

Islam and the Relation of Science and the Qur'an

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Abstract. The relation of science and religion is one of the most important interdisciplinary issues in the world from the past to the present. Any kinds of religion generally brought about a new challenging discussion with science; Islam and its scriptures are not exceptions in this case. The Qur'an as a main Islamic scripture has a direct relation with science and scientific matters according to many thinkers' declarations; it is obvious that there are opponents for this subject, on the other side. The purpose of this paper is to examine main categories of the relation of science and religion and then assess and reveal the opponents and adherents' beliefs regarding the relation of religion and science and relation of science and the Qur'an with a precise library method. This paper provided readers with the role and dignity of science in Islam and remarkable viewpoints of great thinkers regarding the issue of the relation of science and the Qur'an.

Keywords: Islam, Science, Religion, Qur'an, Relation of science and the Qur'an.

1. Introduction

Learn the science from the cradle (birth) to the grave (death)

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Bihar ul-Anwar/ Nahjol Fisaha

Felicity and complete self-satisfaction are the main reasons for human-living which man should move to them, promote and develop him in these ways. Hereby, various religions highlighted these objects for human and showed the straight path to him by using guidelines. One of these guidelines is to stress on the significance of knowledge, science and comprehension which has been emphasized by Islam as a monotheistic religion with its book *al- Qur'an* so many times. "Say: are those who know equal to those who know not?"[1]

The aforementioned guideline along with the human tendency towards growth and entelechy prepared a special context for declaring his interest to religion and science. He, therefore, in a form of Muslim or non-Muslim started his research activities and in this way he has created many scientific works and reports such as scientific exegeses, modern science in Islam and the Qur'an i.e. biology, embryology, botany, zoology and etc.

2. Islam and Science

The question of *when was the science appeared in Islam* is a main starting point for this paper. While Muslims achieved new territories at the first century of hegira, they began to have interaction between Islam and other nations such as Persian civilization and Greece. [2]

But conflicts occurred at the Umayyad period [3] had a hump role in the path of Muslims' progress and decreased their connection with nations and societies for several years. Fortunately, the scientific development again started when the Abbasid dynasty came into power. [4] They established their centre in Baghdad city and opened their kingdom to the West. After that the translation movement was intensified, and many paperbacks from Greece, writings in Sanskrit and Syriac were translated into 'Arabic. Muslims

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learned medicine, math, astronomy, natural sciences and philosophy. Muslim scholars wrote their best works at the third and fourth centuries like Avicenna who wrote his well-known books with the titles of *the Canon of Medicine* (*Al-Qanun fi'l-tibb*) and *the Book of Healing* (*Kitab al-Shifa'*). The translation movement was formed in the West at the twelfth century with focusing on the theories of Avicenna and Averroes. [5]

Above matters testified in what way science was downloaded in the body of Islam. Besides, there are some incentives that made Muslims mindful and conscious about the science which are mentioned as follows:

2.1. Exhortation of the Qur'an and Prophet's Hadith

Many Qur'anic verses signify the importance of science and learning, which provoked the attention of Muslims interests. For example, in the Qur'an stated "Say: Are those who know equal to those who know not? It is only men of understanding who will remember". [6]

Hadiths and narrations from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are also other incentives for Muslims. For instance, Prophet (pbuh) narrated that learning of science is an obligatory ordinance for all Muslims .i.e. man and woman, [7] or he stated that those who wish this world must learn (comprehend) the science; those who wish the futurity (next world) must learn the science and those who wish both the worlds must learn the science as well. [8] Therefore, it is really understandable the role and significance of science in the Islamic scriptures, while the sacred texts attracted Muslims to follow the scientific discourses. There are also some Qur'anic verses which accentuated the ways of learning. As God says " Say: Behold all that is in the heavens and the earth". [9]

