The Case for God

A rationalist's perspective — including the rise, decline and future of Islam

This item is a copy of selections from a slide presentation made by the author to a number of primarily non-Muslim audiences in the UK and the USA and particularly the Star Island Conference of the Institute of Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) on "Emergence" held in July 2008 making out The Case for God – based on reason and evidence and not mere faith. This is meant to respond to the atheists' viewpoint and to bring out the fact that while their emphasis on reason and evidence is fully supported, it is not the monopoly of atheists. In fact the author's forthcoming book on this subject makes the point that the age of reason and enlightenment did not emerge in 17th-century Europe, as is commonly espoused in western literature, but actually germinated in the 7th century with the advent of the Qur'an with its pointed and frequent urgings to its readers and listeners to think, to ponder, to reflect and to understand even verses of the Qur'an before accepting their content.

Note: This presentation can be downloaded in color PowerPoint from my website: www.tariqmustafa.com. The following is the text-only version of the presentation.

"The Case for God"

A Rationalist's Perspective

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A Concerned Global Citizen

and Seeker of Truth

Three Themes of the Talk

- Science and Religion Discourse
- Atheist counterattack – The God Debate
- Not distinguishing between authentic and corrupted revelation

The real struggle is not between West and Islam, à la Huntington's thesis of "Clash of Civilizations", but between the forces of Belief and Disbelief

Successes of Science

- Astounding success of modern science – Acme of Reason
- Science can explain everything—Mechanistic Syndrome (Newton)
- Man's increasing control over his environment

New Trends of the Late 20th Century

- Growth of academic institutions studying relationship of science and religion
- Resurgence of atheistic thought via a number of bestsellers

Science and Religion Interface - Four views of Ian Barbour

- Conflict: Scientific materialism, Biblical literalism
- Independence: Separate domains, differing language and functions
- Dialogue: Presuppositions and limited questions, methodological and conceptual parallels
- Integration: Natural theology, theology of nature, synthesis

The speaker maintains, both science and religion share the value that truth will ultimately prevail

Science - Limitations

- Chinks started appearing with:
- The Atomic Theory – apparently solid matter being mostly empty space (Rutherford and Dalton)
- Duality of light – Particles or photons
- Theory of Relativity – Relativity of time (Einstein)
- Quantum Theory – Principle of Uncertainty (Heisenberg)
- Chaos Theory
- Complexity of the Genetic Code – DNA (Watson and Crick)

Bold Qur'an Claims

While Qur'an is not a book of Science, it is a book of Signs:

- We will show them our signs in the Universe and within themselves, until it becomes manifest unto them that this (The Qur'an) is the truth.

Al Qur'an, 41:53

- If it had been from other than God you would have found in it many inconsistencies.

Relationship of Science with Revelation

- The strong point of science is that it is relative, changing, developing, and advancing
- True revelation's strength is that it is absolute, deals with permanent values and teaches mankind what they know not and cannot know otherwise
- Both are ways of getting at the Truth

Value of Truth

- Foundation of Successful Society
- Bedrock of Equity and Justice
- Difference Between Functional and Dysfunctional Societies

The Rise of Atheism

- Replacement of the earth-centered scheme by the sun-centered system (Galileo-17th century)
- Rise of Evolution instead of traditional Creationism (Darwin-19th century)
- Libido, Id and Ego can explain human behavior and emotions (Freud-19th century)
- God is dead (said Nietzsche, late 19th century)

Evolution of Ideas

- 18th Century – Culmination of materialistic thinking: philosophers of the French Revolution, Rousseau and Voltaire
- 19th Century – Darwin, Marx, Freud
- 20th Century – Appearance of fundamental limitations in scientific understanding
- 20th Century, second half – Rise of the Reason/Revelation debate and the Evolution/Creation/Intelligent Design debate

The Case of the Atheists - Dawkins

- A Darwinian worldview makes belief in God unnecessary or impossible
- Religion makes assertions which are grounded in faith, which represents a retreat from a rigorous, evidence-based concern for truth
- Religion offers an impoverished and attenuated vision of the world. In contrast, science offers a bold and brilliant vision of the universe as grand, beautiful, and awe-inspiring
- Religion leads to evil. It is like a malignant virus, infecting human

minds

The Case of the Atheists - Sam Harris

- Don't believe in anything without reason and evidence
- They go against religion for its wars, persecutions, bigotry

I fully agree with the first, but beg to differ with the second assertion

Golden Age of Atheism

- What about the excesses of the atheists?
- The atrocities of the French Revolution, considered by many to be the golden age of atheism
- Horrors of the Nazi Holocaust
- The Gulags of the Communists

Surely these were not doings of the religious

Use Reason and Evidence to Judge Revelation

- But let us agree with the Atheists on one important thing:

Let us judge the case of what claims to be "Revelation" on Reason and Evidence because in today's age, nothing less will do

Age of Reason

- Let us accept that in this age of reason, the days of miracles and magic are no more
- If there is a God, He will not hide and will let us know about Himself
- So, just where do we find out about Him and His revelation?

