

# IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO INTERPRET THE QUR'AN ACCORDING TO CONTEMPORARY, SCIENTIFIC THEORIES?

## CORRECTING MODERN-DAY METHODS USED BY NEW- AGE DA'EES IN THE ARENA OF POLEMICS AND APOLOGETICS<sup>1</sup>

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Sālih al-Uthaymeen (*rahimahu Allah*) was asked, “Is it permissible to interpret the Qur'an according to contemporary, scientific theories?”<sup>2</sup>

The Shaykh responded with the following:

Interpreting the Qur'an according to contemporary, scientific theories has its perils and dangers. The reason is because if we interpret the Qur'an according to these theories and then new theories arise that challenge these theories, then, in the view of the enemies of Islam, this necessitates that the Qur'an is incorrect. The Muslims, however, would state that this erroneous understanding is due to interpreting the Qur'an in such a manner [i.e. according to latest in vogue theories], but nevertheless the enemies of Islam are waiting in ambush to take full advantage of such opportunities.<sup>3</sup> And therefore, I strongly caution against rushing into interpreting the Qur'an according to these scientific theories and that we let such matters take their natural course. If it is that some of the theories are affirmed then there is no need to state that the Qur'an has already proven them [1400 years ago]. The Qur'an was revealed for purposes of worship, [to teach] high moral standards and reflection. Allah states,

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢٩﴾

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<sup>1</sup> Paper compiled by Abdurrahmān Bennett and Hamza A. Bajwa.

<sup>2</sup> *Kitāb al-'Ilm* (105 – 106)

<sup>3</sup> See *APPENDIX A* below for a perfect example of such an ambush.

[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded.<sup>4</sup>

It (Qur'an) was not revealed for the likes of these matters that are observed through the scientific method which people learn through such sciences. Moreover, it could be extremely dangerous to model the Qur'an based on these theories. An example of this is the statement of Allah,

يَا مَعْشَرَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ أَنْ تَنْفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْطَارِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ  
فَانفُذُوا ۚ لَا تَنْفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلْطَانٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

O company of jinn and mankind, if you are able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass. You will not pass except by authority [from Allah].<sup>5</sup>

When mankind landed on the moon, some people began to interpret this verse and made it conform to these exploration events. So they said that the intended meaning of 'authority' was science and that through science they were able to pass beyond the earth's orbit and its gravitational pull. However, this is a mistake; it is not permissible to interpret the Qur'an by using such methods simply because this entails that you are testifying that this is what Allah intended, which is a mighty testification to make for which you will be questioned.

So whoever reflects over this verse will find that this interpretation is false because the context of the verse refers to the reality of man.<sup>6</sup> Read Chapter *ar-Rahmān* and you will find that this verse is mentioned after these set of verses:

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهَ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٢٧﴾ فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ  
رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٨﴾

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<sup>4</sup> *As-Sād* (29).

<sup>5</sup> *Ar-Rahmān* (33).

<sup>6</sup> It states in the tafseer of Ibn Katheer, "It was reported from al-Hasan who said, 'I heard Abu Mu'adh say, 'Ubayd informed me that he heard ad-Dahhāk say about the verse, **O company of jinn and mankind...** "it means that no one will be granted refuge from death and that everyone must die; no one can escape from it – it is unavoidable. Even if they were able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, they would still be in the dominion of Allah, and Allah would certainly seize them with death."

**Everyone upon the earth will perish, (26) And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honour. (27) So which of the favours of your Lord would you deny? (28)<sup>7</sup>**

So we ask, are these people able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth? The answer is no because Allah states,

﴿ ۲۳ ﴾ **إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ أَنْ تَنْفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْطَارِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ**

**... if you are able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth...**

Secondly, has there been sent upon them a flame of fire and smoke? The answer is no and thus it is incorrect to interpret this verse in this way. We say that their conclusions are based on scientific methods and experiments, but as for distorting the meanings of the Qur'an so that they conform to these scientific methods and experiments then this is neither permissible nor valid.

## APPENDIX A

The ambush alluded to by the Shaykh is no better demonstrated than by the backlash Muslims experienced following the debacle created by Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, a revert who heads the research team of an organisation that goes by the acronym iERA, or the *Islamic Education and Research Academy*. This so-called research academy was founded by its current chairman, Abdur Raheem Green, another revert who made a name for himself attending the famous public debate forum *Speakers' Corner* in London's Hyde Park.

Lauded on the academy's website as one of "the main initiators of the contemporary emergence of Muslim public debaters and speakers using western and Islamic philosophy to defend and explain Islam", Hamza was, until very recently and alongside fellow iERA sidekick Adnan Rashid, one of the main proponents of *Ijaaz ul-Qur'aan* and was at the forefront of bankrolling, thanks to the gracious proceeds of a largely unwary and gullible public, a vigorous campaign promoting said methodology.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ar-Rahmān* (26-28).

