



COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ORIGIN OF THE
COSMOS IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE
LIGHT OF MODERN SCIENCE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the origin and formation of cosmos in Islam and Christianity in the light of modern science. The motive behind this research has been to find out areas of disagreement as well as the common ground where the three parties (Islam, Christianity and modern science) could integrate and utilize each other's for prosperity and enhancement of human community or the entire world. The study argues that there is no doubt that the three parties have provided indisputable and remarkable accounts regarding the origin and formation of the cosmos that has shaped the worldview and attitude of mankind through and through. However, the findings of this study reveal that the explanations given by the modern science are limited as compared to the comprehensive explanations provided by theology that entails metaphysics, ontology, the knowledge concerning the unseen world, as well as that of eschatology and the like. As we have seen, modern science has failed in one way or the other to provide us with information to the origin of the cosmos as well as the origin of man, the fate of the universe, including the purpose of our existence in this world and of course our final destination. Furthermore, it (modern science) could not provide a code of ethics or moral guidelines for human beings to rightfully govern themselves and sustainable environment in order to pave the way to a bright future for generations to come. It then follows that there exists a dire necessity and urgency for the reunification of science with religion. Since modern science is not compatible with Christianity, Islam can easily supply the required religious background to modern science.

خلاصة البحث

يهدف هذا البحث إلى مناقشة القضايا المتعلقة بالدراسات المقارنة عن نشأة الكون في النصرانية والإسلام والعلم الحديث. ولاشك أن هذا البحث قد أثبت أن الأطراف الثلاثة، النصرانية والإسلام والعلم الحديث قد زودوا الإنسان بمعارف وشروح - لاجدال فيها - حول نشأة الكون، ولقد ساهمت تلك المعارف في تشكيل رؤية الإنسان الكلية، وموقفه تجاه نشأة الكون منذ الأزل وحتى الآن. ولقد أثبتت نتائج هذا البحث أن التفاسير التي قدمها العلم الحديث عن نشأة الكون تُعد محدودة إذا ما قورنت بالشمول الذي جاء في النصرانية والإسلام حيث تشتمل كليهما على مفهوم الميتافيزيقا، وعلم الوجود، والمعرفة بشأن الغيب، فضلاً عن الإيمان بالآخرة وما شابه ذلك. وإضافة إلى ذلك كما اتضح لنا من خلال البحث؛ فإن العلم الحديث قد أخفق بطريقة أو بأخرى في تزويد الإنسان بمعارف تُحيطه بنشأة الكون، ونشأته، وغاية وجوده، فضلاً عن مصيره النهائي. علاوة على ذلك؛ فإن العلم الحديث لم يقدم للبشرية رؤية كلية مناسبة، ولا أخلاق، ولا مبادئ إرشادية أخلاقية تُمكن الإنسان من حكم نفسه، والحفاظ على البيئة من أجل تعبيد الطريق للأجيال القادمة. ومن ثم أبرز ما خلص إليه هذا البحث من نتائج؛ هو حاجة المجتمع البشري الماسة إلى إندماج الدين مع العلم الحديث. وبما أنه لا يوجد هنالك نقاط الإلتفاق بين النصرانية والعلم الحديث، إذاً الإسلام قادر على أن يقدم وبكل سهولة الخلفية الدينية المطلوب للعلم الحديث.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis of Mahfuz has been approved by the following:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*I dedicate this work:
In memory of my grandparents - Malim Adite, popularly known as Malim Pangisa-*

*ever the futurist - for his
uncanny knowledge of hydrology and soils and
the precious secrets of moraines in an era when
ecology was a fledgling science.*

*To all of the staff, campers and parents who breathe
a joyful and positive human element into the natural
communities of summer camps here and elsewhere
throughout the world.*

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TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

Table of the system of transliteration of Arabic words and names used by the International Islamic University Malaysia

CONSONANT

أ = A	ر = r	ف = F
ء = ' (Alif Ma'adhiyah)	ز = z	ق = Q
ب = B	س = s	ك = K
ت = T	ش = Sh	ل = L
ث = Th	ص = ṣ	م = M
ج = J	ض = ḍ	ن = N
ح = ḥ	ط = ṭ	ه = H
خ = kh	ظ = ḏ	و = W
د = D	ع = ' (Ayn)	ي = Y
ذ = dh	غ = Gh	

