main cause and foundation that provides incentive and ethical ground for conservation” (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 257-58).

The Divine property and the sources of Knowledge

According to Qaradawi” all environmental resources and elements in Islam are divine property which do not belong to one particular individual or group of people, it is a shared public right which belongs to the entire society, and could belong to both human and non-human creatures including animals, plants, earth(s), seas and the cosmos (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 212). The misuse of these resources could cause damage to all these creatures, and this is the reason for the prophet’s call for the conservation and none violation of nature and it’s elements (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 212). This is in many ways similar to the conclusions that Nasr reached in his contribution to the Richard Foltz volume on which I felt that Nasr was moving very closely with the main stream of Islamic writers on the environment (Nasr, 2003, p.97-8). In the same contribution Nasr addressed the Islamic sources to be used for the Islamic environmental crises answers. In his view such sources can be found in the Quran, hadith, Islamic philosophy, Islamic scientific tradition, Islamic arts such as architecture and landscaping, and literature (Nasr, 2003, p. 95-96).

For Qaradawi, the environmental welfare study is not something invented by the West since it can be found within various strands of Islamic disciplines for knowledge (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 19). This would include the following:

Usul al dīn or the foundation of faith: This discipline could provide the doctrinal guidance on the environment. As an example we can conclude that all the elements of the environment are creatures like the humans being. They are made by God and all are in the constant position of *suj-d* or prostration to Him (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 20).

On the significance of *suj-d* to the environmental conservation, Izzi Dien informs us that *suj-d* in the Islamic theology, is not only a mechanistic ritual action but it also provides evidence to man of the reality of God. Prostration, according to the Quran, is experienced by everything that God created:

“Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the earth do prostrate themselves to God willingly or unwillingly, including their shadows...” (Izzi Dien, 2000, p. 15 Citing Quran: 13:15). Izzi Dien suggests a practical application for *sujud* when enforcing an Islamic environmental legislation.

The prostration is like a holistic symphony habitually played out by all creatures. Such a notion can be significant when Muslim governments need to be provided with a convincing case to produce legislation in order to protect both people and other elements of nature. This could be an influencing factor when decisions need to be made regarding radical alteration of landscape features in response to urbanisation. When a mountain is blown up to build a motorway, evaluation has to be made of the impact of the destruction of the natural habitat of other creatures that also prostrate to God. (Izzi Dien, 2000, p. 15)

Sufism or *‘Im al Suluk* according to Qaradawi, is another discipline within which the Islamic legal foundation *ta’īl shar’ī* for the environment can be proposed. Qaradawi maintains that such a proposition is based on the pretext that Sufism’s second main focus after “truthfulness with the creator” is good manner with other creatures *‘idq ma’ā al khāliq wa khuluq ma’ā al khalq*²³. To put all that in an environmental nutshell, Qaradawi adds the concept of charity (*ihsān*):

One of the wonderful Islamic environmental directions is that it insists on extending charity (*ihsān*) to all the elements of the environment including humans, animal, vegetation, water and air (Qaradawi 2001: 26).

Other two behavioural concepts that Qaradawi’s calls for is: to approach the environment on the base of “care for it and reverence for its maker.” (Qaradawi 2001: 29). He adds that “by intending that such an action is done to please Allah like other daily practice would render such an action as a form of Islamic ritual (*‘ibādāt*) to Allāh.” (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 28) At this point it is important to observe that such a suggestion represents a considerable move within the main stream traditional theology since in Islam there is a great historical sensitivity against animism²⁴. From an environmental point of view, to see the care for environment as “a form of ritual” is a new notion to say the least and, could have a positive implication to the attitude and awareness of Muslim society towards the environment. This attitude could help in developing a social change to humans’ outlook towards nature and its conservation. Human awareness of the value of environment is considered to be one of the prime

influential factors that can have a direct and lasting impact on healing the wounds between man and nature. This healing process could be further strengthened according to Qaradawi by love and affection which can take place between humans and nature (Qaradawi 2001: 28-29). Such sentiment is frequently expressed by the prophet Muhammad's hadiths such as his statement about the love exchanged between him and the mount of Uhud when he said "Uhud is a mountain that loves me and I love". (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 30)

