

# IS THERE A CONFLICT BETWEEN RELIGION AND SCIENCE?

Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri

**Citation format:** Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri, "Is there a conflict between religion and science ", CIFIA Global Journal, Vol 3, June 2021

## Abstract

Religion has two essential elements, believe in a Creator God, and believe in the creation of this cosmos which includes its inhabitant creatures. It is believed that the first generation of human beings who inhabited Planet Earth believed in the creator God. Later, many religions came into being who deviated from this belief. Currently, it is estimated that there are over 10,000 religions in the world whose beliefs are varied from each other. Science is an intellectual research and practice of observing and studying the physical world to find facts and use them for the benefit of mankind. On the face of it, both religion and science look totally disconnected from each other. However, as the scientific discoveries progressed and facts of the physical world were unfolded, these seemed in contradiction with certain beliefs of the people following different religions. Particularly, the theory of evolution, which was meant to benefit mankind, proved to be a cursor for some people to solidify their belief in non-existence of a Creator God of this Cosmos. We have discussed all aspects related with this issue and have tried to find facts in this context.

*Keywords – Science, religion, creation, evolution, Atheism, Agnosticism*

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## The original religion of mankind

When we study human history, we realize that people worshiped different gods at different times. Many philosophers say that the number of religions increased because people thought that one God was not sufficient to run this massive cosmos. They thought there must be several gods, like a god each for war, love, crops, wealth, knowledge, etc. Some people thought that a Chief God also exists under whom different lesser gods are active in the Cosmos. Some others thought that there is a big force under whom several gods are working. Some thought there were 3 gods who enjoy absolute power, and so on. All these beliefs were the deviated forms of the original religion of human beings.

German anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954) wrote that the original religion of humanity

was Urmonotheismus (original or primitive monotheism). He published a 12-Volume treatise, titled, 'Der Ursprung der Gottesidee' (The Origin of the Idea of God) over a span of 42 years, during 1912-1954. This treatise was based on his detailed research. He explained that the oldest religion of all tribal people of the world was monotheism of one benevolent God. Later, men and women began to worship several gods. He criticized the 'revolutionary or evolutionary monotheism theory' which claims that the emergence of monotheistic thought was the result of gradual process spanning the Bronze and Iron Age polytheistic religions of classical antiquity. His research was based on the evidence from Native American mythology, Australian aborigine, and other primitive civilizations of Egypt, China, India, Greece, etc. In 1930s he wrote – 'the Supreme Being became dim only among later generations of human beings.'

Scottish anthropologist Andrew Lang (1844-1912) wrote that Urmonotheism or Urreligion was the original religion of mankind which is known as Original Monotheism or Primitive Monotheism. Based on his research, Andrew Lang concluded that all non-monotheistic and polytheistic religions were later evolved as a degenerated form of Urreligion.

## The conflict between science and religion

The conflicts and difference of opinion occur when there is a clash between religious convictions and logical conclusions based on our scientific observations in the physical world. Over a period, these were the result of varied religious beliefs and traditions of the followers of different religions. The concept of secularism also came

into being in view of the conflicts between the followers of different religions in the world.

Philosophers, theologians, scientists, historians, and others have debated the issue of the relationship between religion and science for centuries. The reason being that people believing in different faiths and ideologies looked at certain things in the physical environment and thought that they were the result of certain divine aspects. Their observations were their individual opinions, not based on scientific facts. Gradually these observations became part of their theological faith. Certain religious scholars tried to interpret their religious scriptures to prove that what they thought was part of their religion. Like Ahmed Radha Khan of Bareilly (1856-1921) claimed that the Earth was flat because everyone in the beginning thought so. To prove earth was flat, he tried to interpret certain Quranic verses and made it look like a religious belief even though the Quran explicitly described the earth as egg shaped. The Quran says – ‘He (Allah) made the earth egg-shaped (79-30). Same thing happened in Christianity, Judaism, and other religions. Like the discovery of the motion of earth was condemned by Catholic tribunal in 1615 AD. Also, the discovery of evolution in 1859 became a topic of heated debate between religious scholars and philosophers. The reason was that religious scholars did not understand the theory of creation properly and branded evolution theory as a deviation from their religious beliefs. The free thought people opposing religious scholars used evolution theory to falsify religions altogether and most of them converted to atheism. The theory of evolution which was meant to help humanity in many ways was misunderstood by both and caused a great damage to human society as some people treated it as evidence to prove non-existence of a Creator God. Currently it is believed that there are more than 1 billion people in the world who identify as atheists.

