


## Is Nidhal Guessoum's Theory of Science and Religion Innovative?

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article type:</b> Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b>  <b>Received</b> 10 November 2024  <b>Received in revised from</b> 28 November 2024  <b>Accepted</b> 17 December 2024  <b>Published</b> online 28 January 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Nidhal Guessoum, Islam, Science and Religion, Science</p>	<p>Among contemporary Muslim scholars, Nidhal Guessoum's ideas concerning the relationship between science and religion and his efforts to harmonize the two stand out as particularly prominent. As such, he is today considered one of the most significant representatives of Muslim thinkers in this domain. This article aims first to present a clear and structured account of Guessoum's theory of science and religion. It then briefly reviews critical perspectives on his ideas to address the question: to what extent are Guessoum's views innovative and effective in resolving key issues? In other words, despite the wide dissemination of Guessoum's ideas, how impactful are they in practice? The conclusion drawn from this study is that, while Guessoum's approach includes certain novel elements, especially in framing the discourse, ultimately—particularly in addressing the relationship between science and the Qur'an—it does not significantly advance the discussion. Many of the longstanding challenges in this area remain unresolved, even in Guessoum's framework. But his works are outstanding because of his method to approach to the problems concerning religion and science. Guessoum shows one of the best examples of moderate and rational approaches to such problems.</p>
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## Introduction

Among Muslim scholars, a number of figures have seriously engaged in theorizing about the relationship between science and religion. One prominent example is Nidhal Guessoum. Nidhal Guessoum is a leading astrophysicist and researcher in the field of science and religion in the Islamic world. He was born in 1960 in Algeria and, after completing his primary and secondary education, studied theoretical physics at the University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB), receiving his bachelor's degree in 1982. He then moved to the United States to pursue graduate studies, earning a master's degree in 1984 and a PhD in 1988 in physics and astrophysics from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), with a dissertation on thermonuclear reactions in astrophysical environments<sup>1</sup>. Upon completing his education, Guessoum worked as a postdoctoral researcher at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, participating in gamma-ray astrophysics projects<sup>2</sup>. After returning to the Arab world, he held academic positions at the University of Blida in Algeria and later at the College of Technological Studies in Kuwait. Since 2000, Guessoum has been a professor of astrophysics at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in the United Arab Emirates, where he has held numerous administrative roles, including Chair of the Physics Department, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Chair of the Faculty Senate.<sup>3</sup>

Guessoum's research areas include gamma-ray astrophysics, Islamic astronomy (particularly crescent sighting and prayer times at high latitudes), and the relationship between science and religion in the Islamic context. He has produced significant work on the intersection of modern science and Islamic tradition, especially in the contemporary period. In addition to his academic contributions, Guessoum is a well-known public intellectual and media figure.<sup>4</sup> The objective of this paper is to provide a systematic and categorized presentation of Guessoum's core ideas and to evaluate their novelty and effectiveness in addressing the ongoing

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<sup>1</sup> Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Nidhal Guessoum, "The Crescent Moon Visibility and Islamic Calendar: Toward a Unified Global Islamic Calendar," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 37, no. 1 (2006): 55–71.

<sup>3</sup> American University of Sharjah, "Dr. Nidhal Guessoum – Faculty Profile," last modified 2024, <https://www.aus.edu/faculty/nidhal-guessoum>.

<sup>4</sup> He runs a popular YouTube channel titled *Tafakkur Ma'i* ("Reflect with Me"), which has over 350,000 subscribers and promotes science and commentary on astronomical and cosmological topics in Arabic. He is also a regular science columnist for leading platforms such as *Arab News* and *Nature Middle East*, and appears frequently on networks like Al Jazeera, BBC, and NPR (Arab News, 2024).

Throughout his academic and public career, Guessoum has received numerous awards and honors. In 2018, he was listed among the top Arab thinkers, and in 2021, he was recognized as one of the 100 most influential leaders in the field of space exploration (Richtopia, 2021). He has also been awarded a research grant from the John Templeton Foundation for interdisciplinary education in science and religion within the Islamic tradition (Templeton Foundation, 2012).

tensions between science and religion—particularly between science and Islam. In other words, this article focuses on assessing the practical efficacy of his proposed framework.

