

# Green Theology

Edited by  
LEJLA DEMIRI  
MUJADAD ZAMAN  
TIM WINTER

*Sapientia Islamica*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Sapientia Islamica

Studies in Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism

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# Green Theology

Emerging 21st-Century Muslim  
and Christian Discourses on Ecology

Edited by

Lejla Demiri, Mujadad Zaman  
and Tim Winter

Mohr Siebeck

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## Acknowledgements

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## Note on Transliteration and Dates

The transliteration of Arabic names follows that of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three* (EI3). Technical terms in Arabic are all italicised except for terms that have become common in English (e.g. Muhammad, Hadith, Islam, imam, mufti, sufi, Sunni, Shi'i). Double dates are used in reference to the Islamic (A. H.) and Common Era (C. E.) calendars (e.g. 716/1316).



## Introduction

LEJLA DEMIRI

A dog has ten qualities, all of them worthy of acclaim.  
How I wish all or some of these were in us, the same!  
His is a relentless hunger, the righteous ones are just so.  
And as a place of his own, he has nowhere definite to go,  
Like the one who upon his Lord does incessantly depend.  
Nay, but a short while of the night does he in slumber spend,  
Akin to the lovers of God. He leaves behind no inheritance,  
When he dies – just like the ascetics – it is with independence.  
He never abandons his master, not even for one day,  
Even if treated roughly, in the manner of those who follow the way.  
He is of those who are satisfied with a paltry livelihood and provision,  
Just like the contented ones, who are perfected in their religion.  
And if perchance someone were to occupy his place,  
He would turn away from it with an easy grace.  
By leaving it, he is belittled, like the people of humility,  
Then chased and struck by a boy, causing further indignity.  
If that same boy were to call him later, the dog would come indeed.  
Like the states of the reverent, of this example take heed!  
When he sees food, he makes haste to stand and you find him like so,  
Full of delight at your sight, like the ones who keep themselves low.  
And when he departs, you see he leaves with naught.  
Just like the one who isolated himself and seclusion sought.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqā'iq wa-majmū' al-raqā'iq*, Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1986, vol. 2, p. 151.

في الكلب عشر خصالي كلُّها حُمِدَتْ يا ليتها كلُّها أو بعضها  
جوع له لم يزل والصالحون كذا وما له موضع يختصُّ تعينا  
كمن على ربِّه لا زال متكلا ولا ينام سوى من ليله حيناً  
مثل المحبِّين لا ميراث قطُّ له إن مات كالزاهدين المستقلِّين  
وليس يهجر يوماً من يصاحبه وإن جفاه كأخلاق المردينا  
وراضياً يبسر من معشته ما زال كالفانع المستكمل الدينا  
وإن يكن غالباً شخصٌ سواه على مكانه يتصرف عن ذلك تهوننا  
بتركه مثل أصحاب التواضع قلَّ وإن يضرب وطرِّد من فني هينا  
ثمَّ الفتى قد دعاه بعد ذلك أتى كحال أهل خشوعٍ خذه تبييننا

This intriguing poem by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), a great Damascene scholar and poet, sufi master and jurist, which analogises dogs to spiritual guides worthy to be followed, may come as a surprise to modern ears. Yet it evinces an attitude well-known to Nābulusī and his Muslim contemporaries, whose cosmology was profoundly shaped by the Qur’anic vision of the universe, which presents every living thing as existing in a state of constant awe and praise (*tasbīh*) of the Creator. In its very being, the Qur’an asserts, the entire creation extols God.

The Qur’an, like the Old and New Testament, emerged, in its primal *Sitz im Leben*, in an arid and semi-arid region. In such a landscape, where water is a precious commodity, life appears as particularly miraculous: as something to occasion reflection and a principle to be protected and cherished. The world, existing as a tapestry woven from the Divine names, is a book which we are invited to read, and which tells us the story of its Creator and His continuing concern for us. Its beauty takes us into itself towards His beauty. A principle of balance (*mīzān*) holds together the integrity and existence of the created universe. It demonstrates that the order of nature is not a random collocation of particles and energies, but holds together as a superb symphony of forms, processes, and mineral and biological beauty pointing us towards Him.

