

The confluence of religion and science

HASAN ZILLUR RAHIM

FORGET Samuel Huntington's hysterical "Clash of Civilization" theory: "Clash of Religion and Science" has now moved to centre stage, this time in a courtroom in rural Pennsylvania.

This is unfortunate, for the ancient battle between religion and science is just that: ancient. It was in the seventeenth century that the Church imprisoned Galileo for daring to suggest that the earth was a mere player in the cosmic drama, and not its prima donna as theologians had thought.

Muslims too have experienced their share of this conflict. In the 9th century, advocates of reason led by the Mutazalites clashed with the dogmatic Kharajites, and as Muslims historians often darkly summarise, this effectively closed the doors of ijthad. The

"debate" between al-Ghazali representing tradition and mysticism and ibn Rushd representing science and reason in the 12th century was also a turning point in which Ghazali's views held sway.

Since then, we have traveled a long way. Although there have been more ambushes and skirmishes (The Scopes Monkey Trail in Tennessee in 1925, for example), there have also been advances in our thinking, and now most of us do not see any conflict between science and religion. Science deals with the factual aspects of the natural world and religion with the transcendental questions of meaning and purpose.

There will, of course, always be scientists who view religion as an albatross around civilisation's neck, and theologians who rail at science as the new God that has driven meaning from life.

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There are many more theologians representing different faiths, for example, who find in the theory of evolution evidence of God's glorious self-disclosure, and many scientists whose research leads them to ask the deeper questions of life -- why are we here, why do we suffer -- that lie outside the realm of science.

tists will assert that an atheistic view of life is our only choice as a consequence of what they consider to be the all-encompassing reality of Darwin's theory, while certain religious leaders are so defined by their certitude that they know who will go to heaven and who are destined for hell.

Intelligent design proponents say that because life on earth is too complex to have been created by random genetic mutation, Darwin's theory must be balanced by the recognition of an "intelligence" beyond its reach.

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A good starting point may be to consider the provocative question: Is coexistence the last word in the relationship between religion and science, or can there be something more?

Lessons from Islamic history help frame an answer. From the eighth through the fifteenth centuries, Muslim scientists made discoveries based on challenges posed by religious observances. Determining the proper time of day to offer the five daily prayers, calculating the precise direction toward the kiblah, and predicting the visibility of the crescent moon to mark the beginning and end of lunar months led to the discovery of spherical trigonometry and algebra and significant advances in astronomy.

We can safely ignore these predictions. Instead, we should be thinking more creatively about how religion and science relate to, and reinforce, each other.

Uluh Beg (1349-1449). Considered a genius, he established an observatory at Samarkand, and with astounding accuracy, charted the course of more than 1000 stars over a period of 18 years.

In our times, this scientific-spiritual quest animates many Muslim scientists, but one who stands out is the cosmologist Abd-al-Haqq Bruno Guiderdoni, a director of research at the Paris institute of astrophysics and the director of the Islamic Institute for Advanced Studies.

Further harassment, I sent a tax lawyer, who returned with a nil assessment, but with a bill of "incidentals." I need not dwell any further on corruption in Bangladesh, since my nephew said it all.

Let me now turn to another phase of "getting away with it." Corruption is a matter of morality/financial morality. There is also a matter of sexual morality. Perhaps sexual urge is more intense than the desire for money.

Morality, sex and corruption

R H KHANDKER

MY journalist nephew wondered aloud in my presence why corruption was so rampant in Bangladesh. I was not sure what was on his mind, but it could be that, since his chacha traveled all over the world and observed various societies, he thought he might have some opinion to offer.

I may state the conclusion first, which is that human beings in all societies are alike in some basic instincts, though they may differ in colour, ethnicity, or social conditioning.

We have heard and read in media in the past years about the financial scandals in high places in the US and other western countries. Remember

Enron or WorldCom? The CEO of the latter was convicted recently. Even Vice President Dick Cheney was talked of being involved in corrupt practices at Halliburton, of which he was a past CEO.

There was a story about the late Senator Jacob Javits, who was chairman of a Senate committee. He was Republican but was equally regarded by the Democrats for his grace and integrity.

freedom to get away with it. In Italy, the widely publicised charge of corruption against Prime Minister Berlusconi was not proved in court (which people suspect he controlled).

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position. Fear of effective law keeps one away from financial corruption, not moral value as much. Any opportunity to get away with it tends to bring in corruption. Credit card frauds are so extensive in the US that the card-issuing banks charge exorbitant interest from the honest users to recoup the loss caused by fraudulence.