### **1. Major Works of Nidhal Guessoum in the Field of Science and Religion**

The most important and influential work by Nidhal Guessoum on the subject of science and religion is his book *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*, published in 2011 by I.B. Tauris<sup>1</sup>. This book offers a systematic and analytical exploration of the theoretical tensions between the modern scientific worldview and the intellectual-religious traditions within Islam.

In this work, Guessoum adopts a critical yet conciliatory approach, demonstrating how Islamic teachings—particularly in areas such as creation, life, cosmology, and religious rationality—can be interpreted in a manner compatible with contemporary scientific findings. He places particular emphasis on issues such as the theory of evolution, the Big Bang, and quantum mechanics, advocating for a re-reading of religious interpretations in light of scientific progress. The book has been widely recognized by scholars in the Islamic world and by researchers in the field of science and religion as a significant and influential contribution to contemporary discourse on the subject.

Another notable work is *The Young Muslim's Guide to Modern Science* (2018). As the title suggests, this book is more educational—and to some extent, didactic—in nature, aimed at younger Muslim audiences. Written in accessible yet rigorous and reasoned language, Guessoum introduces the principles and foundations of modern science and discusses how Muslims have historically engaged with science and continue to do so in the present day. The book encourages readers to develop a sound understanding of the scientific method, fundamental theories in the natural sciences, and the epistemological challenges posed by the interaction between science and religion<sup>2</sup>. It has been adopted as a reliable resource for interdisciplinary science and religion education in universities and Islamic schools across the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

Among Guessoum's other noteworthy contributions in this area are his research articles on Islamic astronomy. In his 2006 paper, *The Crescent Moon Visibility and Islamic Calendar*, published in the *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, he analyzes the topic of moon sighting and the calculation of the Islamic lunar calendar through the lens of modern astronomy. In this article, he presents scientific evidence for the need to reconsider traditional calendrical practices in Islamic contexts<sup>3</sup>. The article sparked widespread discussion in Muslim countries and has become a key reference in debates on reforming the Hijri calendar.

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<sup>1</sup> Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*

<sup>2</sup> Nidhal Guessoum, *The Young Muslim's Guide to Modern Science* (Bradford, UK: Beacon Books, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Guessoum, "The Crescent Moon Visibility and Islamic Calendar: Toward a Unified Global Islamic Calendar

In addition, Guessoum has authored a book in Arabic, titled *The Story of the Universe*, which outlines the history and structure of the cosmos for Arabic-speaking readers. This book has also been used as an educational resource at universities in Arabic countries. In it, the author endeavors to present cosmology in a way that is philosophically and theologically resonant with the Islamic intellectual tradition<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Key Ideas of Nidhal Guessoum on the Relationship Between Science and Religion

Nidhal Guessoum is a multidimensional thinker. In addition to his specialized research in astronomy and cosmology, he has also seriously engaged in theoretical discussions on science and religion. He has formulated a rationalist framework that he elaborates in his books, articles, and academic lectures. In fact, the issue of science and Islam—and, in some instances, science and the Qur'an—constitutes a long-term intellectual project for him, rather than a peripheral or secondary concern in his scholarly pursuits.

### 2.1. The Distinction Between Science and Religion

Due to Guessoum's deep understanding of both science and religion, he consciously avoids superficial, emotional, or mystically charged interpretations of the unity between the two. Before outlining Guessoum's specific views, it is important to note that the various theories articulated in the Islamic world concerning the relationship between science and religion—or more specifically, science and the Qur'an—despite their diversity, can broadly be classified into two intellectual camps.

The first is a traditionalist approach that seeks to defend the scientific inimitability (*i'jaz 'ilmi*) of the Qur'an, aiming to secure a position of authority and credibility for Islam in the face of the overwhelming impact of modern science. This approach seeks to prevent the Qur'an and Islam from suffering the same fate that befell Christianity and the Bible in the wake of scientific modernity. Within this camp, a spectrum of views exists. At one end are those who reject the secular nature of modern science and attempt to reorient it by constructing a distinct "Islamic science" or "religious science." On the other end are those who fully accept modern science but strive to validate the Qur'an by demonstrating its scientific miracles.