According to the Qur’anic depiction of creation, nature leads to faith, and thus nature is sacred; this is one of the most salient elements in the scripture. The Qur’an reads: ‘Truly in the way the heavens and the earth are created, and the succession of night and day, are signs for people of understanding. Those who remember God standing, sitting, or on their sides, and meditate on how heaven and earth have been created’ (Q 3:190–1). It is no coincidence that the Sura of the Qur’an which most movingly invokes the order of the physical world carries the title *al-Raḥmān*, ‘The All-Compassionate’. For God has made the world, not from any compulsion, but in the free and sovereign expression of His love. It is, as the Andalusian mystic Muḥyī l-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) tells us, the ‘exhalation of the Compassionate God’ (*nafas al-Raḥmān*). It is through this Divine Breath that all things are brought into existence.<sup>2</sup> The world is hence regarded as pure sacrality, even though its purpose and coherence may sometimes appear to be veiled. What the Perfect God makes is necessarily perfect. And so, the Sura of the All-Compassionate tells us: ‘The sun and the moon run to right measure, and the stars and the trees prostrate themselves [to Him]. And the sky, He made it high, and established the balance. Violate not the balance’ (Q 55:5–8). Elsewhere

وإن رأى الأكل أضحى واقفاً تره  
يرنو إليك كأخلاق المساكينا  
مثل الذي حاز في التجريد تمكينا  
وإن ترسل لا شيء ترى معه

I am grateful to Amina Nawaz for help in rendering my English translation into rhyming verse.

<sup>2</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 127.

in the Qur'an the divine instruction is emphatic: 'do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right' (Q 7:56).

Muslims and Christians are evidently united in their concern for God's earth, and in their passion to resist our voracious despoiling of its resources to produce consumer goods and increase material gain. The Qur'an alongside the Bible is a great song of praise, expressed in the language of wonder at the beauty and order of the world around us. As the Persian poet Sa'dī (d. c. 690/1291) of Shiraz says: 'I am delighted in the world, because the world delights in Him. I love every world, for every world is from Him'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, taking his inspiration from Muslim scriptures and theology, Nābulusī followed a well-trodden scriptural path in Islamic spirituality which celebrates the natural environment as the *āya* or sign indicative of God, and in sufi terms, the *shāhid* or the witness testifying to the divine beauty.<sup>4</sup>

A frequent *topos* in many sufi narratives involves dogs who lead Muslims to spiritual openings, or which are to be commended for specific virtuous qualities which they manifest, even though on occasion certain reprehensible carnal desires are compared to those of dogs and other animals.<sup>5</sup> In Islamic legal discourse, references to dogs are often related to ritual purity regulations. The impurity of dogs is treated in detail, though with varying interpretations between diverse schools of jurisprudence.<sup>6</sup> Despite the negative image of dogs commonly associated with Muslim customs today, which is perhaps rooted in this jurisprudential unease, the writings of piety offer a rather different theological take on the subject, in which dogs and the rest of the animal order reflect divine majesty and beauty, as exemplified in Nābulusī's poem above. The praise of dogs in his ode was not unique and did not remain undetected by his contemporaries: for instance, Müstakimzāde Süleyman Sādeddin (d. 1202/1788), a renowned Ottoman calligrapher, sufi of the Naqshbandī order, scholar and poet, penned a treatise on

<sup>3</sup> *Be-jehān khurram az ānom, ke jehān khurram az Ūst. 'Āsheqam bar hameh 'ālam ke hameh 'ālam az Ūst.* As quoted and translated in Abdal Hakim Murad, *Travelling Home. Essays on Islam in Europe*, Cambridge: The Quilliam Press, 2020, p. 199.