Atheists think that in controversies between religion and science, the religious scholars are always wrong, and science is always right.

Needless to say, that this is a misleading conclusion.

The fact is that the laws of science are always updated because of new discoveries in the fields of medicine, computer science, engineering, physics, etc. Discoveries that change the course of scientific understanding have occurred throughout history. The discoveries made by Galileo (1564-1642) and Newton (1643-1727) are glaring examples in this regard.

Galileo said the earth moves and that the sun is fixed; the religious scholars said the earth is fixed and the sun moves around it.

Later, the astronomers following Newton's theory said both the earth and sun move.

During Galileo's time, the modern concepts of relative motion were not known to people. Now the earth moving around sun, and the sun moving on its axes and moving along with its galaxy are accepted facts.

Similarly, no one would have thought earlier that we can see each other in a video call from anywhere in the world. Earlier people thought that these things were possible only in spirituality. Meaning, a person who is provided with spiritual eyes can see, just like jinn, what is happening in a remote place. What he needs to do is to turn his attention towards it.

The conflict between atheist-religion-bashers and religious-science-deniers has profited one community, the book publishers and sellers who made a lot of money by publishing polarizing books.

The question is, do we need to prove religion based on science and vice versa. The logical answer is ‘no’ as religion, in principle, is a belief system, and scientific facts are established in laboratory environment which are accepted as logical facts at the time of discovery and remain so until another fact is established by continuous research in that area.

However, our beliefs are subject to scrutiny as what one believes is rejected by the other. This is

the reason over 10,000 religions with varied beliefs have come into existence.

Among them how do we establish authenticity of a religion and its belief system?

This is where we can partially take the help of science and scientific inventions and tally them with our belief system. If our religion is truthful these scientific discoveries will not generally contradict with our theological beliefs.

Our theological beliefs are those which we have understood from the broad-based religious beliefs. Like, the basic belief of the original religion of human beings is 'God is one' and He has created this Cosmos. The question is how is God and what are his attributes? How has he created this Cosmos? Even though these may have been covered in religious scriptures, sometimes we falter in our understanding in these aspects. These issues are covered under theology. When these beliefs get contradicted from certain scientific discovery, we reject science. Conversely, the science lovers start rejecting the religion itself and become atheists.

It is also a fact that the scientific discoveries are transitional. Nothing can be said to be ultimate truth as we keep on discovering new things as we undertake research in these areas.

In theological aspect of our religion, sometimes our understanding does not reach to facts presented in the religious scripture.

How do we resolve this issue? The answer is simple. We keep cool and continue our research to improve our theological convictions as well as do research in finding facts of our physical world and use both these research for the benefit of mankind.

### Religion and science are compatible with each other

It is self-evident that if there exists an All-Mighty God who is the creator of this cosmos and whatever there in it, including human beings, then it is expected that he will also guide the people how to live in the world. The guidance that is truthfully coming from him can never contradict

with the progress of science or new discoveries in the world. It is for the simple reason that the creator is expected to know about what he has created.

Thus, the teachings of a truthful religion will be in conformity with the physical world. And its teachings cannot contradict with scientific discoveries. This is the touchstone of an authentic religion. With this understanding, we think there are four ways to evaluate authenticity a religion, as follows.

