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Science as an ally of religion: a Muslim appropriation of ‘the conflict thesis’

M. ALPER YALCINKAYA*

Abstract. John W. Draper’s *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874) is commonly regarded as the manifesto of the ‘conflict thesis’. The superficiality of this thesis has been demonstrated in recent studies, but to read Draper’s work only as a text on ‘science versus religion’ is to miss half of its significance, as it also involved evaluations of individual religions with respect to their attitudes towards science. Due to Draper’s favourable remarks on Islam, the Ottoman author Ahmed Midhat translated his work into Turkish, and published it along with his own comments on Draper’s arguments. Midhat interpreted Islam using the cues provided by Draper, and portrayed it as the only religion compatible with science. While his Christian readers condemned Draper for his approach to Islam, Midhat transformed the ‘conflict thesis’ into a proclamation that Islam and science were allies in opposition to Christian encroachment on the Ottoman Empire. This paper analyses Midhat’s appropriation of Draper’s work and compares it to the reaction of Draper’s Christian readers. It discusses the context that made an alliance between Islam and science so desirable for Midhat, and emphasizes the impact of the historico-geographical context on the encounters between and representations of science and religion.

Whether one likes it or not, the theme of ‘science versus religion’ promises to occupy a central position in public debate for many years to come. While it is reasonable to expect a surge of interest in new approaches to the history of the relations between science and religion, it is also evident that one key point has been firmly established by works published in the last two decades: the untenability of the conflict thesis. These studies demonstrated that the idea that there exists an unavoidable and irreconcilable conflict between religion and science is an utterly simplistic one that can hardly contribute to the understanding of these two phenomena.¹ Investigating the problem as it pertains to Christianity, these analyses uncovered a plethora of different views about

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1 For criticisms of the conflict thesis see David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers (eds.), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; and *idem*, *When Science and Christianity Meet*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003; John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. James R. Moore discusses the emergence and the impact of the conflict thesis in *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

the relationship between Christian theology and science broadly conceived that emerged during the history of this religion. 'Unavoidable conflict' was essentially a view that had become popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, but even then alternative views continued to be held by 'men of science' and 'men of religion', and these two categories were never mutually exclusive.

However, studies of the conflict thesis do not, for the most part, link their analyses to a deep-rooted and at times extremely antagonistic controversy that characterized the history of the three 'sister' religions, namely the conflict among Judaism, Christianity and Islam.² What makes this a conspicuous problem is that the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed not only the emergence of the conflict thesis, but also the intensification of the controversies among religions, particularly between Islam and Christianity. Colonialism brought Muslims and Christians into an entirely new kind of relationship, fostering the emergence of novel ideas about these religions and the place they occupied in the new world. Meanwhile, the fields of critical biblical studies and comparative religion, as well as orientalism, products of the nineteenth century, generated a wealth of knowledge about these faiths and discussed elements of the traditional debates under the roof of these new disciplines.³ In such a context, ideas about the conflict between science and religion could not but relate to the conflicts between religions.

In this article I analyse an episode in which the two 'conflicts' were thoroughly intermeshed: the translation of John William Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* into Ottoman Turkish under the title *Niza-i İlm ü Din*.⁴ Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844–1912), the Muslim author who translated Draper, also included in the Turkish edition a lengthy commentary he wrote on the American author's views, and particularly those on Islam. Midhat's is an exceptionally interesting reading of Draper, as he approaches the question of 'science versus religion' essentially as yet another aspect of the saga 'Islam versus Christianity'. Indeed, Ahmed Midhat appropriates the conflict thesis to make points about these two religions – points he deems crucial for the survival of the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman intellectuals familiar with European debates were certainly discussing the conflict thesis towards the end of the nineteenth century, but this does not demonstrate that conflict is an idea that travels from one context to another on its own, or that it is just a by-product of the importation of Western science by a peripheralized society. Representations of and disputes around science and religion need to be analysed within their own contexts, and, as I seek to demonstrate in this paper, the Ottoman response to the conflict thesis cannot be fully understood without an examination of the broader

2 While this study focuses on Christianity and Islam, it is worth noting that many criticisms directed by Muslim authors against Christianity in reference to the 'conflict between religion and science' were actually about the Old Testament. The way the 'conflict' narrative influenced Muslim understandings of Judaism is a promising research topic.