Qur'an—The Final Testament

- It is here, ready to be examined
- It is available in its original form, just as it was revealed, and not a translation
- It is clear and consistent without any contradictions
- It states unequivocally that GOD Himself is its guardian against

corruption

Qur'an refutes Dawkins' Assertion

- It is He who created several heavens closely fitting one another. No want of proportion will you see in the creation of one Who created things within a specified pattern. So turn thy vision again. Do you notice any flaw? So again turn thy vision a second time; your vision will come back to you dull and discomfited in a state worn out.

Qur'an 67:3-4

Claimed Revelations

- The Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu scriptures
- Zend Avesta and Dasatir of the Zoroastrians
- The Torah of the Jews
- Bible of Christianity
- Al Qur'an of Islam
- Sri Guru Granth of the Sikhs
- Book of Mormon of the Latter-day Saints
- Writings of the Christian Scientists
- Books of the Baha'is
- The Urantia books of Chicago, by the Sleeper

How to Verify Authenticity

- Same way that we check other things i.e. through rational examination of their substance and content, for example:
- Gold – by its specific gravity and inertness
- Diamond – by its hardness and refractive index
- Gravity or Neutrinos – by their peculiar effects

So just how do we go about judging a book?

Test Criteria for Revelation

- Revelation should be UNIQUE in language, form, and content
- It should be consistent and free from contradictions
- It should explain itself, give its purpose, indicate its origins, and establish its credentials
- It should contain solid, meaningful, practical guidance, and not be airy-fairy
- It should address the needs of an illiterate as well as a Bertrand Russell
- Preferably, it should contain self-tests for its veracity, a code or a pattern for its genuineness and purity

Revelations: Suggested Evaluation Criteria

1. The revelation should be in a clear, intelligible, and understandable language, having some exceptional literary and other qualities – worthy of its sublime source, befitting the Creator. It must carry the stamp of the super-intelligent Creator and be demonstrably so.

2. It should be consistent and free of any contradictions.

3. It should have depth of meaning so that it can simultaneously cater to the needs of both a simple farmer and an accomplished philosopher à la Bertrand Russell.

4. Its appeal must be based on rational grounds and must not call for blind faith.

5. It should retain its form, original language, and text to maintain its veracity for the future generations and be attributable to the divine.

6. It should carry evidence of its divine, not human, origin and content in a suitable and convincing fashion.

7. It should contain information, or pointers, which can be verified or falsified, for example, signs, predictions or comments about the universe we live in and about the nature of mankind.

8. It should contain guidance, information, laws, and/or instructions that help mankind with its individual and community existence, assist and guide its development, and protect it from unnecessary strife.

9. Determine if it contains any evidence of a fundamental and genuine code similar to the one, for example, being searched for by NASA specialists while conducting their exploration for extraterrestrial intelligence, under the SETI project.

10. It should contain meaningful, useful, and convincing information about the existence and attributes of the Creator, about afterlife (whether there is one or not), and relationship of humans with their Creator.

11. The character, conduct, and behavior of the bearer of the message should display the impeccable standards befitting his lofty status.

12. It should clarify the role and status of other claimants existing before it was revealed, and correct and rectify their significant errors/distortions.

13. There should be a built-in mechanism of renewal, replacement, or preservation of the revelation, to retain some kind of continuity and authority. The essential contents of the guidance should reach all peoples and be valid for all times.

14. It should focus on the welfare of humanity and identify desirable pathways in the march of mankind towards genuine progress with guiding signposts.

15. Ultimately, as recipients of Divine Guidance, mankind should be able to ask: What influence did the revelation have on mankind in general, and how has it stood the test of time?