<sup>4</sup> Nābulusī was also fascinated by the world of plants, as we note in his treatise on agronomy, *'Ālam al-malāḥa fī 'ilm al-filāḥa* ('Signs of Elegance regarding the Science of Agriculture'), which he wrote as an abridgment to an earlier work on agriculture by Raḍī al-Dīn al-Ghazzī al-Āmirī (d. 935/1539) of Damascus.

<sup>5</sup> For a short collection of such sufi stories and sayings, see Javad Nurbakhsh, *Dogs. From a Sufi Point of View*, London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1989. A similar anthology, including a greater variety of texts, is Fabio Zanello (ed.), *Il Cane di Maometto. Uomini e Cani nelle Terre della Mezzaluna*, Viterbo: Stampa Alternativa, 2005. I am grateful to Samuela Pagani for bringing this publication to my attention.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, the saliva of dogs is generally regarded as impure. In the Mālikī school of law, however, there is a distinction between domestic and wild dogs, the saliva of the latter alone being classified as impure. See Ingrid Mattson, "What's up with Muslims and Dogs?", 12 December 2011: <https://ingridmattson.org/article/whats-up-with-muslims-and-dogs/> (accessed 30 December 2022).

dogs,<sup>7</sup> concluding with a poem praising them for their ten high qualities, which at first glance looks like an unacknowledged and non-literal version of Nābulusī's poem rendered in Ottoman Turkish.<sup>8</sup> However, both Nābulusī and Müstakimzāde had centuries-old precedents upon which to rely. One earlier author was 'Izz al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 678/1280), a sufi preacher and poet of Jerusalem, who dedicated a book to learning wisdom from plants, birds and other animals: *Kashf al-asrār fī ḥikam al-ṭuyūr wa-l-azhār* ('Unveiling Secrets regarding the Wisdom of Birds and Flowers'). In the section on dogs, which Maqdisī composed in prose as well as verse, we are informed about their superb qualities, as told by the tongue of a dog.<sup>9</sup> Most of the qualities listed run in parallel to those mentioned by Nābulusī and Müstakimzāde. Yet, Maqdisī too had a precedent, a tradition which goes back to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), one of the major early Muslim ascetic scholars, who is credited with this saying: 'Dogs have ten qualities that every believer should aspire to'. He then goes on to describe each quality<sup>10</sup> with almost identical words and expressions as those found in Nābulusī's poem. According to another tradition, however, this statement, accompanied with the list of ten praiseworthy qualities of dogs, is attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>11</sup>

The very description of these ten commendable qualities of dogs implies a close relationship between dogs and human beings. The strength of this bond

<sup>7</sup> For the critical edition and English translation of this treatise, entitled *al-Maqāla al-mufīda fī aḥwāl al-kilāb* ('A Useful Statement on the States of Dogs'), see Necmettin Kızılkaya, "They Cannot Be Left to the Brutality of a Cruel Group. An Ottoman Scholar's Treatise on Dogs", *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, 6 (2022), pp. 122–40.

<sup>8</sup> Kızılkaya, "They Cannot Be Left to the Brutality of a Cruel Group", pp. 134–5 (English); pp. 137–8 (Ottoman).

<sup>9</sup> 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī, *Kashf al-asrār fī ḥikam al-ṭuyūr wa-l-azhār*, ed. 'Alā' 'Abd al-Wahhāb Muḥammad, Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, (s.d.), pp. 112–4.

<sup>10</sup> It is quoted in the fourteenth-century Yemenite scholar, 'Abd Allāh ibn As'ad al-Yāfi'ī's (d. 768/1367) work, entitled *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn fī ḥikāyāt al-sāliḥīn*, Cairo: Maktabat Zahrān, (s.d.), p. 162.

