

Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth

The Islamic Heritage

Revised Second Edition



Osman Bakar

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New Preface

The present book is a revised and expanded version of its first edition, which was published nearly fifteen years ago (2007). This new edition has an additional chapter titled “The Qur’anic Idea of Earth as Our Only Planetary Home,” which itself is a revised version of my contributory chapter to Imtiyaz Yusuf’s edited book *A Global and Planetary Ethics for Climate Change and Sustainable Energy* published in 2016 by Mahidol University in Bangkok. The inclusion of the revised version of this article as a third chapter of the new edition further strengthens the Qur’anic theme of environmental and ecological wisdom that was adopted in the previous edition. This third chapter seeks to reinforce the argument that the planet Earth is humanity’s only planetary home with scriptural support from the Qur’an.

Since the earlier edition of the book and the earlier version of

Chapter 3 were published years ago, I have made the effort to revise their content wherever necessary. The new edition also contains a bibliography and an index that was not made available in the first edition. Viewed as a whole, the present edition treats readers with a much more comprehensive coverage of the Islamic treasury of environmental and ecological wisdom than the one earlier provided. The body of wisdom under discussion is very pertinent to the issue of the Earth's planetary ecological health that the whole humanity is now facing. With the ecological health in question now worsening, it is our sincere hope that the publication of this work can contribute in a small way to the worldwide efforts to address this unprecedented ecological challenge in human history.

I would like to thank the Centre for Civilizational Dialogue (CCD) of University of Malaya and the Islamic Book Trust (IBT) for their kind agreement to co-publish this new edition of the book. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Datuk Dr Azizan Baharuddin, Director of CCD and Mr. Koya Kutty and Mr. Yusoff Sultan of IBT for all the support they have rendered to me that made this publication possible.

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December 27, 2021/22 Jumada al-Awwal 1443

Preface 2007

In the Name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate

Islam is a much talked about religion these days, especially following the tragic event of September 11, 2001. Whether it is being talked about positively or otherwise, most of the discussions and references to the religion and its followers, however, tend to be confined to such issues as political Islam and extremism, the Shari'ah (Islamic law), Islam and women, Islamic banking, and intra-Islamic conflicts. There are other facets of Islamic life and thought that are rarely discussed despite their importance, not only to the future of the Islamic world, but also the future of humanity as a whole and our planet Earth. One of these neglected facets is Islamic ecological and environmental thought. Even among Muslims, this precious dimension of Islamic thought has

seldom been brought to light for the attention of the general public.

Given the deteriorating environmental degradation in many Muslim countries today, including Malaysia, there is an urgent need to bring to light Islam's ecological and environmental wisdom left buried in its rich spiritual, intellectual, and scientific heritage. There is also the need to popularize this wisdom, and to point out in what way it is relevant to our search for solutions to contemporary ecological and environmental problems. For these reasons, we have decided to publish this little book on ecological and wisdom in Islamic legacy, and to title it *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: the Islamic Heritage*. This book in fact introduces readers to our larger work on ecological and environmental thought in Islam presently under preparation.

In writing this book we have been much inspired by the writings of Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the subject, particularly his widely acclaimed work, *Man and Nature*, which we first read as a student in London in 1970. Nasr excels others, especially when it comes to expounding with clarity the spiritual dimension of modern ecological and environmental crisis. Like his works in question, this book gives great emphasis to the spiritual dimension of Islam's ecological and environmental wisdom. However, in this work, we have not neglected to mention and discuss other dimensions of this wisdom, albeit briefly, particularly the scientific and the economic. In putting such a great emphasis on the spiritual foundation of Islamic environmentalism and ecological consciousness, we have been dictated by our firm belief that the root causes of the progressive

destruction of the natural environment that we see today are to be found in the modern abandonment of a spiritual vision of nature in favor of a desacralized and secularized view of it. We believe that we cannot solve contemporary environmental and ecological problems by relying on help from science and technology alone, without bothering to bring positive changes to our “problematic” attitudes toward the environment.

The book is comprised of just two chapters. The first chapter compares and contrasts the origins and developments of environmental and ecological consciousness in the modern West and in traditional Islamic civilization. In the modern West, environmental consciousness grew out of its bitter experience with pollution and numerous other environmental hazards, which were the consequences of man’s own doing. In traditional Islamic civilization, however, environmental and ecological wisdom is an essential component of Islam’s teachings on the relationship between man and nature, or between the natural order and the human order. Environmental consciousness in Islam developed in tandem with his spiritual realization of the idea of Divine Unity that is so central to Islamic life and thought. The chapter discusses the centrality of environmental consciousness in Islamic teachings, and identifies fundamental ecological and environmental principles preserved in the treasury of Islamic wisdom, not only in the Qur’an, but also in the pages of Islamic scientific and technological history. The chapter attempts to show how close was the relationship between ecological and environmental wisdom in Islam and the kind of scientific and technological culture developed within its civilization. We also

take the opportunity in the chapter to discuss briefly what Malaysia specifically, as a Muslim-majority country, can learn from traditional Islamic ecological and environmental wisdom, especially in light of its *Islam Hadhari* (civilizational Islam) policy, which posits “safeguarding the environment” as one of its principles.

The second chapter argues for the need for dialogues on ecological and environmental issues among the world’s religions and spiritual traditions, and among nations and civilizations. It revisits Nasr’s *Man and Nature*, which we look upon as the first work written in modern times on inter-religious and inter-civilizational dialogue on the issue of global ecological and environmental crisis. Through this chapter, we would like to renew the book’s call for the re-discovery of the spiritual value of nature with the view of applying its spiritual principles to contemporary environmental problems. Viewing ecological and environmental wisdom in Islamic legacy as also humanity’s precious heritage, we have therefore been inspired to disseminate this wisdom through various means, including dialogue. Sharing this forgotten wisdom with the rest of humanity through dialogue for the sake of the planet Earth is the core message of the whole book.

We would like to thank the Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya, especially its Director, Professor Dr Azizan Baharuddin, for having agreed to publish this book under its name. We also wish to record our sincere appreciation of the various helps rendered by the Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur under the supervision of Haji P.K. Koya Kutty to the publication

PREFACE 2007

of this book. *Wa mā tawfiqī illā bi'LLāh.*

Osman Bakar

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6 Sha'bān, 1428 (lunar) / August 19, 2007

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This new (second) edition of the book introduces readers to Islam's exceptionally rich legacy of ecological and environmental wisdom preserved in its revealed scripture, the Qur'an, and in the pages of its scientific and technological history. Although the author puts special emphasis on the spiritual dimension of this wisdom, he has not failed to discuss other dimensions of this wisdom, particularly the scientific and the economic. Moreover, he argues for a holistic approach to contemporary environmental and ecological problems that would give due recognition to the importance of a spiritual vision of nature. For the sake of the ecological health of the planet earth, the book invites Muslims to share Islam's environmental and ecological wisdom with the rest of humanity, particularly through dialogue.

Osman Bakar, a doctorate in Islamic philosophy is currently Holder of Al-Ghazali Chair of Epistemology and Civilizational Studies and Renewal at ISTAC-IIUM and Emeritus Professor in Philosophy of Science at University of Malaya. He was also formerly Malaysia Chair of Islam in Southeast Asia at Georgetown University, Washington DC. Dr Osman is author and editor of 41 books and numerous articles on various aspects of Islamic thought and civilisation. His most well-known book is *Classification of Knowledge in Islam* (1992). His latest work (ed.) is *Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters* (2020). He has been named among the 500 most influential Muslims in the world since 2009.



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