3 David Friedrich Strauss's work on the 'historical Jesus', *Das Leben Jesu Kritisch Bearbeitet* (1835) was a turning point in biblical studies. Max Müller's *Introduction to the Science of Religion* was published in 1873.

4 John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1874; Ahmed Midhat Efendi, *Niza-i İlm ü Din, İslam ve Ulûm*, 4 vols., Istanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat, 1895–1900. In the rest of the paper I will refer to Draper's work as *Conflict* and Midhat's as *Niza*. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

debate into which Draper's ideas were introduced. Midhat approached the conflict thesis pragmatically and 'Ottomanized' Draper to make him part of a local debate. In Midhat's hands, *Conflict* became a work that legitimized the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II by proving the superiority of Islam over Christianity.⁵

But as I will also illustrate, it was not only Ahmed Midhat or Muslim Ottomans who read Draper through the lens of the struggle between Christianity and Islam. His Christian readers were equally interested in Draper's comments on Islam, and they were as exasperated by his positive remarks on 'Mohammedanism' as by his criticism of Christianity. In other words, Draper's diatribe was read also as an account of the merits of the two religions on both sides of the ocean. Finally, as I will briefly discuss, Draper's perspective also represented more than just a philosophical argument for readers in other 'Westernizing' societies like Russia and Japan.

Before presenting Midhat's comments on Draper, I will focus on the particularities of his position as an influential author in the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. As *Niza* remains in obscurity even in Turkey, and also in order to demonstrate how Midhat makes the most of Draper's arguments, I will then provide a lengthy summary and analysis of this work.⁶ I will conclude with a discussion of what *Niza* signified in its own context and a comparison between the approaches of Draper's readers in different parts of the world to illustrate the connections between the 'two conflicts'.

Ahmed Midhat Efendi and Abdülhamid II: creating the new Ottoman individual

Ahmed Midhat published *Niza* in four volumes between 1895 and 1900. He had written by that time more than one hundred books, both fiction and non-fiction.⁷ He owned a major printing house, published a leading newspaper, and, crucially, was a favourite of Abdülhamid II (reigned 1876–1909) – a sultan whose regime exercised unprecedented degrees of press censorship. Yet Midhat had started from humble beginnings. In contrast to many Ottoman intellectuals of the period who were sons of state officials, Midhat was the son of a shopkeeper.⁸ He learned to read while working as an apprentice at the Spice Market in Istanbul. He later had some formal education and took bureaucratic posts in Niš (in present-day Serbia) and Baghdad, which included the administration of local official newspapers. Upon his return to Istanbul in 1871, he started working as a journalist and founded his own printing house. He also acquainted himself with the Young Ottomans, reformist intellectuals who advocated the

5 As his contemporary critics note, Draper's work is also best seen as a tract against Catholicism, rather than as a well-researched history on science and religion. See, for example, Moore, op. cit. (1), pp. 23–29.

6 The only work in English with references to *Niza*'s arguments is Berna Kılınç's 'Ahmed Midhat and Adnan Adıvar on history of science and civilizations', *Nuncius: annali di storia della scienza* (2008) 2, pp. 291–308.

7 After publishing his short stories in 1870, Midhat became the author of the first novels in many genres in Ottoman Turkish, along with many stories and plays. For analyses of his literary output see Orhan Okay, *Batı Medeniyeti Karşısında Ahmet Mithat Efendi* (Ahmet Mithat Efendi Confronts Western Civilization), Istanbul: MEGSB, 1989.