While some argue that these represent two fundamentally different approaches, it appears more accurate to consider them as points along a spectrum, rather than categorically distinct paradigms.

The second intellectual camp comprises scholars who possess a profound understanding of the nature and power of modern science. They not only consider the Islamization of science futile, misguided, and impossible, but also view the effort to prove scientific miracles in the Qur'an as a flawed enterprise. Instead, they aim to refute the claim that science and Islam (or the Qur'an)

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<sup>1</sup> American University of Sharjah, "Dr. Nidhal Guessoum – Faculty Profile," last modified 2024, <https://www.aus.edu/faculty/nidhal-guessoum>.

are inherently incompatible—emphasizing that science and religion speak different languages and that direct comparisons between them are methodologically unsound. Guessoum aligns himself with this rationalist camp.

In Guessoum's view, science and religion are two distinct epistemological systems, each governed by its own methodology. While the two can engage in constructive dialogue and coexist at a rational level, they must not intrude into each other's domains. He explicitly rejects perspectives that seek to extract scientific claims directly from sacred texts or that instrumentalize scientific discoveries to support religious apologetics<sup>1</sup>. According to Guessoum, science is based on empirical methodology, testability, and rational inquiry, aiming to uncover natural laws and explain the phenomena of the material world. Religion, by contrast, concerns itself with meaning, purpose, ethics, and existential values—seeking to offer a holistic vision of life and existence.

Guessoum grounds this approach in the rationalist tradition of classical Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd, while simultaneously engaging with contemporary philosophy of science. In his influential book *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (2011), he critiques both Salafist and positivist approaches prevalent in parts of the Muslim world, arguing that religious interpretation should not be oriented toward proving or validating every scientific theory or discovery. According to Guessoum, such approaches not only undermine the credibility of science but also diminish the epistemic dignity of religion by reducing it to an auxiliary of scientific positivism<sup>2</sup>.

## **2.2. A Rationalist and Ijtihād-Based, Non-Literalist Reading of Religious Texts**

Continuing his analysis, Guessoum promotes what he calls a “rationalist-ijtihād-based” reading of religious texts. He maintains that science and religion should engage in philosophical and semantic dialogue without encroaching on each other's methodological boundaries. To achieve this, he attempts to move beyond abstract theoretical discourse and approach the issue through concrete examples. Accordingly, he addresses topics such as evolution, the Big Bang, and quantum mechanics, and demonstrates how some contemporary Muslim thinkers, in their eagerness to uphold religious apologetics, ignore the scientific method and deviate from rational inquiry<sup>3</sup>.

Contrary to the dominant view in parts of the Islamic world—which seeks to align the Qur'anic text with modern science or to demonstrate its scientific inimitability—Guessoum contends that sacred texts, due to their revelatory nature and metaphorical language, were never intended to provide detailed scientific information. Thus, it is misguided to expect them to deliver empirical propositions. Rather, religion's primary aim is to offer meaning and to guide human beings toward moral and spiritual excellence.

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<sup>1</sup> Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*. p. 36-38

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 58-60

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.p. 105- 110

This position aligns closely with the views of numerous reformist Islamic thinkers—such as contemporary Iranian intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush—who also emphasize the distinction between the domains of science and religion. At the same time, it stands in sharp contradiction to thinkers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr as well as the majority of thinkers who believe in and try to demonstrate scientific inimitability of Quran. From Guessoum’s perspective, science and religion each possess distinct subject matter, domains, and methodologies, and their epistemic boundaries must be respected. He argues that while religion aims to provide purpose, orientation, and moral guidance, science is tasked with developing a systematic and empirical understanding of the natural world. As such, attempting to derive scientific claims from sacred texts or to verify religious teachings through scientific methods is fundamentally flawed and ultimately compromises the epistemological integrity of both fields<sup>1</sup>.

