

BOOK REVIEWS

Osman Bakar, Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage.

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Osman Bakar is one of the fewest Muslim thinkers who attempt to apply Islamic philosophy across disciplines. This current work of his applies intellectual Sufism to the field of environmental science. The demand for profounding new ideas related to environmental care is increasing, as the world reaches dead ends for solutions to environmental deterioration. Knowing that human interaction has its roots in human thought, Bakar tackles the issues related to modern scientism from its bottom line. He analyses the fundamental philosophical principles of traditional and modern science worldviews to replace the latter with the former school of thought.

In this book, Bakar shows that modern scientism is secularism as it deviates the self from the spiritual part of man, the Supreme Being (God) and the natural world. Traditional Islamic science, in contrast, treasures the hierarchical relationship of the three, affirming the unicity of nature in a vertical way and the Unity of God in a horizontal way. Bakar adds to the idea that ecological consciousness can be either derived from sentimental or intellectual sources. The latter, he mentions, largely exists in the Qur'an, but remains unnoticed by contemporary Muslim minds. In regards to this, he demonstrates an approach that signifies the Islamic intellectual tradition and concentrates on a *tawhidic* framework that originates from the teachings of the Qur'an and the universal set of principles that is rooted in the nature of reality.

Bakar asserts that nature, which is also named “*Qur'an Takwini*” (Qur'an of the creation)”, similarly like the “*Qur'an Tadwini*” (the recorded Qur'an), is sacred; thus, should be handled and managed in the most proper way. Furthermore, it also carries a law that substitutes certainty and stability in its essence. They are permanent, unchangeable, and are not able to act oppositely to their nature, however, modern science has unfortunately reduced nature or natural science, to

a kind of precision and certitude that negates the affirmation of God, depending only on modern science for certification.

However, one must not misinterpret that Bakar negates the significant contributions of science and technological progress. What he meant was for human beings to not submit themselves to what modern science claims to be. His comprehensive formula involves an affirmation of unity, which implies the metaphysical inter-relatedness of all things in the universe to worship and affirm the Almighty. He states in the first chapter of his book:

“In pursuing science, they discovered that the more they came to know about nature, the more glaring the truth of unicity of nature would appear to them... —a firm belief in the Unity of God.” [p.25]

In the second chapter of his book, following his mentor Nasr, Bakar invites the Muslim community to discuss the topic of man and nature. He also emphasizes inter-civilisational, interfaith dialogues and conversations on traditional religious cosmologies that can rekindle the spiritual vision of nature and establish harmony, respect and appreciation of man and nature. These elements are regarded as integral and intellectual as they are grounded and sustained by objective knowledge, not only of nature’s delicate ecological balance and unity but also the metaphysical nexus between all created things and God [p.51].

The third chapter provides Bakar’s interpretation of Qur’anic verses on the idea of the earth as humans’ only planetary home. He speaks of the cosmic theories, traditional and modern, pertaining to their metaphysical dimensions, which included the moral and spiritual significance in the whole scheme of creation. The diversity or multiplicity of things seen as a contradiction in the material world is therefore unified by epistemological principles that create internal harmony. For example, the micro and macrocosmic views of man and the universe are able to explain humans’ cosmic positions on earth as theomorphic beings and God’s vicegerents on earth. Therefore, man is not only created to fulfil the demands of the physical world but also to worship the Creator and serve as a trustee and a guardian of God’s planet, aka man’s temporary home.

This book is a revised and expanded version of its previous edition, also published by the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University Malaya, in 2007. It is now value-added with the third chapter on Qur’anic views, which marks the significance of any contemporary research, e.g. integration of science and religion, that is able to give solutions to the modern world’s graving issues, e.g., environment. Bakar, like other scholars such as Guenon, Nasr, Al-Attas, and Alparslan have deep concerns about the metaphysical responses of science’s dependency on philosophy and worldviews. In contrast, some groups deny science entirely or are on the side of pushing modern science to the top. Bakar

supports the idea of cultivating natural science and developing a technology based on the concept of harmony (not the domination concept of human animalistic nature). This opinion of Bakar addresses a balance between many views as it allows another form of technology that is essentially in harmony with the natural environment.

To conclude, the environmental wisdom of the Islamic heritage evolves around a spiritual consciousness that cultivates a deep intimacy with every component of nature. It is also regarded as inevitable in the journey of ecological sustainability. The Muslims' blindness to the Islamic teachings about nature, the science of nature, and the objectives of knowledge is to be blamed for the escalating environmental issues in the Muslim world. Bakar's book managed to give a new spirit to the field of applied environmental science and evoke Muslim minds in regard to the importance of seeking and spreading the message of ecological consciousness, as the Qur'an explains in 7:85:

“Do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order: that will be best for you if you have faith.”