في الكلب عشر خصال ينبغي لكل مؤمن أن تكون فيه: الأولى أن يكون جائعاً، فإنها من آداب الصالحين. الثانية أن لا يكون له مكان معروف، وذلك من علامات المتوكلين. والثالثة أن لا ينام من الليل إلا قليلاً، وذلك من صفات المحبين. والرابعة إذا مات لا يكون له ميراث، وذلك من صفات الزاهدين والخامسة أن لا يترك صاحبه وإن جفاه وضره، وذلك من علامات المرئيين الصادقين. والسادسة أن يرضى من الأرض بأدنى موضع، وذلك من علامات المتواضعين. والسابعة إذا تغلب على مكانه تركه وانصرف إلى غيره، وذلك من علامات الراضين. والثامنة إذا ضرب وطرد وحسب له كسرة أجاب ولم يحدد على ما مضى، وذلك من علامات الخاشعين. والتاسعة إذا حضر الأكل جلس بعيداً ينظر، وذلك من علامات المساكين. والعاشر أنه إذا ارتحل عن مكان لا يلتفت إليه، وهذه من علامات المحزونين.

<sup>11</sup> 'Happy is the one who leads the life of a dog! For the dog has ten characteristics which everyone should possess. First, the dog has no status among creatures; second, the dog is a pauper having no worldly goods; third, the entire earth is his resting place; fourth, the dog goes hungry most of the time; fifth, the dog will not leave his master's door even after receiving a hundred lashes; sixth, he protects his master and his friend, and when someone approaches he will attack the foe and let the friend pass; seventh, he guards his master by night, never sleeping; eighth, he performs most of his duties silently; ninth, he is content with whatever his master gives him; and tenth, when he dies, he leaves no inheritance.' Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006, p. 133.

is particularly brought to our attention in the treatise *al-Ḥikma fī makhlūqāt Allāh* ('The Wisdom in God's Creations') attributed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), who calls us to reflect on the dog's dedication to guarding its owner, at the expense of giving up its own sleep, food and drink, and at times even sacrificing its own life in order to protect him. The dog is equipped with these qualities to benefit human beings.<sup>12</sup> Müstakimzāde takes even a step further in his treatise, as he offers an ontological explanation for the close affinity and ancient companionship which exists between humans and dogs, as they were both created from the same clay:<sup>13</sup>

When the Prophet Adam, peace be upon him, fell to earth, (all animals) were mild-natured, but with the martyrdom of Abel, they all became wild. The Devil took advantage of this and misled them and taught them devilry by which to torture the Prophet Adam. The most violent of these (animals) were dogs. Gabriel, peace be upon him, came and told the Prophet Adam to put his blessed hand on the dog's head. Henceforth, in this way, intimacy and familiarity between the dog and man was formed and the heart was put at ease. The dog actually came into being from the clay from which human came into existence.

What is remarkable here is the link made between human acts and those of animals. It is humans whose wrongdoing alters animal nature. Human violence leads to animal wildness. This relationship can be repaired, but only when humans approach animals with amity and kindness. Ultimately sharing an origin is what binds the two together, an attitude which we may treat as a useful allegory for our ecological concerns today, especially when seeking a rooted discourse about human responsibility.

We have seen above how Islamic theology asserts that not only humans but animals and the rest of creation reflect divine qualities. This is best illustrated in an anecdote about the twelfth-century Egyptian sufi shaykh and founder of the Rifā'iyya order Aḥmad al-Rifā'i (d. 578/1183), who upon hearing someone say: 'God has five thousand names', responded: '(Rather) say: "God the Exalted has names as numerous as His creation: sand, leaves and so forth"'.<sup>14</sup> Every existent being mirrors certain qualities of its Maker. Animals along with the rest of creation reveal the divine names and attributes. A century later, 'Izz al-Dīn al-Maqdisī would confirm that

Every created being confirms the existence of the Creator, and everything that is silent is in reality a speaker. [...] Everything speaks with the tongue of its state (*lisān ḥālīhi*) and the tongue of its speech (*lisān qālihi*). But I find the tongue of its state (*lisān al-ḥāl*) more eloquent than the tongue of speech (*lisān al-qāl*), and more truthful than any verbal

<sup>12</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Ḥikma fī makhlūqāt Allāh*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā Qabbānī, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm, 1404/1984, pp. 101–2.