The exploration of the environment within the next branch of Islamic knowledge i.e., Islamic jurisprudence *fiqh*, can be traced according to Qaradawi through its variant subdivisions. Such subdivision includes *ṣahārah* or purity; prayer *ṣalāh*; financial dues *zakah*; religious endowments *awqāf*; revival of unused lands (*Ihya' al mawāt*), and land cultivation (*zira'ah*) (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 39) Qaradawi informs us that the legal maxims (*qawā'id*) can also provide a wealthy source of data for an Islamic environmental knowledge. Citing a few of these maxims Qaradawi suggests that they can be of great importance if an environmental legislation is to be considered (Qaradawi, 2001, p.41).²⁵ He also attempts to give us examples of how the jurisprudential process could facilitate the application of these rules on the relationship between the society and individuals (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 42). However he does not tell us what is the Islamic legal view when such a relationship becomes more complex, such as when the interest of one nation clashes with the global interest of the environment. Examples of this can be found in is the cases of environmental harm caused by generating energy from harming resources such as oil, fossil fuel, nuclear reactors or the damaging of the environment caused by logging in order to achieve commercial benefits to Muslim countries such as the Gulf states and Malaysia. Qaradawi further informs us that Islamic jurisprudence focuses on the basic objectives of Islamic law upon which the environmental conservation can be established (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 44). Another significant fatwa that the author gives is that the protection of the environment falls under the five objectives of Islam: these are faith *dīn*, human regeneration *nasl*, soul *nafs* and mind or intellect *ʿaql* (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 49-50). The striking part of this fatwa is that the conservation is placed here within the core part of Islamic doctrine which is "the safeguardin of faith *hifza al dīn*". This is one of the most important vital objectives in Islam (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 47) which is reserved for the highly prioritised objective of belief and often applied to important

Islamic purposes such as *jihād*. According to Qaradawi, the legal justification for this highly prioritised position is based on the pretext that environmental conservation falls under God's decree to apply 'adl justice and Charaty *ihsān* in the society.²⁶ Conservation is also part of human responsibility which is a human's religious duty *tadayyun* and any violation for such duty would breach Muslims religiosity. The difficulty with such statement is that it could lead to misunderstanding and confusion since it could place all forms of "public interest" under the same position as the *dīn* since verse Q: 60:90 of the Quran by Qaradawi's (2001, p. 45) own admission is the Quranic verse relevant to public interest *ma-laha*.

Generation equity and other environmental questions

One of the disappointing discussion on the environment that Qaradawi attempts to cover is the subject of "generation equity". This is a topic which is considered by the environmentalist as a key issue in engaging with the environmental rescue. According to Izzi Dien this is a term which poses the following question: "To what extent should current decisions affecting exhaustible resources and the environment reflect the interest of generations to follow?" (Izzi Dien, 2000, p.119) Qaradawi attempts to address this problem while discussing the protection of human population (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 50) when he revisited it in more details in his chapter entitled "The danger of exhausting environmental resources" (Qaradawi, 2001, p.208-130). Unfortunately in both cases the discussion is general and does not provide a comprehensive answer to the question that it can pose or lead to the fundamental environmental question of question of population explosion.

