

## BOOK REVIEW BY HARFIYAH HALEEM

### **PROMOTING CONSERVATION IN MISALI ISLAND, ZANZIBAR: TEACHERS' GUIDE BOOK FOR ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

by Fazlun Khalid and Ali Kh. Thani (English and Swahili editions) IFEEES,  
Birmingham UK 2008, ISBN 978-0-9534248-1-8.

This long-awaited book contains the core teachings of Islamic environmentalism. It is based on the Misali project in Zanzibar. There, the people's traditions of respect for the environment had been undermined as they have been elsewhere. The government and various agencies had tried unsuccessfully using secular reasoning to convince the local fishermen to abandon their modern destructive practices and return to more sustainable technologies, but it was the Islamic precepts that finally got through to them. The book mentions fishing with dynamite, dropping anchor over the coral, the collection of coral to make lime, seine and gill nets, and using poison, saying (p.40) that these and other malpractices destabilise the ecosystem and that 'if we do not change our attitude to Misali and its surrounding marine habitat we will be seeing the total disappearance of our livelihood'. It compares this attitude to throwing a grenade at a mango tree: 'no tree, no mango; no coral, no fish'. The use of 'we' and 'our' is important. The book is co-written by Ali Kh. Thani, the local Misali project officer, whose 'Afterword' complements Fazlun Khalid's 'Foreword' and summarises concisely five principles of Islamic environmentalism. It is a Muslim-to-Muslim dialogue, using local place names, not the government or 'Western Experts' telling the locals how to manage their affairs.

The book speaks about 'conservation' in a language common to all Muslims - that of the Qur'an. It explains, for example, that what is now called 'the holistic approach to environmental education is deeply embedded in the meaning of *Tawhid*', and the word 'environment' may be used as a substitute for *Khalq* in most situations. The modern destructive attitude is described as 'openly challenging Allah's authority', based on ayah 16:4 on p.39. Glossaries of Arabic and conservation terms are provided (pp. 54-7). I read the English edition, but the Swahili edition will be more accessible to East Africans.

Designed to be used by local imams and *madrassa* teachers, and to continue the grass-roots work done by IFEEES in collaboration with Care International and WWF, the guide book is compact, consisting of six core lessons, each one structured around seven headings and examining a core concept: *tawhid*, *khalq*, *mizan*, *insan*, *fasad* and *khalifa*. The Message and Objective are clearly stated at the beginning of each lesson and the texts are taken from the Qur'an, with one 'Key Ayah' followed by 'Additional ayahs', 'Further Reflections', 'Links to the Marine Environment' and a Summary. A list of relevant ahadith is given at the end of the book.

This guide book is a resource for a specific project, but provides a pattern of teaching that can be replicated in other projects and languages for Muslims around the world. Scientific arguments may be argued about, come and go but the Qur'an's teachings are timeless and in harmony with those of other

religions. Muslims need only to be reminded of them and shown how to apply them now.

---

Published in *Ecolslam* Issue 5, September 2008