(i) Does it fulfill the essential requirements of an original religion? If yes, then does it identify itself with the original religion of the mankind?

(ii) The best way to judge a religion is to scrutinize its scripture. Has the scripture survived in its original shape? Have there been changes made to it over a period; additions, deletions, or updates from the time it was revealed?

(iii) Are the beliefs of this religion compatible with the discoveries of science in the world?

(iv) Are people free to question the authenticity of this religion? If yes, are they compelled to accept it irrespective of their getting convinced or not?

Most of the religions of the world, be it Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or any other religion in the world do not meet fully with the above criteria as their scriptures were updated over a period.

To justify these updates, they claim that their God(s) inspired the successive people over hundreds of years to update / add / delete / change these scriptures.

It is obvious that a scripture coming from god cannot be changed or updated / deleted / added by human beings.

Meaning, they cannot establish the authenticity of their scriptures from one single authentic source.

In addition, their concept of God or idol worship and their beliefs' non-compatibility with the scientific discoveries are other major factors that do not meet with the above criteria.

Let us evaluate Islam if it meets the above conditions.

## Islam

(i) Does Islam fulfill the essential requirements of an original religion? If yes, then does it also identify itself with the original religion of the mankind?

Islam identifies itself with the original religion of mankind. Islam declares that from Adam (عليه السلام), the first human being on earth, to Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم), the teaching of Islam remained the same. The Quran says – [ Mankind was a single community, then Allah sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So, by His leave Allah guided the believers to the truth they had differed about. Allah guides whoever He will to a straight path.] (2:213)

(ii) The best way to judge a religion is to scrutinize its scripture. Has the scripture survived in its original language/shape? Has there been changes in it over a period; additions, deletions, or updates from the time it was revealed?

It is a fact that the Quran, the original scripture of Islam, was revealed in Arabic and it remains the same in its original format ever since it was revealed 1450 years ago. There is no change of even a vowel sign in it. This is not the case with any other religion in the world. No one in the world denies this fact.

Are there contradictions in the message in the Quran?

The message contained in the Quran is based, more on reason, to lead us towards the truth. 'Reasoning' is the touchstone to validate the authenticity of the Quran as the message of the creator of this world to human beings.

If someone scrutinizes the Quran as a book or an object, he will start with the understanding that if this a true word of God, it should not have any contradiction in its 114 chapters of varied length spread over more than 6250 verses.

As a matter of fact, the Quran itself declares that - [ Do they not ponder over the Quran? Had it been the word of any other but Allah they would surely have found contradictions in it.] (4 - 82).

The Quran also declares - [ If you doubt (in this Quran) which has been sent down on Our Chosen Servant, (Apostle Mohammad ﷺ) then bring a chapter like it; and call all your helpers, other than Allah, if you are truthful. If you cannot do it (bring a similar verse like the Quran), and you will never be able to do it. (2:23-24)

It is known to everyone that the above challenge of the Quran has not been answered by anyone in the world till today.

(iii) Are Islamic beliefs compatible with the discoveries of science in the world?

There are thousands of verses in the Quran whose statements are proved compatible with scientific discoveries. A few of them are mentioned below.

(1) The Quran says - [ God created human being from Alaq (عَلَقٍ) (96-2)

There are various meanings of the Arabic word Alaq (عَلَقٍ) like, clot of blood, clinging substance, leech (a worm that hangs or clings to the wall of the uterus and sucks the blood), etc.

All these meanings have been proved to be true by science to describe the initial stages of a human embryo in the womb of the mother.

(2) The Quran says – [ Don't the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder?] (21-30)

Earlier people thought that the Cosmos was eternal (existed from before and there is no beginning or end to it). However, Albert Einstein's (1879-1955) 'field equation' changed

our understanding. Further research was done on this equation by a Mathematician, George Lemaitre (1894-1966) who discovered that the Cosmos started from a single point and got expanded. Lemaitre's theory was later known as Big Bang theory which is the basis of understanding of the Cosmos by the scientific community today.