The root of generation equity according to Izzi Dien lies in the deformation of the Islamic value system in modern Islamic society:

...many parts of the Muslim world are currently witnessing a cultural environmental rupture which can be ascribed to two causes. The sudden, almost shocking, introduction of the industrial age to these countries was not supported by a value system compatible with the prevalent Islamic values. The outcome has been a sad alteration from "satisfaction," with the little that can be acquired from the environment, to a "dissatisfaction" which can only be appeased by ever increasing consumption. Human values were and still are witnessing a dangerous level of deformation that cannot be controlled without going back to the bottle that once contained the genie. Both Islamic values and industrial values need to be re-examined

to extract from them a new value system that fits modern human beings, without rejecting the bedrock of Islam and the environmental elements that it supports. (Izzi Dien, 2000, p. 119)

Another key environmental issue that Qaradawi discusses is the biological diversity and the right of anima (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 91). He highlights how Islam calls for the preservation of “all” forms of life including what might look harmful to some like spiders and wild animals (Qaradawi, 2001, p.92). He also addresses useful miscellaneous environmental cases, issues such as greening of the earth (Qaradawi, 2001. p. 58), development and reformation of land (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 64), cleanliness, conservation of resources (Qaradawi 2001:75) , maintaining the environmental balance (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 152; 214), pollution (Qaradawi, 2001, p.160), and the exhaustion of resources.

In the final part of his book Qaradawi makes a profound statement regarding human corruption of earth:

In our time we witness a very dangerous form of corruption that is the corruption of the earth as represented in violating the green spaces of earth, polluting the rivers and seas causing its living marine life to be poisoned causing harm and damage to humankind as well as others. (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 207)

Human role on earth

A more recent book on the environment is written by Dr Ali Jum‘a entitled: “The environment and its conservation from an Islamic perspective *Albī‘a wa al hifāḥ alayhā min manḥ-r islāmi* (Jum‘a, 2009). This book is a small piece of work but contains extremely helpful information on the stand of Islam on conservation. It reflects a further move towards improving Muslims awareness and understanding of the environmental issues. One of these issues is the human role on earth and the concept of humans’ responsibility on earth and Jum‘a states that:

A human’s role in the universe *khilāfa* means that humans should carry on their responsibility by building (*i‘mār*) the universe and preserving (*muhāfaza*) the environment this ..is a price that humans should pay in return for having the universe at their service (*taskhīr*) (2009, p. 10).

In stating that the environment is made for human service (*taskhīr*) raises a major question to modern environmental movements which reject the Abrahamic faiths claim that the humans are the centre of the universe. Jum‘a seems to be aware of this argument and tries to modify the meaning of such a term by stating:

Taskhīr- according to the Islamic view - would mean that humans may benefit from the providences of the universe but may not appropriate such benefit depriving others from it at all levels of time and place (Jum‘a, 2009, p. 10).

The main issue here is not the question of benefiting from the earth but the question is human domination of the earth which Christianity is often accused of as an interpretation for “human’s dominion over creation”.²⁷ In addressing such a question Izzi Dien informs us of the following:

The relationship of human beings with the environment is considered by Islam as a positive and interactive relationship rather than one of dominance and repression. The relationship is symbiotic in structure, it is not only the human species which is expected to benefit by their actions but also the other inhabitants of the Earth (Izzi Dien 2001:46). According to the Quran, in essence, human beings are created from the same substances as the earth, He who created all things in the best way and He began the creation of man from clay. (Q: 32:7)²⁸

Another helpful contribution to the foundation of an Islamic eco theology is Jum‘a’s confirmation for the concept of love for human- earth relationship which we found Qaradawi speaking of earlier (2001, p.28-29).²⁹ Emphasising the importance of human love to earth was one of the important recommendations that the Jeddah conference for the environment has called for in the year 2000. ³⁰ Jum‘a further informs us that “the relationship between human and the universe is based on harmony and conformity” God (Ju‘ma, 2009, p.25). A believer would therefore deal with the creation from the stand that they are all equal entities which are made by one. By loving Allah, humans love whatever He created. A Muslim would therefore venerates *yuqaddis* objects such as the Quran, the Ka‘ba or the grave of the prophet³¹ because of their position *makāna* to God. ³² This veneration combines both love and respect (Jum‘a, 2009, p.26). The *Salafis* view would reject the idea of objects veneration on the pretext that it is form of polytheism. However one can

observe that the idea of “veneration of objects because of their value to God” as Jum‘a puts it, does not violate the principle of belief in Allah. This veneration is a form of respect (*hurma*) which is granted by Islam to all what has been made by God. ‘Uthaymin comments on the prophet’s hadith “do not curse the wind” stating:

The wind should not be cursed (even when it causes damage) because it a creature of God which is instructed by Him to do its duty (*musakhara*). And to curse it would indicate disrespect to the one who created it. (‘Uthaymin, 1995, p. 140)

These Islamic views on the elements of nature are important in breaking the block that modern materialistic civilization has created resulting in modern man’s spiritual vacuum and leading to the environmental crises. In attempting to find the root of the environmental problem Jum‘a associates the corruption of earth with the over whelming materialistic philosophy that paid no respect to earth and was only concerned with fast and larger gain. (Jum‘a, 2009, p. 17) On the same line of thought Qaradawi informs us that the environmental crises is caused by man’s ethical problem who could never settle the problem without realising his limits and duties towards his Maker (Qaradawi, 2001, p. 268). Nasr agrees that there is an ethical problem but he puts the blame directly on the West and the unethical technology that it has invented by stating:

The present environmental crisis is directly related to the use of modern technology and the various applications of modern sciences.... The present period of human history, the agenda for major social and economic matters, including the applications of science and technology is set by the West. (Nasr, 2003, p. 88)

Sufism is important

Evidently Nasr, Qaradawi and Jum‘a belong to different schools of thought but it is surprising to find many similar thoughts linking the three together. What is more surprising is that all view Sufism as an important source for the Islamic understanding for environment. The main difference between the three starts when Nasr pushes the boundary towards the belief in *Wahdat alwuj-d* or unity of God with the creation which is a rather problematic area within a Muslim mainstream traditionalism.

On a more profound level, one can say that the order of nature is nothing but the Divine Reality manifesting itself on the plane of phenomenal

existence. It is to this essential reality that the Quran refers when it asserts, "Wither soever ye turn, there is the Face of God" an utterance to which the numerous Sufi treatises on *wahdat* are so many commentaries (Nasr, 1996, p.62).

The subject of *Wahdat al wuj-d* is often discussed amongst Muslims and involves rather complex and perplexing debates which often results from the confusion and misinterpretation of the language of eminent Sufis who frequently speak and think allegorically. This is in contrast to textual scholars who restrict themselves to what the tangible sources could reveal. As result of such a confusion we even find eminent mainstream traditional scholars like Ali Jum'ā being accused of subscribing to *Wa hdat al wuj-d* despite his rejection and denial to such an acquisition³³. In a public question and answer session Ali Jum'ā was asked his opinion on the *itti hād* unity to which he responded "if unity means God is united with his creations then such a claim belongs to other religions creed such as the Hindus and Buddhist". In his book Jum'ā expressed his view further on the order of Nature that it is an order which based on the uniformity of their creation *wahdat al khalq*. They are created by God and follow his order: Using the Quranic verses 39:21³⁴ Jum'ā sheds more light in his book on what binds or holds all creatures together:

Man and all creatures follow one order and one norm *qān-n wāhid wa sunna wā hida* which controls their movement and stillness. Such a norm expresses the oneness of the creator (*wi hdat al Khāliq*). And within this norm the creator's principles and rules are reflected. For every exiting entity there is a life cycle that starts with existence and followed by growth, shrinking and then death. This is a matter that applies to all things that surrounds us including the inanimate (*jamād*), animal and humans. Even the stars and galaxies has such a uniformity since it has its own ages and times when it ends they would enter into the life cycles of other beings (Jum'ā, 2009, p.33-4).

Qaradawi too emphasises this concept adding that the Quran confirms this similarity in creation.³⁵ According to Qaradawi

all environmental resources and elements in Islam are "Divine" property which doesn't belong to one particular individual or group of people, it is a public right which belongs to the entire society, and could belong to all humanity and non humans including animals, plants, earth(s), seas and the cosmos. The misuse of these resources could cause damage to all that, and this is the reason the prophet

warning of grave punishment for the violators who transgress against the environmental elements. (Qaradawi, 2001, p.212)

Are they talking differently?