8 The details are based on Okay, op. cit. (7). Also see Carter V. Findley, 'An Ottoman occidental in Europe: Ahmed Midhat meets Madame Gülnar, 1889', *American Historical Review* (1998) 1, pp. 15–49.

establishment of a parliament under a new sultan. This, and his haphazard references to a variety of ideas in his articles, caused him to be sent into exile in 1874 along with the Young Ottomans. While he had published many 'harmless' texts on the history of Islam, he had also toyed with ideas like private entrepreneurship, the concept of 'the nation', and social evolution – ideas that were not particularly popular in the Ottoman Empire during this period.⁹

Forgiven in 1876, Midhat returned to Istanbul and thus started a new period in his life defined by his rapport with the new sultan, Abdülhamid II. After distancing himself from the Young Ottomans and praising Abdülhamid II in his works, he was appointed to the directorship of the Ottoman official gazette in 1878.¹⁰ He also started to publish the newspaper *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* at his own printing house, but received regular financial support from the palace, and in his articles and books he propagated ideas that were consistent with Abdülhamid's policies. Chief among these ideas were public education, stability, patriarchy and deference to the Sultan. The image of the industrious, frugal and obedient individual that he had been constructing since his early works culminated in his views on the best synthesis between the 'Eastern' and the 'Western'. He summarized his viewpoint in an article published in 1898:

If we try to Europeanize only for the sake of becoming European, we shall lose our own character. If we, on the other hand, add European civilization to our own character, we shall not only preserve, perpetuate, and maintain our character but also fortify and refine it.¹¹

The ideal Ottoman individual was one who combined the knowledge produced in the West by the new sciences with the morality of the Muslims and remained loyal to the throne, just like the protagonists of his novels.¹²

But the reign of Abdülhamid II was itself a period of increased emphasis on the connections between Islam, the 'Ottoman character' and obedience to the Sultan. Particularly after the empire had lost most of its territories and non-Muslim citizens in the Balkans in the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman war, the Sultan started to 'stress the Islamic religion as a new bid for unity against what he saw as an increasingly hostile Christian world'.¹³ He began emphasizing the title 'the caliph of all Muslims' that previous sultans had rarely used, many 'Holy Relics' were 'discovered' and brought to

9 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı* (19th-Century Turkish Literature), Istanbul: Ibrahim Horoz, 1956, pp. 438–439.

10 In *Menfa* (Exile), Istanbul: Arma, 2002 (first published 1876), Midhat argued that while enthusiasm for progress was commendable, the reformists' project was flawed as it was built on hostility. Progress could best be achieved through cautiousness and education, 'without offending anyone'. See *Menfa*, p. 51. In *Üss-i İnkılâb* (The Basis of Reform), Istanbul, 1878, he portrayed Abdülhamid II as a wise ruler who had understood that the freedom of the people was the essence of reform. See Ufuk Ulutaş 'Üss-i İnkılâb: an official narrative of the evolution of reforms in the Ottoman Empire', MA thesis, Ohio State University, 2005.

11 Quoted in Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, Montreal: McGill University Press, 1974, p. 285. On Midhat's views regarding this ideal union also see Findley, op. cit. (8).

12 See, for example, *Felâhî Bey ve Râkım Efendi* (1875) and *Demir Bey, Yahut İnkışaf-ı Esrar* (Demir Bey, or the Discovery of Mysteries, 1888). While references to this 'ideal synthesis' can be found in the works of authors such as Namık Kemal, Ahmed Midhat was its most prominent advocate.

13 Selim Deringil, 'Legitimacy structures in the Ottoman state: the reign of Abdülhamid II, 1876–1909', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (1991) 3, pp. 345–359, p. 346.

the capital with extravagant ceremonies, and similar spectacles accompanied the departure of the Sultan's gifts to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.¹⁴

This policy affected the educational system as well: while the number of state schools of all levels based on the French model increased rapidly, the curricula were reformed with an emphasis on Islam.¹⁵ A report of the curricular reform commission stated in 1887 that students' interest in Western ideas led to disloyalty to the throne, immorality and ignorance in Islamic matters, and recommended increasing the number of classes on Islam, and monitoring schools very closely to 'fend off the danger [posed by students] being occupied with Western works and writings that are harmful to Islamic morals and to the exalted sultanate'.¹⁶ According to a similar report from 1900, students needed to have all the essential knowledge pertaining to science, but they should also obtain 'religious firmness [and] be faithful to the sublime sultanate and endowed with sound morals'.¹⁷