Let us now examine the *details* of Guessoum’s theory, as the general idea outlined earlier is, in itself, not entirely novel. For a more nuanced understanding of his perspective, *The Young Muslim’s Guide to Modern Science* (2018) proves especially illuminating. In this book, Guessoum articulates his position in more accessible terms for younger Muslim audiences. While introducing the scientific method and the fundamental principles of modern science, he critiques a widespread phenomenon in the Islamic world, which he terms “superficial scientism”—the same as the first approach mentioned earlier. This tendency seeks to correlate every scientific discovery with verses of the Qur’an or to locate scientific predictions within sacred texts. However, according to Guessoum, such efforts lack valid epistemological grounding and ultimately diminish the integrity of both domains<sup>2</sup>. He emphasizes that contemporary Muslims must interpret religious texts anew in light of scientific advancements—relying on rationality and *ijtihad*—but without subordinating science to religion or vice versa.

Guessoum maintains that science and religion each possess their own distinct methodologies and domains. However, this independence does not imply hostility or opposition. He proposes that the two systems of knowledge can engage in a deeper, more philosophical dialogue—particularly when addressing overarching existential questions<sup>3</sup>. These questions transcend empirical data and scientific experimentation and include inquiries about the meaning of life, the purpose of creation, humanity’s place in the universe, and ethical or metaphysical concerns. According to Guessoum, science—grounded in empirical methods and testable evidence—is limited to understanding the natural world and the laws that govern it. Science addresses the “how” questions successfully, but is not equipped to answer “why” or “for what purpose” questions<sup>4</sup>. Religion, on the other hand, uses revelation, tradition, and philosophical reasoning

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<sup>1</sup> Guessoum, *Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*

<sup>2</sup> Guessoum, *The Young Muslim’s Guide to Modern Science*, p. 24-26

<sup>3</sup> Guessoum, *Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*

<sup>4</sup> Guessoum, *The Young Muslim’s Guide to Modern Science*,

to provide meaning, purpose, and value, thereby addressing the “why” questions that fall within the metaphysical and moral realms.

In his seminal article *The Crescent Moon Visibility and Islamic Calendar* (2006), Guessoum puts his theoretical framework to the test through a concrete astronomical case. He argues that, in the age of modern astronomy, the traditional practice of crescent moon sighting—which relies solely on visual observation—requires scientific reconsideration. Drawing upon both jurisprudential and scientific reasoning, Guessoum advocates for the use of precise astronomical calculations to determine the beginning of lunar months. In doing so, he proposes a model of greater alignment between science and *sharī‘ah*, without permitting unwarranted interference from either domain into the other.<sup>1</sup>

A careful review of Guessoum’s works reveals that his theory rests on three foundational principles:

1. **Epistemological and methodological independence** of science and religion, meaning that the two realms are not directly comparable and should not be conflated.
2. **The possibility of rational and semantic dialogue** between science and religion at the philosophical and ethical levels. This implies that while they are distinct, they are not wholly unrelated and can interact indirectly.
3. **The necessity of rational reinterpretation of religious texts** in light of contemporary scientific advancements.

It appears that this third principle is largely rooted in the longstanding science-religion debate, whose origins trace back to the Renaissance and the rise of modern science—a debate that has profoundly shaped the discourse in the Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Taken together, these three components place Guessoum’s theory within a category of moderate, conciliatory, and reformist approaches. His framework seeks to distance itself from both the uncritical scriptural literalism and defending scientific inimitability of Quran prevalent in some Islamic circles, and from extreme scientism or anti-religious sentiments.

### **2.3 Promoting Scientific Literacy in Muslim Societies**

Guessoum’s social concerns have led him to extend his ideas beyond technical or theological discourse into the realm of public engagement. Particularly in *The Young Muslim’s Guide to Modern Science* (2018), he emphasizes the urgent need to promote scientific literacy in Muslim societies and to critically reexamine the science-religion relationship. He believes that the most pressing intellectual and epistemological challenge facing the Muslim world today is the widespread misunderstanding of the scientific method and the persistence of unscientific interpretations of religious texts in matters related to science<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Guessoum, “The Crescent Moon Visibility and Islamic Calendar: Toward a Unified Global Islamic Calendar,” p. 68-70

<sup>2</sup> Guessoum, *The Young Muslim’s Guide to Modern Science*,

According to Guessoum, this condition stems from the lack of education in scientific methodology, weak critical thinking skills, and the dominance of “scientific miracle” narratives in public discourse and religious media. His active engagement on social media—especially YouTube—can be understood in this context, as part of his broader mission to bridge this epistemological gap.