Although those scholars often sound like if they are talking about different matters but the concept of nature within creation to them all seems to have been sparked by the same conviction from which all their environmental understanding starts. On nature and creation both Qaradawi and Jum'a envisage nature to be part of God's creation (Qaradawi, 2001, p.34-35; Jum'a, 2009, p.49-55) while Nasr states that: Creation occurs from within God, an esoteric doctrine to be found also in Christianity and Islam (Nasr, 1996, p.54). Qaradawi informs us that amongst the best form of good deeds in Islam is charity (*ihsān*) and the best form of (*ihsān*) is that which is exercised towards the environment and its elements such as human animal water and air (Qaradawi, 2001, p.25). Nasr too starts his well-known paper by one of the most profound announcement in the Quran relevant to the environment which emphasises the most fundamental aspects of Islamic eco theology:

Behold, Thy Lord said to the angels: "Verily I am to establish on earth a vicegerent." They said, "Wilt place therein one who will spread there on and shed blood, whilst it is we who celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy Name? God answered, "Verily I know what ye know not." (Quran 2.30 in Nasr, 1996: 1).

CONCLUSION

The discussion throughout this paper demonstrates that the Islamic intellectual interest in the natural environment and its conservation is not new or a view that was made as a reaction to the modern environmental crises. Indeed, the Islamic care for the environment is imbedded in the traditional practises and narratives of Islam. The contemporary scholars who attempted to address the issue brought with them their own interpretation for Islam but there are so many points for unity within their diversity. This unity needs to be further explored as humans first and as believers second. One of the main conclusions that I found while writing this paper is that neither the mainstream scholars nor Sayyed Hossein Nasr and his supporters seem to be aware of one another. This is a matter of great concern. In my humble opinion a call for an Islamic

environmental ecumenism is desperately needed if the wounds of nature are ever expected to be treated.

REFERENCES

- Al Qaradawi, Yousuf .2001. Ri'āyat al-Bī'a fi Sharī'at al islām. Dār al •hur-q .
- al-'Uthaymin, Mohammad Sāli h. (1998) A Public lecture delivered at the University of Ibn Sa'd 01/01/1998. Retrieved: 19.9.2012 <http://youtube.com/watch?v=s02s5MeqFqo>
- al-'Uthaymin, Mohammad Sāli h. 1415/ 1995. Al Qawl Al Mufīd 'Alā Kitāb al taw hīd, Riyaḥ. Dār al'ā'ima .
- Ali, A. Y. (1977). *The Holy Quran Translation and Commentary*, USA: publisher?.
- Ba Kader, et.al (1982). *Islamic Principles for the Conservation of the Environment*, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper (no 20).
- Fierro, M. S. (2012). *Encyclopedia of Islam*. (2nd ed.) Brill Online. URL.. http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx?article-title=The_Nature_of_Man_by_Seyyed_Hossein_Nasr.pdf
- Izzi Dien, Mawil. Y. (1977). Islam and Environment Theory and Practice. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 18(1), 47-57.
- Izzi Dien, Mawil. Y. (2000). *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam*, Cambridge: Lutterworth. Press.
- Izzi Dien, Mawil. Y. (2005). *Islamic Law From Historical Foundation to Contemporary Practice*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jum'a, A. (2009) Al- bī'a wa al @ifaḥ' alayha min maḥ -r islāmi, , Cairo: Al wābil al-sayyib Publication.
- Jum'a, A. *on Wahdat al Wuj-d*. <http://youtube.com/watch?v=uGpaWNEwLRM>
- Laoust, H. (2012). Ibn Kayyim al-Djawiyya." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. (2nd ed.) Brill Online. URL
- Laoust, H. (2012). Ibn Taymiyya. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (2nd ed.) Brill Online.
- Llewellyn, Othman. and Izzi Dien, Mawil, Y. (1994). *Islamic Principles for the Conservation of the Environment Gland*, Switzerland – Cambridge, UK.
- Nasr, S. H. (1996). *Religion and the Order of Nature: The 1994 Cadbury Lectures at the University of Birmingham, New York USA*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Nasr, S. H. (2003). Islam the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crises. In *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Ed Richard,C, Foltz, et al. Cambridge Mass: University of Harvard Press.
- Nasr, S. H. 2007.6. The nature of man, Available at
- Pichall, M. M. (1930). *The meaning of the Glorious Quran*. Hyderabad-Deccan.