2.2. Preparing Educational-Research Facilities

Another admirable incentive came out from the governors or the thinkers of a region. For example, "the rulers of Abbasid dynasty Harun al-Rashid and his son, al-Mamun, devoted the empire to the study of sciences, culture and the arts, while actively seeking knowledge from other cultures. Within fifty years of the establishment of the dynasty, Baghdad had been the cultural center of the world and al-Mamun established the Baghdad school called the "House of Wisdom", where al-Farabi taught". [10] 'Ezod Dowlah Deilami as a ruler of Buyid dynasty prepared an especial assembly room for debates and discussions of scholars and philosophers. [11]" Razi as the thinker of the fourth century of hegira built a house which was called *Darul 'ilm or the House of Science* for probers and researchers". [12]

These kinds of incentive assisted Muslims to learn and practice more particularly the natural sciences. Muslims adapted or compared these sciences with Qur'anic verses. The initial steps regarding the issue of the relation of science and the Qur'an have been emerged and this paper examines this relation in the next section.

3. The relation of science and the Qur'an

It is understandable that the issue of science and the Qur'an is an interesting and contentious discussion among the thinkers of religious and Islamic studies. Most thinkers attempt to propagate this issue and some of them decline it. Historical and scientific views have the main effects on their acceptance or rejection. With reference to popular discourses on the relation of religion and science, there is also another reason for the thinkers' statements, which the majority of them follow the Barbour's (1990) classifications. Barbour (1990) divides the relation of science and religion into four categories which include (a) contradiction and conflict, (b) independence, (c) interaction or dialogue and (d) unity and integration. [13] The importance of this classification is sensible when a scholar wants to prove or expand his/her idea. While an author with a positive view on the relation of religion and science has accepted the interaction or the unity; on the other hand, the one with a negative standpoint has assessed the contradiction or independence of religion and science. Noticeably, those who wrote books, articles concerning the relation of religion and science should follow above classification that it would be true about the relation of science and the Qur'an. In this case, an adherent of this relation should accept the truth of this relationship in order to explain his/her idea. For example, a book entitled *the Geographical Concept of Mountains in the Qur'an* mentioned that "the Qur'an consistently describes mountains as stabilizers for the Earth's surface which hold it firmly lest it should shake with us, and as pickets (or pegs) for the Earth hold it surface (i.e. the Earth's lithosphere) down as a means of

fixation". [14] Hereby, the author accepted the correctness of science and the Qur'an's interaction, because he referred to various geological encyclopaedias and resources for the purpose of proving his statement, "in the *Dictionary of the natural environment*, Monkhouse and Small (1978) define the term mountain as follows: A markedly elevated landform, bounded by steep slopes and rising to prominent ridges or individual summits-peaks". [15] Na'ik(2001) also declared "The scientific evidences of the Qur'an clearly prove its divine origin...and the Qur'an contains a complete code of life for the individual and society". [16] So, it is obvious that Na'ik agrees the unity and integration principle. On the other hand, there are opponents' viewpoints i.e. Nekoonam (1999) who is a scholar of Qur'anic Studies in the religious city of Qum expressed his negative viewpoints about the relation of science and the Qur'an. He believed that there is not any compatibility between science and religion and the existence of scientific matters in the Qur'an or scientific relations with the Qur'an is null. [17] He assumed the language of the Qur'an as a general language ('urf) according to its historical context; 'Arabs of early Islam were unfamiliar with scientific matters such as astrology, cosmology, biology, etc. Abduh (1980) also denies the interaction of science and the Qur'an and he stated that "the path to reach science and discoveries would be intellect and experience rather than tradition and religious sciences". [18]

4. Remarkable Views on the Issue of the Relation of Science and the Qur'an

The Middle East and Asia have brought great thinkers in different fields to the world from the past to the present. Abu Raihan Biruni as the expert of philosophy, physics, math and astronomy of Persia, Avicenna who is a famous influential polymath, al-Ghazali with the tendency towards religious sciences and philosophy and other scholars from the Middle East altogether made the golden age of Islam. Indeed, the historical and religious contexts of the Middle East such as the holy shrines, Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Religious Seminaries (Howzeh) from the primary age of Islam, and the existence of the scientific debates between Muslims scholars and Western scientists at the period of Abbasids kept the relation of religion and science alive in the Middle East; the presence of consecutive great scholars naturally leads to critical and scientific debates as well as the challenges between the science and the Qur'an.