#### **2.4 Challenging Superficial Scientism**

Although the issue of superficial scientism was mentioned earlier in the broader outline of Guessoum’s theory, its significance and epistemological weaknesses merit deeper analysis. Guessoum has consistently warned against the discourse of scientific miracles in the Qur’an, identifying it as a prime example of superficial scientism in the Islamic world. He argues that many of the claims made in this context are not grounded in proper scientific methodology, but rather rely on speculative interpretations and often impose modern concepts onto texts whose meanings are rooted in specific historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts<sup>1</sup>. In his view, these efforts result in interpretive inconsistencies and ultimately reduce the metaphysical richness of religion to a series of empirical claims. However, the primary function of religion, he contends, is to address existential questions and to offer moral and spiritual guidance.

As a solution, Guessoum underscores the need to improve scientific literacy, promote training in scientific methodology, and foster critical thinking within Islamic educational systems. He insists that contemporary Muslims must first understand how science operates—learning about falsifiability, repeatability, empirical theory-building, and the ability to distinguish science from pseudoscience<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, Guessoum advocates for constructive and philosophical dialogue between science and religion—but, as emphasized earlier, such dialogue should occur at the semantic and philosophical level, not through scientific proof-texting. In his view, science and religion can interact meaningfully when addressing profound existential questions—such as the meaning of life, the purpose of creation, and humanity’s place in the cosmos—yet must avoid methodological interference<sup>3</sup>.

Within this framework, Guessoum has also critically analyzed specific examples of superficial scientism in the works of contemporary Muslim commentators. In his articles, he frequently highlights claims such as the prediction of space travel, stem cell research, or Einstein’s theory of relativity within the Qur’an, arguing that such interpretations are neither credible nor grounded in sound hermeneutics<sup>4</sup>. He contends that this trend not only hinders

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<sup>1</sup> Guessoum, *The Young Muslim’s Guide to Modern Science*,

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Guessoum, *Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*

<sup>4</sup> Nidhal Guessoum, “Moon-Sighting and the Islamic Calendar: Towards a Unified Global Islamic Calendar,” *Zygon* 45, no. 3 (2010): 613–636, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2010.01117.x>

scientific advancement in Muslim societies but also alienates the scientific community and fosters mistrust between religious scholars and scientists.

Ultimately, Guessoum sees the solution in cultivating a new generation of Muslims well-versed in the principles of the scientific method, the philosophy of science, and the history of science—a generation capable of interpreting religious texts with methodological rigor and modern rationality. Instead of attempting to prove religious doctrines scientifically, this generation would aim to live ethically, spiritually, and meaningfully in the age of science.

### **2-5. Rational Coexistence of Science and Religion**

In offering practical solutions, Guessoum emphasizes that the rational coexistence of science and religion is possible, provided that this methodological distinction is maintained. In other words, religion should not attempt to prove or disprove empirical propositions using scientific methods, and science should not enter semantic and ethical domains that lie beyond its capacity<sup>1</sup> This methodological distinction helps to minimize the apparent conflict between science and religion and allows each to flourish within its own realm.

Rather than seeking a direct synthesis of science and religion or extracting scientific knowledge from religious texts, he advocates for a rational dialogue in which both systems can discuss values, spirituality, and the ultimate goals of human beings, without stepping outside their own epistemological frameworks. Such a dialogue can contribute to a deeper understanding of the self, the world, and humanity's relationship with creation, while also increasing mutual respect and understanding between scientists and religious thinkers.<sup>2</sup>

Guessoum maintains that there is no inherent conflict between modern science and Islam, and that a "rational compatibility" between them can be achieved. In his writings, he emphasizes that science must remain grounded in empirical, rational, and testable methods; however, this does not mean ignoring religious faith. Rather, faith can play a role in ultimate explanation or scientific worldview<sup>3</sup>. Guessoum believes that many of the problems in the Islamic world stem from a misunderstanding of the relationship between science and religion, not from an actual conflict between them. He asserts that science must be free to explore, and religion must be flexible enough to understand and reinterpret.