- Schwencke, A. M. (2009). *Nasr Sayyed Hussain Nasr: Traditionalism, Islamic Esotericism and Environmental Ethics*, Leiden, Leiden University, Leiden Institute for Religious Studies (LIRS).
- Schwencke, A. M. (2012). *Globalized Eco-Islam: A Survey of Global Islamic Environmentalism*. Leiden: Leiden University, Leiden Institute for Religious Studies (LIRS).
- World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford, O.U.P, 1987, p 43.

NOTES:

¹ I loosely selected Qaradawi as a sample for Muslim movement, Ali Jum'a as an official Mufti for Egypt, and 'Uthaymin as an independent *salafi* scholar.

² Born in 1933, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, currently University Professor of Islamic Studies at the George Washington University, Washington D.C. is one of the most important scholars of Islamic, Religious and Comparative Studies in the world today. Sayyed Hossein Nasr Foundation web site: <http://www.nasrfoundation.org/bios.html>, entered 12.9.12

³ Sheikh Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Saalih ibn Muhammad ibn 'Uthaymeen (1929 – 2001) <http://www.ibnothaimen.com/all/Shaiikh.shtml> entered 27.9.12

⁴ Shaykh Ali Jum'a Muhammad born 1952 is the Grand Mufti of Egypt 2003- to date. *cf.* http://alimamalallama.com/article.php?cat_id=14 entered 23august 2012.

⁵ Born 1926 is an Egyptian Muslim scholar and preacher best known for his popular al Jazeera program, ash-Shariah wal-Hayat (Shariah and Life), and Islam Online, where he offers opinions and religious fatwa based on his interpretation of the Qur'an. He has also published some eighty books, including *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam and Islam: The Future Civilization*. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Yusuf-Al-Qara%aawi/24024767384?sk=info> entered 14.9.2012.

⁶ Some of these writers are: Ziauddin Sardar, S. Parvez Manzoor, Fazlun Khalid, Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, and Harfiyya Abdulhaleem.

⁷ *cf.* Anne M. Schwencke, 2012 *A Survey of Global Islamic Environmentalism*, and Revised version: 23 February 2012, Leiden Institute for Religious Studies (LIRS), Leiden University.

⁸ According to Dr Abd al Barr al Gain the then Vice Precedent of IUCN-Saudi Arabia who supervised the printing of that paper: more than 10,000 copies were distributed initially in 1983 and within 3 months a further 100,000 copies were reproduced and distributed.

⁹The definition of the terms “mainstream” and “traditional” can no doubt be a subject for debate and discussion. In this paper I use them loosely to mean both popular and classical Islam which by itself can be a minefield of definitions.

¹⁰ Chairman of International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources UCN Commission on Environmental Policy Law and Administration.

¹¹An Environmental Planner, born Colorado Springs USA.

¹²*cf.* Anne. M. Schwencke, 2012 *A Survey of Global Islamic Environmentalism*, Revised version: 23 February 2012, Leiden Institute for Religious Studies (LIRS), Leiden University.

¹³As an examples *cf.* <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=682506> and <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=17&article=656171&issueno=12082>

¹⁴ In reference to pious predecessors *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* the adherents of this group are often referred to by Western writers as wahabis. cf. Wāhhābiyya." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online, 2012.