The historical background of this relationship implies on the significance of this issue and many thinkers have evaluated the relation of science and the Qur'an. Although some groups believed that the former thinkers like al-Ghazali, al-Meresi, Zarkeshi, Soyouti and Feyz Kashani successively discussed the relation of science and the Qur'an; some people considered Avicenna as a pioneer of the comparison of the Qur'anic verses with scientific matters such as the Ptolemaic system. In the verse "and eight angels will, that Day, bear the Throne of your Lord above them" [19] he interpreted the Throne ('Arsh) to empyrean or the ninth sphere of Ptolemaeus. [20]

Then, al-Ghazali mentioned that the Qur'an is the source of inner knowledge (ma'rifa) and the source of general knowledge. [21] Al-Meresi with an extremist viewpoint approved the al-Ghazali's opinion and added this statement "all of sciences from the first to the last are in the Qur'an", [22] which Zarkeshi in *the Tafseer al-Burhan* accepted this theory as well.

However, there are some examples would be helpful to find out more about the Qur'an and science. Al-Ghazali in *al-Jawahir* regarding this verse "And when I am ill, it is He who cures me" [23] extracted a medical miracle [24]. Al-Meresi with the benefit of al-Ghazali's theory applied science of algebra from the mysterious letters (Huruf Muqatta'a), and then Zarkeshi by using this verse "when the earth is shaken with its (final) earthquake"[25] predicted an earthquake. [26] And Soyouti in *al-itqan fi ulumel Qur'an* and *al-Eklil fi estenbate tanzil* and Feyz Kashani in the introduction of his book *al-Wafi* supported the theories of former scholars. [27] Nevertheless, above opinions encountered opponents' ideas such as Shatebi when he replied to al-Ghazali and al-Meresi "the Qur'an has been just revealed with the intention of expressing the Hereafter secondary rules (ahkam) and its relevant topics". [28]

Apart from above, several noticeable utterances from contemporary scholars proclaim the adhesion of science and Qur'an such as Tantawi (1935), Maurice Bucaille (1976), M. Hussein Dahabi (1976), Zakir Nai'k (2000), Zaghoul Naggar (2003), S. Muhammad Reza Nouri (2005), and M. Ali Rezai Isfahani (2010); on the other hand, the opponents' statements such as M. Abduh (1980), J. Nekoonam (1999), A. Karim Soroush (2011) emphasized on the independence of science and the Qur'an.

On balance, these kinds of discussion have been continuing and rebounding to its hypersensitivity, while Einstein's statement which is " the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible ... in every true searcher of nature there is a kind of religious reverence ... science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind" [29] increased the adherents' attention to the relation of science and religion as well as science and the Qur'an; beside, contemporary thinkers' works such as a book with the title of *Atheism and Science* by Atkins [30] (2006) which emphasized on the incompatibility of science and religion, uphold the opponents' accounts regarding the relation of science and religion and science and the Qur'an.

5. Conclusions

This paper provided following main points:

- a) The relation of science and religion is divided into four groups: (1) contradiction and conflict, (2) independence, (3) interaction and dialogue and (4) unity and integration.
- b) Adherents of the relation of science and religion (science and the Qur'an) follow the interaction and unity of science and religion but opponents of this relation confirm the contradiction and independence of science and religion.
- c) The Qur'an and Hadith are the main incentives which influenced on Muslims' scientific achievements and researches.
- d) The issues like the relation of religion and science or science and the Qur'an, their compatibilities or incompatibilities and their challenges and conflicts will be continued based on the world's development. Thus, the adherents and opponents' accounts are even being varied.

6. Acknowledgments

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7. References

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- [30] Peter William Atkins is a British chemist and former Professor of Chemistry at the University of Oxford. He is a well-known atheist, who has written and spoken on issues of humanism.