In the European countries, too, the same scenario prevails. The degree of corruption varies with the degree of

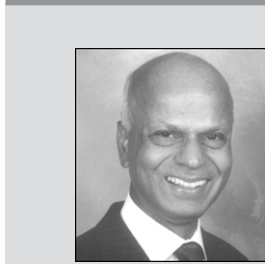
however, two or more private companies compete to provide the same services, bonuses perhaps would replace bribes. Look at the competition among mobile phone companies.

Let me confess that when I was in a high position, my PA could get my personal matters done over the phone; he might have got done some of his own using my name.

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Root causes of modern jihadism



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid

NOW that the initial anger aroused by the July 2005 bombings in London has to some extent subsided, time has come for us to analyse these attacks in a manner as cool-headed and dispassionate as possible.

My heart bleeds in sympathy and solidarity with the innocent victims. It would be easy here, simply to brand the attackers as lunatic Jihadists or fanatic purveyors of an "evil ideology" who are hell-bent on destroying the Western "way of life" without any reason whatsoever.

According to Prof. Ayoob of Michigan State University, the United States currently occupies an enormously "privileged position in economic and security arenas" and wants to retain this position "by concentrating wealth in the global North, controlling access to strategic resources, and retaining a global military advantage."

LETTER FROM EUROPE
My heart bleeds for the innocent victims of London, but I must add that I also grieve for the far more numerous deaths caused by Western interventions in Muslim countries apparently to "spread democracy."

political and economic affairs of the world. In military matters, "the US accounted for nearly half of the world's total military expenditure in 2003" (Stockholm International Research Institute). Technologically, it is also the most advanced country in the world.

injustice, humiliation, and outrage among the Muslims. This sense of humiliation has been further aggravated by unconditional American military and economic support for Israel, its actions in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and other secret torture centres, and the desecration of the Koran by its military.

Tal Afar, and so many other places. What is even more awful is the West's apparent lack of concern for these deaths. John Slodova, an author of a recently published report on the Iraq war, said recently in London, "It remains a matter of gravest concern that nearly two and a half years on, neither the US nor the UK governments have begun systematically to measure the impact of their actions in terms of lives destroyed."

The road to ecological Armageddon

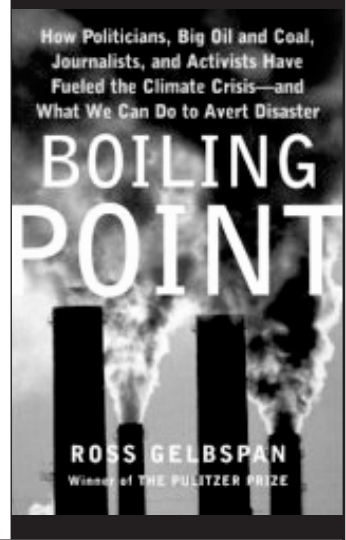
RON CHEPESIUK

THE Bush administration may be in denial about global warming, but people who believe that it is the single most urgent threat to mankind's survival will find plenty of ammunition in this well-researched investigation.

Scientists have found that since the year 1000, the decade of the 1990s was the hottest in history. Indeed, 1998 was the hottest in the last 1,000 years! Climatologists reveal that climate warming was progressing at the rate of one degree centigrade per century, but that rate began changing in the mid 1970s when research showed that the warming rate had increased to about three degrees centigrade.

INSIDE AMERICA
In reading this book, it becomes a no-brainer figuring out why the US has stonewalled on the Kyoto Protocol and other environmental initiatives. Gelspan labels the skeptics "criminals against humanity."

Book Review
Boiling Point: How Politicians, Big Oil and Coal, Journalists and Activists are Fueling the Climate Crisis
Ross Gelspan
Basic Books (2004)
Pps. 254, \$22



to human-induced forcing." Scientists now know for a fact that the Arctic has thinned dramatically over the past two decades. In 1980, an Arctic ice shelf was 150 feet thick. By 2003, the same ice shelf had thinned to less than half that depth.

science information. The result/journalists are under-reporting the biggest story of our lifetime. As for the "compromised activists" (the author's term for the environmental lobby), they have missed the boat. "Around the country, environmental advocates are working to get people to drive less, turn down their thermostats, and reduce their energy use," Gelspan writes.

As for the "compromised activists" (the author's term for the environmental lobby), they have missed the boat. "Around the country, environmental advocates are working to get people to drive less, turn down their thermostats, and reduce their energy use," Gelspan writes. "Unfortunately, though many environmental problems can be addressed through lifestyle change, climate change is not one of them."