<sup>13</sup> Kızilkaya, "They Cannot Be Left to the Brutality of a Cruel Group", p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, Cairo: (s.n.), (s.d.), vol. 1, p. 123. I am grateful to Samuela Pagani for bringing relevant parts of Sha'rānī's work to my attention.



statement. For any tongue that provides information can be either declared to be a lie or affirmed to be true, whereas the tongue of one's state speaks nothing but the truth.<sup>15</sup>

The wisdom of animals is widely acknowledged, as they are described as possessing discernment (*fahm*), though unable to speak of what they discern. They are called dumb animals (*bahā'im*), some sufis hold, only because we have no understanding of them (*ibhām*), and not because of their lack of understanding. They possess directed conduct (*tadbīr*) and vision (*ru'ya*) through divine inspiration (*ilhām*).<sup>16</sup> In other words, they are naturally guided by God, and in turn they guide humanity to Him.

One practical outcome of this metaphysical interest in animals is to be found in the periodic advocacy of vegetarianism in Islamic philosophy and spirituality. Here the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 580/1185) famous *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* ('The Living Son of the Awake') is a case in point. The major figure of this fictional story, the solitary autodidact Ḥayy, in his aim to draw near to the Necessarily Existent Being and to become like Him, reaches the conclusion that all animals and plants have an intended purpose. In order to allow them to discharge their providential intent, he resolves to eat as little as possible. He would eat fruits 'provided he was certain not to eat or harm the seeds or throw them in places unfit for vegetation'. Only when no fruit were available 'must he eat meat or eggs, again being careful to take only from the most abundant and not to root out a whole species. [...] As for the amount, he felt it should be enough to stave off hunger, but no more'.<sup>17</sup> For Ḥayy the disruption of the natural order 'would mean opposition to the work of the Creator'.<sup>18</sup> It is this understanding that leads him not only to vegetarianism, but also to exhibiting the utmost care for plants and fruits. The latter we find strikingly emphasised by Ibn Ṭufayl's compatriot Ibn 'Arabī, who speaks of the duties of one's company with not only animals but also trees, as he urges that

If one were to see a withered tree, in need of water, while its owner is not present, and he is capable of watering it at the time of this company (*ṣuḥba*) – as he shaded himself with it, or reclined against it seeking rest from weariness, or stopped by it for any business that suddenly befell him – and he is able to water it, then the right of companionship obliges him to water (the tree), not for the sake of its owner, or out of desire for its fruits.<sup>19</sup>

Another take on vegetarianism, as represented by some Muslim ascetics, is to consider eating meat an obstacle to witnessing the divine presence in creation

<sup>15</sup> Maqdisī, *Kashf al-asrār*, pp. 43–4.

<sup>16</sup> 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Laṭā'if al-minan wa-l-akhlāq fī wujūb al-taḥadduth bi-nimat Alāh 'alā l-iṭlāq*, ed. Aḥmad 'Izzū 'Ināya, Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā, 1425/2004, p. 349.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Tufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān. A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman, New York NY: Twayne, 1972, p. 144–5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Tufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, p. 144.

