

THE PROBLEMS OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUR'AN

Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Siraj-ad-Din)

There is no doubt that modern knowledge has made it necessary for us to interpret certain verses of the Qur'an in a way which is less literal than the interpretation accepted by most of our -ancestors. For example, the science of geology has shown, on the evidence of the fossils in the rocks, that there are long chronological gaps between the first appearances of different classes of living things. It is therefore difficult to take the Qur'anic account of the creation in six days to mean six in an arithmetical sense. But the Holy Book itself invites us to a symbolic interpretation, for *verily a day in the Sight of thy Lord is as a thousand years of what ye count.*¹ For Christians and Jews there is a similar invitation from the Psalms which tell us that *a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday.* No problem whatsoever exists between tradition and science in this respect. Nor is there any. factual difference between what religion teaches and what science has discovered about our remotest ancestors. Both are in agreement that in the earliest times man lived in entirely natural surroundings, without houses, without books, and, if we go back far enough, without clothes. The only divergence here lies in the sense of values: according to the modern outlook, ancient man was "back-ward"; according to tradition-man's primordial simplicity was a great asset. The Holy Books tell us that he was-at first better and wiser than when he began to build houses and to read and write. His perfection was such that he did not, need a religion; and the angels were ordered to prostrate themselves before him.

As to the theory of evolution, sometimes called Darwinism, the belief that the human race is descended from apes which themselves had gradually evolved from some lower species, this does not constitute a difference between religion and science because the theory in question is totally unscientific, being no more than a fantastic hypothesis. None the less, it is taught in many schools as if it were a proven scientific fact; and in the 'West

¹ Qur'an, 22:48.

it has done much — in fact it has probably done more than any other single factor — to undermine religious faith. If it were true, it would indeed be impossible to believe in the religions, which all teach what the Holy Qur'an expresses in the verses: *We created man in the fairest rectitude. Then We cast him down to be the lowest of the low.*² And many other verses could also be quoted, such as those which tell us that when God desires something He says *Be, and it is* and that the creative act is *like the twinkling of an eye*. In a word, the modernists believe that man has come up from below. But until the present age, man believed what all religions teach, namely, that man has come down from above.

The cause of Western disbelief in this universal truth is human pride, largely based on an ever increasing lack of the sense of proportions and the failure to judge things according to their true value. By the end of the 19th century in Europe men were drunk with the conviction that they represented the highest human possibility yet reached. For them the proof of this lay in the new inventions. This certainty of human progress made them totally vulnerable to the theory of evolution, which they eagerly accepted as a scientific proof of their superiority. It was in vain that a minority of scientists maintained that this theory has no scientific basis, and that it runs contrary to many known facts.

Man is made for religion; he cannot live without belief; and if he loses his faith in true religion, he will give his soul to another object of faith, which he will endow with all those rights and privileges which belong to religion alone. The majority of Western scientists have made a religion of evolutionism and of "progressism" which is inseparable from it.

But the non-scientist public is unaware of this. When the scientists affirm that evolution is a proven fact, the non-scientist accepts it without question; they assume that it is the result of altogether objective investigation. In consequence they either lose their religious faith or they try by false logic to adapt their religion to evolution and progress; and I am sorry to have to say that even some Muslims have tried to make out, by turning a blind eye to many Qur'anic verses, that the theory of evolution is to be found in our Holy Book.

As to those scientists who remain objective and who see clearly that the theory of evolution has no scientific basis, they are unable to make

² Qur'an, 95:4, 5.

themselves heard, and some of them have to pretend to be evolutionist in order to obtain work. The evolutionist majority controls all official scientific domains. One of the greatest of the English non-evolutionist scientists, Douglas Dewar, was never able to make himself heard on the radio because whenever he submitted to the BBC a talk against evolution It was referred automatically to the scientific section of the BBC who said it was not interesting. Dewar also asked many times to have a broadcast debate with an evolutionist, but no evolutionist ever dared to undergo this risk.

In consequence the last three or four generations in Europe and America have tended to believe that evolution is a proven fact, and this accounts for the atheism and the agnosticism which is so widely spread over the Western world. In communist countries parents are obliged to send their children to state schools where from the age of five they are indoctrinated with atheism; and evolution, presented to them as a scientific fact, is one of the great "proofs" that religions are all false — deliberately invented by the rich as a means of oppressing the poor. In non-communist countries it is easier to escape from these lies. But none the less, pupils and students see that most of their teachers believe in evolution, and they are bound to be influenced by them, more or less, as the case may be.

In Dar al-Islam the situation is altogether different: the Holy Qur'an affirms the exact opposite of evolutionism and progressism again and again. So do the sayings of Sayyidina Muhammed (ﷺ) And these authorities are accepted as absolute proofs that evolution is not true and therefore not based on scientific fact. But our sons and our daughters are continually being sent to the West, and there they are in great danger of losing their faith because of the predominant belief that science has proved that man is descended from a lower species. If they go to the British Science Museum in London, for example, they will see a gigantic illustration of man's gradual descent from the apes, with a portrait of an ape-like man or a man-like ape for each of the successive links in the chain; and they will be tempted to believe that these portraits are based on fact, not on fantasy, precisely because they are to be found in a museum of which the function - indeed the whole point of its existence — is to place scientific facts before the public. How can we safeguard against this danger, their belief in the Holy Qur'an? In my opinion one of the chief answers to this question lies in the fact that although the true

scientists have not been allowed to broadcast the facts about evolution, they have written books which show beyond doubt that the theory in question is nothing other than a hypothesis. These books, or some of them, should be translated into Arabic, Urdu, Turkish and Persian and other main languages of Muslim peoples. They will serve to show that no problem whatsoever arises from the Qur'anic affirmation that man was created in the best possible state, because the theories which teach the opposite of this are not scientific.

One of the most important of these books is *The Transformist Illusion*³ by the already mentioned Douglas Dewar. Another is *Flaws in the Theory of Evolution*⁴ by Evan Shute. More recent is *Evolution: a Theory in Crisis*⁵ by Michael Denton. These books set out to be purely scientific. Although the authors are believers that God created the universe, they deliberately avoid letting their religion, intrude upon their refutations of evolutionism so that they cannot be accused of religious prejudice. Their arguments are factual and objective. In an altogether different class is *From the Divine to the Human*⁶ by Frithjof Schuon. Here the standpoint is religious but not in the ordinary sense, for the book is addressed to the higher reaches of the intelligence. The reader is intellectually convinced of the absurdity of evolutionism and of the necessity of creation in the light of the metaphysical truth that for all relativity the Absolute-Infinite is both Origin and End. For the Western world which has been subjected for several generations to the lie expressed in the words "from the subhuman to the human", Schuon's *From the Divine to the Human* is a much needed medicine.

³ Dehoff Publications, Tennessee, 1957.

⁴ Tenside Press, Canada, 1966.

⁵ Burnett Books, 1985.

⁶ World Wisdom Books, Bloomington (Indiana) 1982.