Applying the Evaluation Criteria

- Once such criteria have been broadly developed, in consultation with the scientific and religious communities of different hues, the next stage of the exercise would be to use them in judging the

extent to which any claimed revelation can and does fulfill this standard

- Anyone would be free to conduct such an exercise and place the results for discussion and debate before acknowledged peers, as is the custom in sciences, for study and verification/falsification
- This should lead to the development of an agreed framework to move forward towards answering the all-important question of whether there is indeed a Creator and Divine Guidance and if so where can we find such revelation

Seek the Truth With Humility

- The Creator's signs/evidence are spread all over
- We just need to open our eyes and our minds and make use of our rational faculties
- But only with humility and not arrogance
- Because the Creator of the Universe does not like arrogance. Remember what happened to Pharaoh! In his story are signs for all of us

Qur'an Bases Its Case on Reason and Evidence, Not Blind Faith

- Qur'an ushered in the Age of Reason; European Enlightenment followed 1000 years after the Qur'an!
- Look at the Companions of the Prophet as examples
- And not at today's Muslims, who have abandoned Qur'an and are an affront to its teachings
- Note that Qur'an is not the monopoly of Muslims
- When Bani-Israel turned their backs on the teachings of the prophets, they were abandoned and enslaved
- When any other group abandons Truth/moral values, they too will meet the same fate, like modern-day Muslims

Contributions of Islam to Human Civilization

- Ushering in of the age of reason in the 7th century by the Qur'an, well ahead of European Enlightenment in the 16th–17th centuries
- Beginning of the experimental/observational method of science (8th–13th centuries)
- Introduction of jurisprudence – the science of law (8th–12th centuries)

Note: Also study of history leading to the birth of sociology, begun by Ibn Khaldun (14th century)

Uniqueness of Qur'an

- Its approach—based on reason and not blind faith
- Final Testament, divine origin
- Continuation of the long series of revelations
- Old Testament › New Testament › Final Testament
- Final word of the Creator
- Corrector of corruption in ideas of God, Hereafter, life in this world, etc.
- Universal Constitution for Mankind
- Restorer of rational belief (see quote of Alphonse de Lamartine)

Lessons for Modern Civilization

- Humankind needs GOD for guidance
- Science has been dazzlingly successful, but its limitations are increasingly showing up
- Guidance is especially needed in the spheres of social and moral issues, the very areas that are not easily amenable to scientific experimentation
- GOD not only exists as He proclaims, but is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. We can look for His signs in the universe, history of peoples, and within ourselves
- Qur'an states, "We will show you our signs till you come to accept

that this indeed is the truth"

Historical Background to Western Mistrust of Islam and Muslims

- Historical conflicts between the world of Christianity and Islam
- Islam displaced Christianity in Hellenized Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Spain, and the Byzantine Empire
- Led to counterattacks by Christian Europe
- Crusades of 11th–13th centuries
- Reconquista of Spain and Sicily
- Colonization of Islamic World in the 18th-20th centuries
- The European military reaction was accompanied by intense psychological warfare by:
- Distorting the picture of Islam and Muslims (e.g. accusing that Islam was spread by the sword)
- Denigrating the Prophet (calling him an impostor, a lecher, and now a terrorist)
- Mounting false attacks on the Qur'an
- The result was deep misunderstandings and a widening chasm between Christianity and Islam
- The 19th–21st centuries saw some reversal of this trend in Europe with increasing confidence and growth of objective scholarship

Rise of Islam

- Pre-Islamic Arabia – a total non-entity
- Middle East was totally dominated by Persians and Byzantines, in perpetual conflict
- Tribal Arabia was subjugated by both
- Rise of Islam in the 7th century
- Explosive physical expansion, never seen before in human history, from China & India in the East to the Atlantic Ocean and Spain in the West, in less than a hundred years, simultaneously overpowering the Persian and Byzantine superpowers of the day

Spurt in Intellectual Advancement 8th-12th Centuries

- Unique display of intellectual openness—gathering of knowledge from all over the world
- Original contributions—anatomy, algebra, trigonometry, optics, medicine, Arabic numerals, zero digit (India), gunpowder and paper (China)
- Development of experimental method, leading to the rise of modern sciences
- Open sharing of knowledge with Europe through Sicily and Spain

What triggered this phenomenal burst of physical and intellectual energy?

The Only Convincing Answer Is ...

It was the impact of the Unique Qur'an, a revelation from the Almighty Creator, and the example of Prophet Muhammad, the revolutionary par excellence.

The Qur'an produced this effect then; it can repeat the same now

What Has Stood in the Way of Understanding of the Qur'an by Westerners?