<sup>19</sup> Muḥyī l-Dīn ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1420/1999, vol. 3, p. 432 (chapter 170).

and thus to one's spiritual closeness to God. Eating meat hardens the heart, ascetics say.<sup>20</sup> Here one may argue for *zuhd*, asceticism or renunciation of worldly pleasures, as a guiding principle for environmentalism. This is best illustrated in an account featuring two major figures of early Sufism:

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī one day goes out into the countryside to visit the pious Rābi'a. Rābi'a is surrounded by tame game, mountain goats, gazelles and other wild animals. As Ḥasan approaches, the animals run off. Ḥasan is jealous of Rābi'a because of this and asks her why the animals run away from him but not from her. Rābi'a asks him what he's eaten. He admits to having eaten onions with fat. Rābi'a then says: 'If you eat the fat of these poor animals, you shouldn't be surprised that they run away from you'.<sup>21</sup>

Such stories appear abundantly in the literature, often accompanied by narratives that emphasise man's responsibility towards animals, whose kind or unkind treatment may cause one's eternal salvation or perdition.<sup>22</sup> A true believer is expected to treat animals as Godly guests:

Someone asks God to please send him a guest. He receives the answer that a guest will come to him tomorrow. The man makes all the preparations but no guest arrives. Only a dog arrives running and is driven away by the man. After waiting all day in vain, the man lies down to sleep. He's reproached in a dream for not having received the dog which was sent to him as a guest. Upset, he rushes after the dog and excuses himself. The dog says: 'You shouldn't ask God for guests but for eyes'.<sup>23</sup>

The eyes that can detect the signs of God in the animal order and beyond are those of the true worshipper who is equipped to serve God in a befitting manner.

Beside dogs, the sources frequently dwell on the topic of cats, especially since cats feature a number of times in Prophetic traditions and are well-documented in Hadith sources.<sup>24</sup> In a treatise dedicated to a close examination of the popular report attributed to the Prophet, 'Love of the cat is a part of faith' (*ḥubb al-hirra min al-īmān*), 'Alī al-Qārī al-Harawī (d. 1014/1606), concludes his treatise with

<sup>20</sup> This is cited by Ibn al-Jawzī who denounces certain sufi practices, one of which is to abstain from eating meat. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, (s.d.), p. 203.

<sup>21</sup> Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul. Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār*, trans. John O'Kane with the editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke, Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 212.

<sup>22</sup> See Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, pp. 337–40.

<sup>23</sup> Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, p. 339.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, a study which analyses the image of cats in Arabic literature, covering Hadith, Prophetic stories (*qiṣāṣ al-anbiyā'*), *adab* literature, poetry, proverbs, fables, and dream interpretations: Giovanni Canova, "Sinnawr, Hurr, Qitt. Il Gatto nella Tradizione Arabo-Islamica", *Quaderni Di Studi Arabi. Nuova Serie*, 9 (2014), pp. 195–214. For a similar study examining Muslim sources in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Die orientalische Katze. Mystik und Poesie des Orients*, Freiburg: Herder, 1995.

a story of the famous early sufi scholar Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946), quoted from Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Tārīkh* (‘History’):<sup>25</sup>

One of the companions of Shiblī said: I saw Shiblī in a dream after his death, and asked (him): ‘How did God treat you?’ He responded: ‘(God) made me stand before Him and said: O Abū Bakr, do you know through the means of what I forgave you? I said: Due to my righteous deeds. He said: No. Then I said: Due to my sincerity in worship. He said: No. I said: Due to my keeping company with the righteous. He said: No. I said: Due to my journeying to seek knowledge. But He said: No. Then I said: O Lord of all these means of salvation, upon which I have settled my heart firmly, assuming that through them You will pardon me. He said: I have not forgiven you through the means of any of these. Then I asked: Through which means (did You forgive me)? He said: Do you remember when you were walking on a street in Baghdad, you found a kitten who weakened by cold, was running from one wall to another hiding from strong snow and cold. You took her out of mercy to her and placed her under the fur you had upon you, in order to protect her from excruciating cold. And I said: Yes. (God) said: Because of your mercy to that kitten, I showed mercy to you.’