VOWELS

Short Vowels: a = اَ ; i = اِ ; u = اُ

Long Vowels: ā = آ ; ī = إ ; ū = أُو

Diphthongs: ay = أَيِ ; aw = أُو

Doubled: uww (final: ū) = أُوُو ; iy (final ī) = إِيِي

INTRODUCTION

This study will focus on the concepts surrounding both the origin and cosmogony of the universe according to Islam, Christianity and Modern Science. The word cosmos in its real sense is the world or universe regarded as an orderly or harmonious system,¹ while the term cosmology stands for “the study of the cosmic views in general and also for the specific view or collection of images held in religion or cultural tradition.”² Furthermore, it is referred to as “the scientific study of the universe considered as a whole.”³ As for cosmogony, it is also one of the terms employed to describe the cosmos. This term (cosmogony) is a compound Greek term consisting of *Kosmos* and *genesis*. It is, in fact, a theory of the origin of cosmos or universe in mythical form, i.e. a characteristic feature of somewhat advanced degree of speculative thought.⁴

The facts revolving around the origin of the cosmos are vital and of great value to man since they will pave the way of providing him with not only the history of the world as such, but human history as well. A clear comprehension of man’s origins may be one of the solutions that can help to resolve many differences and disparities that humanity as a whole experiences. Hence, the fundamental questions here are how an orderly or harmonious system came into being and what were the forces behind its existence? Secondly, what is the effect of that on humanity? How do people perceive and explain the existence of life in general? Different people have made attempts to

¹ Hornby, A. S., *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (China: Oxford University Press, 7th Edn., 2007), 344.

² Bolle, Kees W. “Cosmology” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Edited by Lindsay Jones, Macmillan Library Reference USA. (New York: Thomson Gale, 2nd edn., 1987/2005), 1991.

³ Ibid.

⁴ James, E. O., *Creation and Cosmology: A Historical and Comparative Inquiry* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1969), 3

answer these questions differently, but detailed accounts have been provided by these three parties, i.e. Islam and Christianity, Modern Science. This, however, does not rule out the contributions of others including the Indians, Chinese, and their likes. However, a significant point that should be borne in mind while dealing with this issue in question is that, this attempt does not mean making science the adjudicator or evaluator of religion. This is because religion is divine while science is man-made, and thus, incomparable. Conversely, it is possible to argue that the origin of a thing is also the origin of all other origins especially when discussing the cosmos which is, indeed, the mother of all others.

In their answers to these fundamental questions, both religions (Islam and Christianity), on the one hand, and science, on the other, have taken great initiatives to pave the ways for the success and prosperity of mankind despite the dichotomies that exist between science and Christianity *per se*, and science and Islam in some areas, all have roles to play in as far as human behavior is concerned. Thus, the contributions of both religion and science cannot be denied. All the three parties are considered vital and significant and have had great impact on the life of humanity from time immemorial. There are numerous and voluminous books, research works and articles addressing the issue of the cosmos that account for its significance in our life. Thus, both theology and science are fundamental subjects that will never be detached from men for all perpetuity, despite the fact that the current trend in the West is making an unfair attempt to favor science and abandoning anything else, including religion. It is very dangerous to discard religion because none can deny the major role played by religion in the domain and sphere of ethics without which no human society can exist in peace. This may be true of those religions which do not have significant contributions towards science or those that have disdained and scoffed at science and

see mutually inclusive relations between them. However, Islam being the complete way of life does not separate science from religion.

Most people, since science has taken control of many facets of life, are only familiar with information about the cosmos which they have conceived from the realm and domain of science. The problem here is how did this orderly and harmonious system come into being and what is the power behind it. This problem has caused all the three parties, i.e. Islam, Christianity, and modern science to come up with different explanations and elucidations which we deem it necessary to shed light on and to find out the areas of discrepancies and commonalities and their impact on human society.

The objective of this research therefore, is to find out the effect of the various interpretations of the origin of the cosmos on human society, and how far religion and modern science have answered the enquiries of man on the issue. Hence, the study will draw a line of distinction between theology (Islam and Christianity), and science in this regard. It will focus on the arguments presented by theologians, philosophers, and the mystics dwelling on their respective commentaries regarding the origin of the cosmos as well as the ones put forward by modern science, and thereby contrasting one with the other.

In addition, the dissertation will look into ways of developing new perspectives, strategies, and approaches of envisaging and dealing with the issue of science, in particular, and the overarching worldview in this contemporary world so as to find solutions by shedding light on the differences, dichotomies and commonalities between the three parties.