Therefore, in Guessoum's view, this rational coexistence is not only possible but necessary for the epistemic and moral advancement of Islamic societies and beyond. He believes that by maintaining methodological boundaries and focusing on philosophical and ethical commonalities, it is possible to benefit from both epistemological systems and avoid ideological confrontations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Guessoum, *The Young Muslim's Guide to Modern Science*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Guessoum in the Eyes of His Critics

Due to Guessoum's fame and credibility, his ideas have been examined by some critics. In this section, two prominent cases are mentioned. Salman Hameed, professor of philosophy of science and religion, while praising Guessoum's moderate stance, points out that "the claim of full compatibility between modern science and Islamic faith still remains theoretical and faces serious challenges in practice." Ultimately, he considers the theory of "separation of epistemological domains," or "non-overlapping magisteria," to be more effective, since, according to him, science and religion have incompatible methodologies and blending them leads to conceptual confusion.

In contrast to this moderate critique, Taner Edis, a physicist and critic of philosophy of religion, argues more sharply that Guessoum and other contemporary Muslim thinkers, like theological engineers, avoid offering a clear framework in order to evade direct critique. According to him, this kind of "avoidance of specificity" results in a theory that "lacks any concrete empirical or philosophical content." He also notes that, unlike proponents of Intelligent Design who seek to reject evolution or modern physics, Guessoum does not make such attempts; however, this very avoidance is, in his view, a sign of the "harmlessness" of the theory, as well as its "ineffectiveness" in the scientific domain. According to his methodological axiom that Qur'anic verses on creation should not always be read literally, he approaches to the theory of evolution. He believes that allegorical or symbolic interpretations open the door for compatibility with evolution<sup>1</sup>. Thus, Guessoum argues that evolution is a well-established scientific theory and should not be rejected by Muslims. He notes that denial often stems from literalist readings of scripture rather

It seems that Edis means that Guessoum has not been able to provide an acceptable and convincing response to the concrete challenges that certain scientific theories pose to religious belief and scriptural texts. Simply put, Guessoum tries to avoid entering the heart of the conflict and always stays in a safe margin. Perhaps the claim that the languages of science and religion are entirely different and should not be directly compared serves as a convenient excuse for Guessoum and others like him to stay out of the fray.

Other evaluations of Guessoum's approach have also been offered. For example, it has been said that he neither seeks to reinterpret science in religious language nor aims to find scientific verses in the Qur'an. Rather, his approach is that religion should inspire meaning, but not involve itself in the process of scientific knowledge production.

It has also been said that, compared to Christian traditions of science and religion, Guessoum is closer to integrative models, but by emphasizing the concept of *tawhīd* as a unifying principle, he distances himself from Trinitarian theologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*

Contrary to the naturalistic and strictly neutral stance toward science often recommended in secular views, Guessoum suggests that science can be inspired by a *tawhīdic* worldview, without falling into methodological deviation. This crucial distinction sets his view apart from science-averse or religion-averse models, and even from mainstream religious scientism.

#### 4. Analysis and Evaluation

The study of Nidhal Guessoum's approach to the relationship between science and religion in general, and science and Islam in particular, raises the question: what advantage does his approach have compared to other rationalist, moderate, and conciliatory Muslim thinkers? It seems that, overall, there is no significant difference. He merely seeks to be a prominent representative of this intellectual camp through his own particular discourse. Of course, this is not in itself a shortcoming for Guessoum, since it would be unreasonable to expect perspectives outside the two main approaches namely, the rationalist–moderate or the scientific harmonizing frameworks to emerge within the context of the science–religion debate. There is, of course, a third view that has become marginal in contemporary times and cannot be considered significant in the literature of science and religion debates: the retrogressive and dogmatic view that does not consider the science–religion issue to be real, and regards it as fabricated. In simpler terms, the prominent figures in the field of science and Islam studies either belong to the rationalist–moderate camp to which Guessoum adheres, or to the opposing camp that attempts to show that everything discovered in modern science has already been stated in the Qur'an—namely, the view that Guessoum refers to as “superficial scientism.” Nonetheless, a closer examination of Guessoum's works reveals that he shows a clear distinction in at least three areas compared to other thinkers in this field.