- Hostile Islamic-Christian relations from the start; Christian psychological warfare leading to horrible distortions
- Abandonment of Qur'anic values by modern-day Muslims
- They are an affront to the Qur'an, having made suicide bombings and plane hijackings a totally misleading symbol of this religion of peace
- Muslims have turned their backs on Qur'an and they have in turn been abandoned by the Lord, like the Israelites of old
- To look at products of Qur'anic teachings, we have to go back to the Prophet and his companions

Where to Find Signs of the Creator

- Look into the far reaches of the Universe
- Look into the history of people of old
- Look into yourselves

Qur'an says: "We will show you our signs till you come to believe that this indeed is the truth"

Qur'an and Universe – 1/4

- Cosmology and Astronomy, Al Rad-2, Anam-101
- Arabs believed in flat earth and that high mountains supported the heavens, corrected by Qur'an
- Orbits of celestial objects – Anbiya-33, Yasin-38, Dhurriyat-7
- Layers of the atmosphere – Fussilat-11-12
- Big bang and expansion of the universe
- Deep seas and oceans
- Geology, continental drift and role of mountains

Qur'an and the Universe – Signs 2/4

- Growth of the embryo – Momin-14
- Fetus and its development, Dr Keith Moore
- Creation of man, in stages
- Marine phenomena, seas not mingling Rahman-19-20

Qur'an and the Human Body – 3/4

- New Diseases
- Qur'an and skin
- Sensory characteristics
- Resurrection and fingerprints
- Qur'an and clouds – Zukhruf-11
- Qur'an and cerebrum

Qur'an and Signs – 4/4

- Slaughter of animals
- Protective roof (sky) – atmosphere – Anbiya-32, Tariq-11
- Protective role of earth's atmosphere and Van Allen belts from meteors and radiation, etc.
- Qur'an has been made easy to remember
- Iron (Atomic No. 26) – Hadid 57:25–26; the abjad value of hadid is the same as the number of the Sura, i.e., 57

Muhammad – Restorer of Rational Beliefs

Alphonse de Lamartine in Histoire de la Turquie, Paris, 1854.

- If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astonishing results are the three criteria of a human genius, who could dare compare any great man in history with Muhammad?
- Philosopher, Orator, Apostle, Legislator, Conqueror of Ideas, Restorer of Rational beliefs.... As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?

Is There a Purpose to Life? What Are Humans Doing on Earth?

Atheists — Qur'an

Life developed steadily through random mutations and natural selection - evolution — Humans were created gradually through stages, then endowed with consciousness

There is no purpose to existence — There is a definite objective and purpose to creation

We make what we like of life, which ends with death — This life is a preparation for the afterlife which will be much more significant

Recommendations

- Form a circle to study the Qur'an to:
- bring out its relevance and guidance for the modern age
- clear the criticism and doubts being created by vested interests
- mount a watch on internet and media
- Help in my efforts to rationally demonstrate the uniqueness of the Qur'an by:
- Refining the Evaluation Criteria
- Identifying linguistic gems from the Qur'an, e.g.:

Inna Nahnu Nuhyi wa Numeeto wa Ilainal Maseer (50:43)

The Dynamic Relationship

The Old Testament—Target of Atheists' Fury

- The Atheists go especially for the God of the Old Testament – depicted as cruel and vengeful

Forgive me, but who said that the Old Testament represents the true God?

Why the God of the Torah and the Bible Appears Cruel?

- These were the images of God drawn up by a people fallen on hard days, made captive, degraded, and hopeless – perhaps wanting revenge after the Babylonian captivity. Their views are reflective of their own inadequacies
- This man-made picture of GOD has since been amply corrected by the final testament – the Qur'an

Conventional Reply of the Believers

- Based on scriptures, dependent on faith alone – Old and New Testaments
- Viewpoint of Vatican regarding this

But how can anything not in the original language be considered divine?

Islam, the Freshest, Cleanest Political Idea – H.G. Wells in Outline of History

- And if the reader entertains any delusions about a fine civilization, either Persian, Roman, Hellenic, or Egyptian, being submerged by this flood, the sooner he dismisses such ideas the better. Islam prevailed because it was the best social and political order the times could offer
- It was the broadest, freshest, and cleanest political idea that had yet come into actual activity in the world, and it offered better terms than any other to the mass of mankind

Is Islam Compatible With Modernity?