The above fact is elaborated in the Quran - [ With Our power, We brought into being the Universe. And indeed, We expand it (steadily).] (51- 47)

Now scientists unanimously belief that the Cosmos is expanding steadily.

(3) The Quran says – [ He has made the two oceans apparently meeting together, yet between them is a barrier which they cannot cross. (55: 10-20)

Scientists discovered recently that when waters from two different origins meet, they maintain their temperature, density, color etc. This is the reason that the confluence of two oceans show their water in different shades side by side.

This fact was further elaborated in the Quran - [ And He is the One Who merges the two bodies of water, one fresh and palatable and the other salty and bitter, placing between them a barrier they cannot cross. (25- 53)

Scientists discovered recently that when sea saltwater meets with fresh water of a river in a bay, they are prevented from mixing in pycnocline zone. This is a stable zone that separates two waters with different densities. This separation is not visible to the naked eye.

(4) The Quran says - Or it is (parable for a disbeliever) like the darkness in a vast deep ocean, overwhelmed with waves topped by waves, topped by dark clouds, (layers of) darkness upon darkness, if a person stretches out his hand, he can hardly see it! The one for whom Allah has not made light, there is no light for him.] (24-40)

The above verse is related to the ignorance of the non-believers described in a parable. But our

focus is on the description about the darkness of the deep ocean.

We now know that 200 meters below the surface of the ocean, nothing can be seen, and a diver would not go down this deep without the aid of oxygen, light, and other scientific equipment). About 1000 meters below the surface of the ocean, light ceases altogether.

The verse also tells us about internal waves of the ocean. Oceanographers have confirmed that internal waves exist in the oceans. As against the surface waves, the internal waves of the oceans can move across the ocean and it is said that they can reach up to 10 kilometers in length.

(5) The Quran says - [ Do not you see that Allah drives the clouds, then brings them together, and then piles them into heaps until you see rain come pouring from them?] (24-43)

The formation of clouds has been extensively studied by meteorologists over the past two centuries. They came to know the accuracy of the description of the Quran with the formation of clouds. When smaller clouds join, the phenomenon of 'vertical updraft' takes place. Meaning, the thin air within the cloud rises to great heights. These vertical updrafts are formed in sections and are generally uneven in size and it looks they are piled up over one another.

(6) Evolution - One of the major issues of contention is human evolution which has been debated by religious scholars and scientific community. We have discussed this issue in detail in our research article titled 'Religion and Secularism' and have concluded that evolution is also a type of continuous creation of God Al-Mighty.

There are hundreds of such statements in the Quran which have come out to be true in the way these are described. Every new scientific discovery proves that the statements in the Quran are authentic. It can be concluded that as these could not have been imagined by anyone 1450 years ago. Thus, the Quran stands the most authentic in terms of being the word of God.

Some people claim there are contradictions in the Quran. We have described below two such examples to know facts in this context.

*(1) Contradictions in the creation of Cosmos*

(a) The Quran says – [God created the heavens and earth in 6 days (spans of periods)] (7-54, 10-3, 11-7, 50-38, 57-4)

(b) The Quran says – [Ask (them, O Prophet ﷺ), 'How can you disbelieve in the One Who created the earth in two Days (spans of periods)? He placed firm mountains over it, and He blessed it and apportioned its provisions to all who would seek them, (all) in four days. Then He turned to the Heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, 'Come willingly or unwillingly.' They said, 'We come willingly.' So, He formed the heaven into seven heavens in two Days, assigning to each its mandate. And We adorned the lowest heaven with (stars like) lamps (for beauty) and for protection. That is the design of the Almighty, All Knowing.'] (41: 9-12)

People say that at some places God says he created the Cosmos in 6 days (six spans of periods). But in the above verse, this comes to 8 (2+4+2 = 8) days. And this is a contradiction.