¹⁵ Apart from his membership of the Council of Senior 'Ulama of Saudi Arabia, Ibn uthaymin is well known that he never accepted or carried out an official post, except the simple titles of Imām of the Mosque of 'Unayzah and Professor of Shari'ah at the 'Unayzah branch of the Muhammad b. Sa'ud Islamic University. cf.: Obituary of Shaykh Muhammad b. 'Uthaymin: by Dr Suhab Hassan. <http://unity1.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/obituary-of-shaykh-ibn-uthaymin.pdf> downloaded : 28August 2012.

¹⁶ Taqiyy al- Din Ahmad, (1263–1328 CE) Laoust, H.. "Ibn Taymiyya." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online. 2012.

¹⁷ Mohammad b. Abu Bakr (1292-1350 CE) 691-1350. Laoust, H.. "Ibn Ḳayyim al-Djāwziyya." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online 2012.

¹⁸ cf.(Nasr 2003: 8)

¹⁹ Chair for the international union for Muslim scholars associated with the Muslim brotherhood. Born 1926. He represents a more liberal view on Islam which often termed Wasa³iyya or the middle way of Islam. His books were twice referred to in the EI2

²⁰Ab- Ishāq Ibrahim b. M-sa b. Muḥammad al-Lakhmīal-Shāṭibī al-Gharnāṭī (d. 790/1388) Fierro, Maribel." al-Shāṭibī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online

²¹ For further understanding of Shāṭib views on *Maslaha* cf.:Izzi Dien Islamic Law: 71

²² The term was established in the 1990s, reflecting the global importance of its impact. It was primarily initiated by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 and defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford, O.U.P, 1987, p 43. However in recent years the term was criticized as having broad appeal and little specificity. Despite that it is still considered by many to be the most common term around which the future of the environment can be conserved.

²³ This is a well known statement often ascribed to the famous Iraqi 'ufi 'Abd al Qadir al Jilāni 1077–1166 CE.

²⁴Animism is seen by Muslim theology as a violation for the monotheistic belief and is considered as a form of *shirk* or believing in partners other than God in Islam. Such a belief which was prevalent in the Arabian world before the rise of Islam and continued even after Islam.

²⁵For a discussion on legal maxims and environment cf. (Izzi Dien, 2000:114-16)

²⁶ God commands justice and charity and prohibits evil and bad deeds cruelty and injustice Q:60:90.

²⁷ This is an accusation that modern Christianity is striving to reject. Pope John Paul II in his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace stated the following: Adam and Eve were to have exercised their dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28) with wisdom and love. Instead, they destroyed the existing harmony by deliberately going against the creator's plan, that is, by choosing to sin. This resulted not only in man's alienation from himself, in death and fratricide, but also in the earth's "rebellion" against him (cf. Gen 3:17-19; 4:12). Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990

²⁸ cf. Quran 23: 12 and 12:26.For further and more detailed discussion on the subject cf. Izzi Dien :Environmental Dimensions 47

²⁹Qaradāwi, 29-28.

³⁰ *Tawsiyāt al Muntada al ālmi al Awwal lil bi'* (Jeddah Declaration) 23- 25 October 2000 <http://www.islamset.com/arabic/aenv/tawsiyat1.html> entered 29.9.12

³¹ There is a well known debate and exchange of views on this subject between the *salafi* school of Islamic law and the *sufi* school. This is often seen in TV broadcasts and public lectures.

³² Compare that with Qaraṭāwi view on man creatures' relationship above P13.

³³ cf. <http://www.ali.soufia-h.net/main.htm> entered 18.9.12

³⁴ Seest thou not that God sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through springs in the earth? then He causes to grow, therewith, produce of various colours: then it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; then He makes it dry up and crumble Away. Truly, in this, is a Message of remembrance to men of understanding.

³⁵ Q, 16:3-8.

About the Author

(*) This article was submitted on 14/08/2013 and accepted for publication on 03/12/2013.

(**) Izzidien is a Prof. Dr. at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, UK. Email: m.izzidien@tsd.ac.uk, Izzidien@hotmail.com