This is what Professor Ernest Gellner, a noted anthropologist, said in his book Muslim Society, 1985:

> *By various obvious criteria – universalism, scripturalism, spiritual egalitarianism, the extension of full participation in the sacred community not to one, or some, but to all, and the rational systematization of social life – Islam is, of the three great Western monotheisms, the one closest to modernity.*

Uniqueness of Qur'an

- In Mohammadanism everything is different here. Instead of the shadowy and the mysterious, we have history....We know of the external history of Muhammad....while for his internal history after his mission had been proclaimed, we have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation....on the substantial authority of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt.

Rev. Bosworth Smith in Muhammad and Muhammadanism

The Qur'an – Evidence of Divine Origin

- It has been made easy to remember (54:17)
- Allah Himself is its guardian (15:9)
- Its compatibility with knowledge

- Relativity of time
- All life originated in water (21:30, 25:54)
- Big Bang—qurras (spheres) – moving suns
- Stages of fetal development (Professor Moore, Maurice Bucaille)
- Fingerprints
- Code or pattern
- Predictions—Roman victory over Persians (see Gibbon and Hitti)

Evidence of Veracity of the Qur'an

- Claims of Qur'an, its majestic language, its consistency, its clarity
- Prophecies
- Reference to areas of knowledge compatible with modern knowledge – 1400 years ago
- Allah being its Guardian
- It has been made easy to remember - Huffaz
- Underlying numerical patterns and design – Numbers 19 and 9, etc.
- Amenability to falsification tests
- Living miracle, available for testing and verification
- Sad fate of modern Muslims who have abandoned its teaching

Simplicity and Rationality of Islam

- Edward Montet, La Propagande Chrétienne et ses Adversaires Musulmans, Paris 1890. (Also in T.W. Arnold in The Preaching of Islam, London 1913):

  Islam is a religion that is essentially rationalistic in the widest sense of this term considered etymologically and historically.

  A creed so precise, so stripped of all theological complexities and consequently so accessible to the ordinary understanding might be expected to possess and does indeed possess a marvelous power of winning its way into the consciences of men.

Islam – Not Spread by the Sword

- Mahatma Gandhi, statement published in Young India, 1924:

  .... I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle.

- De Lacy O'Leary in Islam at the Crossroads, London, 1923:

  History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated.

Future of Genuine Islam

- Sir George Bernard Shaw in The Genuine Islam, 1936:

  If any religion had the chance of ruling over England, nay Europe within the next hundred years, it could be Islam.

  I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make itself appeal to every age.

  I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it the much needed peace and happiness: I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today.

- See also Karen Armstrong's Muhammad, the Prophet for Our Time (2006)

Qur'anic Views About Man's Creation

- It is He Who created you from dust (inorganic matter) (82:6-8)
- (God) fashioned you in (different) stages (71:14)
- (God) fashioned man from a small quantity (of sperm) (16:4)
- Was (man) not a small quantity of sperm which has been poured out? (75:37)
- Then We placed (man) as a small quantity (of sperm) in a safe lodging firmly established (23:13)
- Man was fashioned from a liquid poured out (86:6)
- A despised liquid (32:8 and 77:20)
- Verily, we fashioned man from a small quantity of mingled liquids (76:2)
- (God) made his progeny from the quintessence of a despised liquid (32:8)
- We cause whom We will to rest in the womb for an appointed term (22:5)

Qur'anic Views About Human Reproduction

- O Man! Who deceives you about your Lord the Noble, Who created you and fashioned you in due proportion and gave you any form He willed (Al Qur'an, 82:14)
- (God) fashioned you in (different) stages (6:2)
- Verily We created them out of sticky clay (adsorption) (23:12)
- And We have created Man from the extracts of inorganic matter of clay (15:26)
- And verily We created man from old physically altered mud which after a lapse of time reached a certain stage of dryness (55:14)
- He created Man from mud nearly as dry as pottery (stage of near dryness) (18:54)

Two Strands—17th to 21st Centuries

- Renaissance › Enlightenment › Rise of Science
- Criticism of the Church › Reformation › Doubts about the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) based on Faith and not Reason

Conclusions

- Form your own ideas
- Stick to Reason and Evidence
- Be Fair and Objective (critical, maybe skeptical, but remain open)
- Finalize the criteria for evaluating the authenticity of claimed revelations
- Let Qur'an be studied by a think tank rather than approached parochially
- Remember, the Qur'an is not a monopoly of the Muslims, but a gift for all of humankind