##### 4-1. Systematic Effort to Critique Superficial Scientism

While most critics of “superficial scientism” suffice with expressing general objections or avoid engaging directly with this trend, Guessoum, through an analytical, structured, and critical approach, has undertaken a fundamental critique of this movement. He considers this critique not as a marginal note to the science–religion discussion, but as one of the central components of his intellectual project.

Unlike some reformist figures who use vague or cautious language in criticizing the scientific miracles of the Qur'an, Guessoum explicitly uses terms such as “distorting,” “irrational,” and “systematically misleading” to describe illegitimate scientific interpretations of the Qur'an. While reviewing reports by promoters of scientific miracles, he points out the epistemological, historical, and philosophical problems of these interpretations and shows that such readings, rather than strengthening religion, expose it to more serious accusations—especially when scientific theories change. For instance, in Chapter Three of *Islam's Quantum Question*, titled “*Science in the Qur'an?*”, Guessoum presents a range of examples of scientific miracle interpretations and critically evaluates them through the lens of scientific epistemology, scientific methodology, and the history of science. He writes:

“Such interpretations are typically the result of wishful thinking, a superficial reading of the Qur’an and of science, and a desperate attempt to impress by showing that everything was already there in the scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

Guessoum also emphasizes that this type of superficial scientism ultimately leads to a loss of trust in both science and religion—since religion is reduced to a tool for scientific validation, and science becomes an instrument for external legitimation.

#### **4-2. Precise Focus on Controversial Cases in Science and the Qur’an**

As it’s been said before, another strength in Guessoum’s approach is his serious and methodical attention to specific and complex cases of science–religion interaction: issues such as biological evolution, the Big Bang theory, quantum mechanics, and the concepts of time and causality. In these cases, he attempts not only to demonstrate the possibility of constructive dialogue between science and religion, but also to expose the artificial contradictions fabricated by both extreme ends.

For example, in Chapters Four and Five of *Islam’s Quantum Question*, he extensively discusses the origin of the universe, time in special and general relativity, the expansion of the universe, and the relationship of these concepts to verses of the Qur’an. He analyzes the verse "وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ"<sup>1</sup>, attempting to show that although using this verse to support the theory of cosmic expansion<sup>1</sup> may seem appealing at first glance, it presents serious methodological issues, since the verse in its linguistic and historical context carries a metaphorical meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding biological evolution as well, Guessoum takes a realistic stance and believes that the Darwinian theory, if properly understood, not only does not negate God, but can be understood as a natural mechanism within the framework of divine will. He writes:

“We must understand evolution not as a theory that challenges God’s role in creation, but as a scientific model of natural processes. The Qur’an need not be in opposition to this, if read carefully and contextually.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, Guessoum’s focus on detailed case analysis offers a practical, bottom-up approach to the relationship between science and religion, rather than merely a theoretical or abstract reflection.

#### **Conclusion**

It appears that Nidhal Guessoum has not advanced a final or definitive resolution to the complex questions that lie at the intersection of Islam and science. This absence of a conclusive solution should not be read as a weakness in his scholarship, but rather as an accurate reflection of the

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<sup>1</sup> According to the one of the reviewers of this paper, the metaphorical interpretation is correctly applied to the word "بأيدي" (as hands, symbolizing power), not to "الموسعون" (which is the subject of the cosmological expansion concept).

deep methodological and epistemological difficulties these issues pose. Methodologically, Guessoum offers one of the most valuable contemporary models for addressing science–religion problems: his approach is measured, rational, and non-fundamentalist, and therefore well suited to produce substantive advances over time. His method bears clear affinities with the rational spirit of classical Islamic philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd, making him a plausible modern continuation of that intellectual tradition. Moreover, Guessoum cautions against investing excessive interpretive energy in claims of “scientific miracles” in the Qur’ān, which he regards as epistemologically precarious and hermeneutically misleading.

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