

***An Introduction to Qur'anic Ecology and Resonances with Laudato Si'*, by
Farhana Mayer:**

A Response by Revd Professor Joshtram Kureethadam SDB

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*Remarks Given at Online Book Launch, hosted by the Laudato Si' Research Institute and the UN
Environment Programme Faith for Earth Initiative, Thursday 19th October 2023*

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. It's a great joy to join our conversation on behalf of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and to be here at the Laudato Si' Research Institute.

I would like to congratulate Farhana Mayer for this very important contribution. As someone who has worked with *Laudato Si'* and continues to work on *Laudato Si'*, her work, *Praise to God, Lord of the Worlds': An Introduction to Qur'anic Ecology and Resonances with Laudato Si'*, resonated deeply with me.

Laudato Si', Pope Francis' landmark encyclical letter on *Care for Our Common Home*, was an invitation to "a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet," and augured "a conversation which includes everyone" (LS, 14). It is wonderful to see that this conversation is indeed happening, with civil society, with people's movements, and I would say, in a very remarkable way with faith communities around the world. *Laudato Si'* was signed on the 24th of May 2015, but published on the 18th of June. By the end of June, we had the Jewish Declaration, the *Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis*, and hardly three months after, there was the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, and in October that same year we have the *Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders*, and around the same time the Hindus came out with *Bhumi Devi Ki Jail: A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change*.

So this is a very, very encouraging factor: that *Laudato Si'*, in a way, helped to spur this interfaith collaboration: Iyad [Dr Iyad Abu Moghli] will remember that at the Vatican, on the 4th of October 2021, there were nearly 40 faith leaders present at the invitation of Pope Francis, who came to the Vatican and signed a joint statement in view of COP26 in Glasgow. It's very encouraging to see how faith communities are responding to *Laudato Si'*: I've seen many blogs and many articles with responses to *Laudato Si'* from specific faiths, groups, or schools of thought. Now, for the first time, I've seen a book-length contribution, and for this I can I congratulate and thank Farhana Mayer.

In an initial review of the book, I highlighted seven resonances between *Laudato Si'* and Farhana's book: the emphasis on praise; the symbolic view of creation as living signs of God, as *āyāt*; the centrality of mercy; the recovery of our responsibility as guardians, *khalīfah*, of creation; the importance of balance; the attention to equal justice, and to climate justice in particular; and, last but not least, the insistence on moderation.

Today I would like to highlight three of these resonances. First of all, I think the most important contribution of this book is that it helps us to rediscover the sacredness of God's creation. This is something we share among all our faith traditions: as Farhana quotes from the Qur'an,

‘Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God’ (Q. 2:115). And we see other signs of God everywhere: I think of the Fathers of the Church who spoke of the two books of God, the Book of Works, God’s first and primordial revelation which is creation, and the second book, the Book of Words, God’s revelation. I think it’s important to read from both these books, and that’s what Farhana does in a very, very remarkable way in this book, reading from the Book of Works, reading from the Book of Words, to rediscover the sacredness of God’s creation.

A second resonance, I think, is that when we rediscover creation as sacred it reminds us of our vocation. The vocation of all creatures is to praise God. Farhana quotes the Qur’an, ‘whatever is in the heavens and the earth praises God’ (Q. 57:1), and I think of the Book of Psalms, and precisely the last of the Psalms, Psalm 150, and its very last words, “Let everything that lives and breathes give praise to God”: that is our vocation. Eastern theology, and especially Orthodox theology, has highlighted this, that our vocation is to be like the choirmaster who can help the entire creation continue to render praise and glory to God. The late John Zizioulas developed the beautiful concept of humans as “priests of creation” who gratefully receive the gifts of creation and prayerfully offer them back to the Creator.

I conclude with the third resonance, which is about our responsibility, even beyond our vocation to join creation’s praise of God, our responsibility to be stewards of creation, the beautiful concept of *khalīfah* that the book proposes. Farhana meditates on the word ‘lieutenant’ and digs out its original meaning in French, namely our vocation to be *lieu tenant*, “the one who holds the place”. So we are indeed stewards, we are tenants, and we need to imitate God’s own care in being stewards of creation. I’m reminded of Rowan Williams, who said we are really *imago dei*, we really reflect God’s image, not when we dominate our God’s creation, but when we care for God’s creation.

Allow me to conclude: this book raised in me hope, but also a challenge. Hope, because, working at the Vatican, I see that in the dark moment of the current climate crisis, children and youth are coming together to dream and work for a better world. I see a lot of hope in movements, especially those led by women, coming together for the care of our common home, and my greatest hope is in faith communities coming together. But this last one is also a challenge. Because we are a sleeping giant, we are 83% of humanity and we are still to wake up! I think that today as faith communities we need rediscover our prophetic vocation. We need to ask ourselves sincerely: are we becoming prophets courageous to denounce the injustices that are wrecking our common home? As faith communities, can we walk the talk? Can we turn prophecy into action?

Thank you very much for listening to me, and once again, from the bottom of my heart, Farhana, thank you. Thank you for this very important, beautiful contribution. Thank you, and God bless.