Their first embarrassing setback occurred in June 2011 when Hamza and Adnan decided to test drive this approach by entering the lion's den and attending the *International Atheist Conference* in Dublin, Ireland. On this occasion, the duo, followed by an equally enthusiastic camera crew, attempted to pit their wits in the most haphazard manner by presenting a confused and contradictory argument for the Qur'anic description of the embryological development of the human foetus to none other than a qualified embryologist (a vital piece of knowledge that eluded Adnan's preparatory research for said encounter resulting in him being taken completely by surprise when learning of it from the horse's mouth!!)<sup>8</sup> and prominent atheist, Paul Zachary "PZ" Myers.

The fact that the mission dramatically backfired can be gauged in the aftermath. Not only did it result in Adnan hastily publishing a Youtube<sup>9</sup> defence of his blundering claim that the Arabic term *thumma* could nonsensically be applied contradictorily in this context – a mistake similarly exposed by other anti-Islamic propagandists (Captain Disguise<sup>10</sup> and Anti-Sharia),<sup>11</sup> but also opened the doors for a sustained counter-campaign led by atheists and other hostile elements to attack Islam and ridicule Muslims *en masse*.

But the story did not end there. Contrary to the famous tradition of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) that: "The believer is not stung from the same hole twice," (Bukhari and Muslim) Hamza exacerbated the situation by preposterously deciding within two months of said fiasco to send a drafted paper on the Qur'an and embryology to, of all people, P.Z. Myers! Needless to say, the move ended in further embarrassment and ridicule across the net.

However, in spite of a spirited defence by the pair, iERA's entire *da'wah* drive was flipped on its head two years later in 2013 when Hamza suddenly announced that he'd decided on a paradigm-shift away from championing said approach by publishing a paper titled: *Does the Qur'an Contain Scientific Miracles? A New Approach on how to Reconcile and Discuss Science in the Qur'an*.<sup>12</sup> What effectively

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T5Pm7qLH50&feature=player\\_detailpage#t=1136s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T5Pm7qLH50&feature=player_detailpage#t=1136s)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKTFncuVayY&feature=player\\_detailpage#t=396s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKTFncuVayY&feature=player_detailpage#t=396s)

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=JLsMDY2bq0c#!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=JLsMDY2bq0c#!)

<sup>11</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20120729165912/http://www.antisharia.com/2011/07/08/embryology-in-the-koran-and-adnan-rashids-mistake-about-the-arabic-word-thumma-and-its-meaning/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.rationalskepticism.org/islam/hamza-tzortzis-renounces-scientific-miracles-in-the-quran-t41106-20.html>

transpired during this period was Hamza's position being subjected to relentless attacks by his opponents, particularly on Facebook, culminating in him caving into the pressure, and admitting he was wrong this entire time. He acknowledged, for instance, that iERA's decision to face Myers in Dublin led to "a huge intellectual backlash" from both Muslims and non-Muslims. He further revealed, much to his credit, how his ill-conceived strategy ultimately resulted in those unfortunate Muslims, who had invested so much of their faith and confidence in him, becoming "confused and ha[ving] doubts" in either said methodology and/ or their religion. He actually confesses: "Significantly, many Muslims who converted to Islam due to the scientific miracles narrative, have left the religion due to encountering opposing arguments."

Of course, the enemies of Islam rejoiced and boasted of how they had exposed his efforts as being "full of misinformation, misquoted and misrepresented citations and bad arguments" with one such website<sup>13</sup> putting it thusly:

**It seems that Hamza finally discovered the joys of intellectual integrity, pulled his paper from his website, persuaded IERA to do the same and to adopt the new approach to dawah, after other people kept shoving the refutation paper in his face on social media. Worries about reputation probably had something to do with it, but I believe and hope that he genuinely feels better now, can put this behind him and wants to be more honest in future. It's a rare and great thing to see for religious apologists to publically change their ways and become much more respectable people.**

As Shaykh al-Uthaymeen accurately predicted that "the enemies of Islam are waiting in ambush to take full advantage of such opportunities". Unfortunately for Hamza, Adnan, iERA et al, they failed to follow the advice of the scholars of Islam who had "strongly caution[ed] against rushing into interpreting the Qur'an according to these scientific theories" and, thus, paid the price. Hamza, in fact, candidly divulged that his decisions in this regard all centred around advice received not from scholars of the calibre of Shaykh al-Uthaymeen, but from "students and scholars of Islamic thought" who "were not thorough and **they** seemed to have also **relied on trusting other Muslim apologists**" (bold ours). He stated:

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.rationalskepticism.org/islam/hamza-tzortzis-renounces-scientific-miracles-in-the-quran-t41106-20.html>

Unfortunately they when the paper was published it was placed under a microscope by atheist activists.[10] Although they misrepresented some of the points, they raised some significant contentions. I have since removed the paper from my website. In retrospect if this never happened, I probably wouldn't be writing this essay now. It is all a learning curve and an important part of developing intellectual integrity.

Although he might have benefited from this intellectual journey, others were sadly not so fortunate paying as they did with their religion.

The question, however, that inevitably begs to be asked in the wake of such a tragedy is whether Hamza really did learn from his mistakes by finally consulting the scholars before publishing his face-saving essay, or did he again succumb to the advice of the same dubious sources as before while relying on his own philosophically-inclined intellectual prowess.