





clear.

In one of the chapters of the *Furqan: Sura 25*), revelation to all humanity becomes the point of reference for distinguishing right from wrong. The same chapter goes on to cite examples

rooted in the idea of the divine command as a basis for establishing moral order through human endeavour.

morality that presents humanity with a distinction between right and wrong. By grounding a moral code in divine will, an opportunity is afforded to human beings to respond by creating a rational awareness that sustains the validity of revelation. It is then that a wider basis for human action is possible, if rationality comes to be applied as a result of revelation to elaborate criteria for encompassing the totality of human actions and decisions. These themes are played out in

Adam, the first human, is distinguished from existing angels, who are asked to bow down to him by virtue of his knowledge capable of being described linguistically and thereby codified, a capacity not accessible to angels, who are seen as one-dimensional beings. This creative capacity carries with

innate nature and limits.

In time, Adam too fails to live within the limits set by God and loses his honourable status, but without any connotation that this implies a doctrine of original sin. This he will have to recover subsequently by struggling with and overcoming his indiscretions on earth which is the new arena of life that allows for choice and action. Ultimately he does recover his former status, attesting to the capacity to return to the right course of action through awareness of his error.

n built into the



human condition and the unfolding saga of human response to a continuous divine revelation in history. Moreover, it exemplifies the ongoing struggle within humanity to discover the equilibrium that allows for balanced action and submission to the divine criterion.

Revelation, Reason and the Law

Law has been a subject of central importance and significance in Muslim thought and practice.

ethical norms to create a very pervasive legal culture which is often considered as one of the great achievements of Muslim civilisations.

It is important to get a sense of the historical development of law in Islam, to help dispel two false assumptions. The first is that Muslim law is a fixed and unchanging seventh-century system and the second, that it is highly restrictive, mediaeval in its outlook and antithetical to the needs of modern society.

The term used to refer to Muslim law is *Shari'a*. The connotation behind this concept is that God intends human beings to follow a divinely ordained path, but that such a path had also

To each of you we have granted a path and a way of life ... Had God wished He could
to test you in what He has
granted to each of you; so strive in pursuing virtue and be aware that to God you will all

Muslim schools of law developed over a period of centuries in response to questions that arose as the Muslim Community or *Ummah* expanded and encountered other peoples and cultures with established systems of belief and law. There developed over time a methodology of analysis and application through which answers could be obtained. The methodology is known as *fiqh*



diversity in background and context of the many cultures of humankind and while they embody universal values, based on revelations, they have evolved into different societies which have adapted these values to specific circumstances and historical conditions. This has not however prevented some scholars from time to time taking more rigid approaches to how law should be implemented. Societies such as Indonesia and various African nations, which have significant Muslim populations, have incorporated practices that are indigenous to their societies with traditions of Muslim law and added to these, in modern times, civil codes from Western legal traditions. In general, a great deal of diversity exists in the Muslim world with regard to legal codes and, virtually in every one of them, various systems co-exist, as legal codes continue to be adapted to contemporary life.

Law and Changing Contexts

The process of community development in the Muslim experience suggests that change can only occur when people are able to create institutions that are validated culturally and rely on the goodwill and support of all the constituencies involved. Where poverty and underdevelopment, for example, have become solidly entrenched, communities often lose the

God would not change the condition of a people unless they choose to change themselves

Faith, while functioning to provide hope, needs to be complemented by and translated into social action where those who ultimately benefit are offered the opportunity to become stakeholders and are able to perceive change as affecting not just their economic life but also as an element that deepens and strengthens their sense of identity and religious values.

that have legal, social and economic implications simultaneously. The community and its leaders are to be seen as custodians of these values and have the responsibility of ensuring that the state and key segments of society oversee the needs of the poor. This compassion and care



on the part of leaders or the state as urged by several Muslim thinkers and leaders is seen by them as a key to fostering a just and beneficial order in their societies.

However, in the context of the urgency in our time to deal with issues of poverty, Muslims also need to work with others to promote enabling conditions among the poorer parts of the world, because there is now a universal language and understanding to promote and urge ethical action on the part of all who believe in it. In this respect, Muslims have often sought inspiration from a

The verses are addressed to the Prophet and bear witness to



striving for excellence through a shared ethical engagement, to alleviate the conditions of conflict and suffering brought on by the global challenges of our time.