Muslim scholars to name but a few like Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Juwaynī, al-Bīrūnī, al-Suyūfī, and of course Mullā Ṣadrā have been studying the world since the inception of human life on this planet and have drawn the conclusion that

man's life is closely bound to the metaphysical, spiritual, and epistemological or philosophical ideas governing Islamic civilization and human life *per se*.⁵ There is no way that the world has been alienated either from the Islamic revelation or from the unseen realm. In fact, it is envisaged by Muslims that whatever exists in this world is created by God, the Almighty and, as such is considered a sign and manifestation of the Creator Himself or a second book of the revelation after the Noble Qur'ān for that matter. In other words, the universe and all its contents are simply directories or indices and signs that act as guides to the world of divinity. This has been clearly stated in several places in the Noble Qur'ān of which the following are obvious: Allah says in 2: 164 and 3: 120 that in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and in the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters throughout the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth there are indeed signs for a people that are wise.

Christianity, on the other hand, also does not detach the world from God or the divine authority, though they consider it as an evil entity (a place for punishment). They (Christians) believe that it is, indeed, the handiwork of God, the Almighty. This has been mentioned in the Book of Genesis which is in fact the first Book of the Old Testament. It says: "In the beginning God created heavens and the earth"; "The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep", "And the spirit

⁵ For details see: Ansari, Fazl-ur-Rahman, *The Qur'anic Foundation and the Structure of Muslim Society* (Karachi: World Federation of Islamic Missions, Islamic Center, 1973), vol. 1, 157 & 269, wherein the author has discussed the multi-dimensional orientations of man.

of God was hovering over the face of the waters”, “Then God said let there be light and there was light.”⁶

In the meantime, the current trend, especially in the West, is principally inclined towards science that despises theology. The renaissance, a by-product of the secular forces, that deviated from the rules of the Church, intend to pit religion against human theories in the name of science to answer questions that impact human life including the origin of the cosmos; thus, science gained prominence and took control of almost everything. Based on this, people became increasingly familiar, from time and again, with information about the cosmos that reached them from the realm and domain of science. All in all, science is striving desperately to place man in the centre of the universe and take control of all the events therein.

Scientists believe that this world has emerged as a result of some reactions that took place sometime in the distant past. According to modern scientists, this world came into existence as a result of some gases that caused an explosion to form the universe. The most famous and widely known theory that illustrates this phenomenon is the ***Big Bang Theory***, which proffers the notion that the universe came into existence due to some cosmic explosion that is believed to have marked the emergence of this universe we experience today. This has been explained by Alan and his colleagues that: “According to the *big bang* model, the universe began in a sort of explosion started from infinite density and temperature, and then expanded, thinned out, and cooled.”⁷ Based on this, modern scientists consider this world to be independent, and not controlled by any divine laws. Thus, to quote Nasr “...the

⁶ *Holy Bible: The King James Version Containing the Old and the New Testaments* (New York: American Bible Society, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1980), 1.

⁷ Lightman, Alan and Brawer, Roberta, *The Life and Worlds of Modern Cosmologists* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 45.

substance of the cosmos is emptied from the sacred character and became profane.”⁸

As a result, science has become the dominant unit or the only yardstick and standard to measure each and everything. Religion, as mentioned above, has been abandoned, which is in fact an approach of eliminating God from the scene and at the same time eradicating human ethics since it (human ethics) is mostly supported and substantiated by divine laws. The fact that religion has had a key role and a great impact on humanity from time immemorial cannot be denied by the current trend to use science as the only yardstick and standard to measure everything. In other words, as Naqib asserts that a gist of their basic assumptions is that “science is the sole authentic knowledge.”⁹ Based on this, metaphysics, culture, and even religion have been overlooked and neglected; yet, both religion and science have had an impact on man since time immemorial. It is high time attention is paid to the problems and challenges of science with respect to various ideologies, and personalities. So too equal attention be directed at the current shaky environment and position of religion, especially Islam and Christianity, in the contemporary world. This is because the moment religion is discarded ethics has no value and meaning. This calls for Islamization of knowledge so as to relevantize such issues and their respective interpretations to meet the realities of contemporary world. Hence, theologians, especially in this regard, Christians, have to join hands with Muslims who have taken a preventive or a protective measure through the above process of Islamization of knowledge. Unfortunately, this has not been realized, thus, all sciences including cosmology of today which flourished in the hands of Muslim scholars in the medieval

⁸ Nasr, Seyyed Hussein, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Kuala Lumpur: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1986), 21.

⁹ Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad, Naqib, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 2001), 114.

age are completely void of any theological perspective and spirit. Thus, the spiritual anchor is lost and is no longer in harmony with the tradition.