The Egyptian sufi ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha’rānī (d. 973/1565), who expresses his gratefulness to God for having granted him a kind heart towards cats and dogs so that he treated them with the utmost generosity, recounts a similar story about Ghazālī who

was seen (in a dream) after his death and was asked: ‘How did God treat you?’ (Ghazālī) responded: ‘He forgave me due to my patience: when a fly landed on my pen drinking from the ink, I withheld writing until it finished and flew away.’<sup>26</sup>

Such examples of attaining eternal salvation through some small act of kindness towards the animal kingdom, or one’s perdition due to cruelty to an animal, are abundant in Islamic literature.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> G. Rex Smith, “*Al-Birrah fī ḥubb al-hirrah*. A 10th/16th Century Arabic Text on Pussy Cats”, *Arabian and Islamic Studies*, ed. R. L. Bidwell and G. R. Smith, London: Longman, 1983, pp. 134–45, at p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> Sha’rānī, *Laṭā’if al-minan*, pp. 349–50.

<sup>27</sup> According to a well-known hadith, for instance, the Prophet relates: ‘A prostitute was forgiven (by God). She had passed by a panting dog near a well. Thirst was about to kill (the dog). She took off her shoe, tied it with her head-cover and drew out some water for (the dog). So, she was forgiven (by God) because of that.’ (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, “Bad’ al-khalq” 17; see also “*Aḥādīth al-anbiyā*” 57). For further examples from sufi literature, see Sha’rānī, *Laṭā’if al-minan*, pp. 349–50. In his *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (vol. 1, p. 123), Sha’rānī narrates a number of anecdotes about Aḥmad al-Rifā’ī and his kind treatment of animals. Whenever a mosquito would land on Aḥmad al-Rifā’ī, he would not make it fly off or allow anyone to remove it, but would remark: ‘Let it drink from the blood, its rightful share given by God’. Whenever a locust would sit on his clothes while he was walking in the sun, he would sit in a shady place, with the words: ‘It shaded itself by means of us’. If a cat fell asleep on his sleeve and the time of prayer arrived, he would cut off his sleeve underneath the cat, being careful not to awaken her; and upon his return from prayer, he would sew it back on the garment. Once he found a mangy or scabby dog which had been abandoned in a distant place. He went with it to the wilderness, fed the dog and gave it to drink, and treated his sore to heal it, and then brought warm water and washed the animal. He

From the initial and emphatic scriptural paradigm of the celebration of the natural world as a theophany, through the complex and highly-diverse pre-modern traditions of theology, mysticism and law, Islam maintained a fairly consistent stance which may be characterised as nature-positive. Like their Christian counterparts, who were also heirs to a complex centuries-old legacy, Muslims who have reflected on animal ethics and more generally on the human vocation to accountable custodianship of the natural world, have found their discourses challenged in the contemporary world. Yet in many salient ways these discourses seem to be reinforced by the contemporary challenges brought about by the instrumental and secular approach to ‘natural resources’, initiated by the Enlightenment and intensified by recent technological advances, the inexorable rise of consumerism and the disenchantment of the natural world. After a slow start, both Muslim and Christian theologians, called upon to respond to this, have critically examined their inherited libraries, where they have found much of enduring value for building a range of novel theological interrogations of some of the founding assumptions and manifestations of contemporary materialism. In not a few cases these new theologies recall the inherently radical and prophetic nature of the two religions’ initial moments, and it may well be that in this area of contemporary theological inquiry and research that we will find many of the most outstanding and outspoken vindications of allegedly outmoded philosophies of human moral involvement in the world.