It looks people got confused in understanding the above verses. When you have a closer look of the above verses, it is abundantly clear that God created all stars, planets, and Galaxies in 2 days (spans of periods). The following two days (spans) were spent in creating provisions for the living and survival of all His creatures who would inhabit these places. He then turned his attention towards the seven heavens and created them in two days (spans), assigning to each its mandate. There seems no contradiction in it as God spent initial 4 days (spans) in creation of the planets/stars and provisions for their inhabitants within them, then turned his attention towards skies (heavens) and created them in the following 2 days (spans).

*(2) Contradictions in the Creation of Human beings*

(a) The Quran says - [ God created human being from a clot of blood (عَلَقٍ) (96-2)

(b) The Quran says – [ It is God Who has created man from water] (25-54)

© The Quran says - [Among His signs is that He created you from the dust] (20-30)

(d) The Quran says – [Certainly We created man from sounding clay, carved out of black mud.] (15-26)

Some people say that these are contradictions.

When we ponder over the above verses, we come to know that Adam (عليه السلام) was created from dust, mud, clay. Water is an essential element of evolution of all life. The creation from clot of blood is the stages of the development of human fetus. Apparently, there are no contradictions in the above verses.

*(3) Contradictions regarding the knowledge of human beings.*

Some people say that the Quran says, only God knows what is in the womb of the mother whereas the science has established that from scans we can know the sex of the child and its proper development in the mother's womb.

The above understanding is not based on facts.

The Quran says – 'Indeed, God (alone) has the knowledge of the Hour (the end of this world). He sends down the rain and knows what is in the wombs. No one knows what he/she will earn for tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he/she will die. Surely Allah is knowledgeable and fully aware (of all things). (31-34)

The meanings of the verse are very much clear. Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) knows what is in the wombs means, how many children will be born to an individual woman, and what will be their nature, life span, where they will live and where they will die and what will be their destination in Hereafter - Hell or Paradise. Surely, all these details are only known to Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ).

From Scan or MRI, we can ascertain the functions of every part of human body, including



the fetus development in mother's womb. This is not the subject of the above verse.

(iv) Are people free to question the authenticity of Islam? If yes, are they compelled to accept it, irrespective of their getting convinced or not?

It looks doors of Islam have always been open to question the authenticity of its beliefs and teaching. The Quran has answered thousands of such questions which were asked by the non-believers from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) during his lifetime.

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) and his companions never shied away from the polemics in clearing the doubts of the people. This practice has continued as the statements of Quran are being recognized as authentic by the people after every new scientific discovery.

The Quran says – [ There is no compulsion in religion; undoubtedly the right path has become distinct from the wrong; He who turns away from the forces of evil and believes in Allah has grasped a very firm handhold; it will never loosen; and Allah is All Hearing, All Knowing.] (2-256)

There are certain deviated sects among Muslims, like Salafis, Deobandis and likeminded groups who insist that the wrongful beliefs about Islam they have adopted are not subject to be questioned by anyone. Needless to say that this is not correct understanding on their part.

## Conclusion

In the light of the above, it can be concluded that there is no conflict between a true religion and science.

The question is do we need to prove religion based on science and vice versa. The logical answer is 'no' as religion, in principle, is a belief system, and scientific facts are established in laboratory environment which are accepted as logical facts at the time of discovery and remain so until another fact is established by continuous research in that area.

Our religious beliefs can be a subject of debate as what one believes is rejected by the another. This is the reason over 10,000 religions with varied beliefs have come into existence. Among them how do we establish authenticity of a religion and its belief system. This is where we can partially take the help of science and scientific inventions and tally them with our belief system and know which is the authentic religion.

There are hundreds of statements in the Quran which have come out to be true in the way these are described. Every new scientific discovery proves that the statements in the Quran are authentic. It can be concluded that as these could not have been imagined by anyone 1450 years ago, the Quran stands the most authentic in terms of being the word of God.

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## About the author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.