Therefore, concern has to be expressed with the malaise facing the theologians and plans should be offered to resolve their plights by critically analyzing and seeking solutions to these problems. Hence, we are obligated to bring science back in accordance with the theological spirit. Concrete and specific strategies and plans ought to be pursued both academically and practically to resolve this issue. This is because no one can deny the role of religion from the past to to-date in shaping and influencing the personality of human being.

Consequently, this study is going to find out ways of drawing a line between theology and science, and, at the same time, explore the possibilities of providing Islam with its central position that it has lost. In addition, ways of developing new perspectives, strategies, and approaches in envisaging and dealing with the issue of science, in particular so that the overarching worldview in this contemporary world are expounded.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the disagreements over the origin of the universe on the human community?
2. How far have Islam, Christianity and modern science answered the enquiries of man over the issues related to the origin of the cosmos?
3. Why there are different views and arguments about the origin of the same universe?
4. What is the distorted relationship between man and the universe that calls

for a solution?

5. What is an appropriate perspective or strategy and approach that could be adopted towards Islam, Christianity and modern science in order to harmonize them for the betterment of all of humanity?
6. What is the most reliable source to be adopted in order to comprehend the reality and significance of the cosmos?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Thus, the objectives of this study include:

1. To elaborate on the differences among Islam, Christianity and modern science with reference to the origin of the cosmos.
2. To determine how far Islam, Christianity and modern science have answered the enquiries of man over the issue of the origin of the cosmos.
3. To draw a line of distinction between Islam, Christianity and modern science over the agreements and the disagreements between them in order to find out ways of uniting and integrating valid concepts in terms of agreements if any, for the benefit of mankind.
4. To find a suitable new perspective and approach in envisaging and dealing with the issue of both modern science and theology (Islam and Christianity) in the contemporary world.
5. To determine the relationship between man and the universe as elucidated by the three parties i.e. Islam, Christianity, and modern science and what should be done in order to enhance this relationship.
6. To find out the reality surrounding the origin of the cosmos.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Even though this research covers the wider space of the cosmos as expounded by both religion and science, yet its focus is somewhat limited to the selected areas in which both these religions and science agreed and disagreed in relation to the key issues of cosmology. By so doing it is not meant to emphasize that science is taken as the yard stick against these religions. Rather it is attempted to expound the limit of science in unraveling the mysteries of the cosmos and to find the horizon science has reached in fathoming the cosmos. As such the study will not delve in elaborating the solar systems, milky ways or any of the constellations in that open space. These are, no doubt, essential parts of what we termed as cosmos, but this research does not discuss them in any details except that of the creation of earth from both philosophical and religious perspectives. Even the latest cosmographic discussions are not included in this research.

METHODOLOGY

This study is principally a library based qualitative research that employs both the inductive and textual analysis methods to analyze the views of both Muslim and Christian scholars in the light of the views expressed by the scientific community. Care has been observed to study academically impartial and scholarly objective in analyzing the facts as depicted by their relevant texts which are then contrasted against one another by way of comparison according to some selected major themes and sub-themes so as to extract and depict a more accurate picture of the reality as described by the cosmological doctrines of both science and religion. In studying the variance in the cosmological doctrines of both Christianity and Islam, the researcher is bound by their respective sacred texts and relied on their interpretations by scholars,

which are then studied in the light of writings by modern scientists and cosmologists to find their agreements and disagreements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

No one can argue or harbor any doubt that the study of the origin of the cosmos in Islam, Christianity and modern science is of great significance because it is from there that our worldview is accordingly set in motion and finally shaped. Indeed, there is no shortage of books written on cosmology. Moreover, as per the survey conducted by the writer, despite all attempts made here and there, there is no single book or a comparative study which has been carried out between Christianity and Islam in the light of modern science. As such, in this very field of the 'origin' of cosmos, which is, in fact, the source and base for our entire worldview, the area that the researcher intends to explore, there is no work written that espouse such a comparison.

It, therefore, becomes necessary to investigate this area and make comparisons between these two sister religions that have many seeming similarities in respect of man and his ultimate goals, and to evaluate the veracity of their understanding of the truths revealed in them and to examine the validity of the perceptions of the scientific community on the ever-expanding horizon of cosmology and the cosmos. The term “in the light of modern science” does not in any way preclude the notion that 'modern science' is a yardstick or an adjudicator between the three parties. The reason for viewing the issue in this manner is because ‘modern science’ is perceived as religiously neutral to scientifically adjudicate the veracity of the religious truths concerning the cosmos. But this does not mean the scientific truths concerning the cosmos are absolute and final. What the modern science has fathomed thus far with its sophisticated tools and equipments is only the bearest surface of the space outside the