Working within the context of twentieth-century re-evaluations of some negative medieval conceptions of the natural world and of humanity’s role as its master,<sup>28</sup> a large number of Christian thinkers have devised forms of ‘eco-theology’ which both rehabilitate the natural world and propose specifically Christian solutions to the global crisis of the biosphere. As such, Christian eco-theology entails an ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of environmental destruction.<sup>29</sup> These theologies have sometimes been divided into three broad categories: the ‘apologetic’, which derives a theology of nature from the Bible and theological heritage, the ‘sacramental’, which evolves insights into the sacred ontology of creation, and the ‘eschatological’, which considers and develops conceptions of the transformation of the natural order by the decisive

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would be the one to initiate a greeting whenever he met anyone, even if it were livestock or dogs. When encountering a pig, he would say: ‘Good morning’; and when asked about this he would respond: ‘I habituate myself to beautiful conduct (*u’awwidu nafsi l-jamil*)’. The last example in fact resonates with a hadith which narrates a story about Jesus son of Mary who having ‘encountered a pig on the road, said to it: “Go in peace (*unfudh bi-salam*)”. And when he was told: “You say this to a pig?”, Jesus responded: “I am fearful of habituating my tongue to evil speech (*inni akhāfu an u’awwida lisāni l-nuṭqa bi-l-sū’i*)”. (Mālik, *al-Muwattaʿa*; ‘Kalām’ 1).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Genesis 1:28: ‘fill the earth and subdue it’.

<sup>29</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “Christianity. An Ecological Critique of Christianity and a Christian Critique of Ecological Destruction”, *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 70–8.

Christ event.<sup>30</sup> An important pioneer has been the Catholic priest and theologian Thomas Berry, who drew on Teilhard de Chardin's theory of God's ongoing self-disclosure through evolution and progress. For Berry, humanity confronts an interlude of technical abuse, which will be followed by a redemptive 'Ecozoic' age of maturity and harmony.<sup>31</sup> Papal interventions have also begun to reference the ecological crisis, beginning in a significant way with John Paul II in 1990,<sup>32</sup> and continuing with a widely-reported 2010 speech by Benedict XVI,<sup>33</sup> and a 2015 encyclical by Francis of an eirenic temper which includes a quotation from the sufi saint 'Alī al-Khawwās.<sup>34</sup> Although Francis acknowledges his debt to Orthodox thinkers, his approach is nonetheless distinct from the creation theology of many modern Orthodox theologians. Notably John Zizioulas (d. 2023) identifies a dualistic Western ontology of nature as the ultimate cause of the present disruption of the natural order. Pointing to the rich resources of the Orthodox tradition, rooted in a distinctive conception of the Fall, he calls for a retrieval of a vision of the Christian man as 'priest of Creation', and a return to the apostolic Christian lifestyle of holy simplicity as an antidote to consumerism.<sup>35</sup>

As for their Muslim counterparts in the contemporary period, the first widely-acclaimed response to ecological concerns came from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who wrote of the spiritual dimension of the ecological crisis in a pioneering book published in 1968.<sup>36</sup> He argued that 'the ecological crisis is only an externalization

<sup>30</sup> John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature. Ecology and Cosmic Purpose*, New York NY: Paulist Press, 1993, pp. 88–112.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story. From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era. A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992, p. 242.

<sup>32</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace", 1 January 1990: [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html) (accessed 11 February 2023).

<sup>33</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace", 1 January 2010: [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliii-world-day-peace.html#\\_edn7](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html#_edn7) (accessed 11 February 2023).

<sup>34</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) (accessed 11 February 2023).

<sup>35</sup> John Zizioulas, "Ecological Asceticism. A Cultural Revolution", *Our Planet*, 7/6 (1996), pp. 7–8; see also his "Man the Priest of Creation", *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World*, ed. Andrew Walker and Costa Carras, London: SPCK, 1996, 178–88. For a bibliography of Orthodox writings in this area in English, see John Chrissavgis and Bruce V. Folz (eds.), *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration. Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, Fordham NY: Fordham University Press, 2013, pp. 398–409.

<sup>36</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature. The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1968; later re-published as *Man and Nature. The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990. For Nasr's impact and reception, see Tarik M. Quadir, *Traditional Islamic Environmentalism. The Vision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2013; Ian S. Mevorach, "The Divine Environment (*al-Muhit*) and the Body of God. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Sally McFague Resacralise

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