The chief problem was thus defined as the 'harmful effects of Western works' on 'confused' students. A related, but even more urgent, problem was Western encroachment via the Christian missionary schools all around the empire – schools that were better equipped and staffed than the new schools of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸ Secessionist movements of the non-Muslim communities were attributed by the Palace to missionary effort, and, according to official reports, Muslim students' attendance in missionary schools could damage 'their national and religious training'.¹⁹ Minister of Education Zühdi Pasha declared these schools a great threat because 'the foreigners realized that they can achieve their political objectives by corrupting the minds of the students of these schools and leading them astray'.²⁰

14 See Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909*, London and New York: Tauris, 1998, for more examples. Islam in the Ottoman Empire has commonly been argued to have been subservient to *raison d'état*, and the autonomy of the class of religious scholars (*ulema*) was always limited, including during the reign of Abdülhamid II. Abdülhamid's emphasis on Islam was essentially a political project for constructing an 'official belief' that would serve as 'social cement'. Deringil, *op. cit.*, p. 66. For a comparative study clarifying the particularities of the Ottoman model see Sena Karasipahi, 'Comparing Islamic resurgence movements in Turkey and Iran', *Middle East Journal* (2009) 1, pp. 87–107.

15 Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 87.

16 Quoted in Fortna, *op. cit.* (15), p. 215. While these reports commented on curricula in general, it was the students of the Military Medical Academy and the War Academy that most concerned the state. In the late 1880s German popular materialism, particularly Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*, became a chief inspiration for these students who developed arguments implicitly or explicitly critical of Islam and the legitimacy of the Sultan, and started the Young Turk movement. See Şükrü Hanioglu, 'Blueprints for a future society: late Ottoman materialists on science, religion and art', in Elisabeth Özdalga (ed.), *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 28–116.

17 Quoted in Fortna, *op. cit.* (15), p. 219.

18 On Protestant missionary schools in the Ottoman Empire see Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, *Kendi Belgeleriyle Anadolu'daki Amerika: 19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Amerikan Misyoner Okulları* (America in Anatolia: American Missionary Schools in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century), Ankara: Imge, 2000.

19 Quoted in Deringil, *op. cit.* (14), p. 117.

20 Atilla Çetin, 'Maarif Nazırı Ahmed Zühdi Paşa'nın Osmanlı İmparatorluğundaki Yabancı Okullar Hakkındaki Raporu' (Zühdi Pasha's report on foreign schools in the Ottoman Empire), *Güney-doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* (1981) 10, pp. 189–219, p. 196.

It is exactly at this point that Draper comes into the picture. What Ahmed Midhat saw in *Conflict* was a text that could be regarded as yet another ‘dangerous Western work’, but in fact it was a far more flexible resource that could actually be used as a weapon to fight both major problems of the period. *Conflict*, for Midhat, not only refuted the claims of the missionaries, but also demonstrated forcefully – though not necessarily deliberately – that Islam did not have a conflict with science, thus proving its truth to ‘confused minds’.

Midhat’s Draper: foe of Christianity, friend of Islam

In his foreword Midhat states that it was Fatma Aliye who had asked him to read *Conflict* – a book of which he had not previously heard.²¹ When he started reading, he realized that the book deserved to be taken seriously, as unlike many critics of religion, Draper was a respectable man of science who kept the promise he made in his own introduction: ‘to present a clear and impartial statement of the views and acts of the two contending parties’.²²

What made Draper’s ‘impartiality’ so appealing for Midhat is obviously that the criteria Draper introduced could be construed as demonstrating that there could be no conflict between Islam and science. Furthermore, as it appears that what Draper means by the word ‘religion’ is Christianity, Midhat argues, studying Draper’s text ‘has many additional benefits for Muslim readers’ – benefits related to his purpose when he published his *Apology* directed against the Christian missionaries in the Ottoman Empire.²³ Hence, reading Draper – under the guidance of Midhat, of course – is useful for Ottoman Muslims: it shows Islam’s compatibility with science, and thus can prevent Muslim students from doubting their religion, and it proves the conflict between Christianity and science, thus providing the Ottoman Muslims with a weapon against the missionaries.

What exactly does Draper state about Christianity, Islam and science, then? *Conflict* is a book that presents Draper’s arguments on science and religion around two themes discussed in separate chapters: the history of the conflict, and the major points of contention. In many of these chapters Draper makes brief, and occasionally quite lengthy, comparisons between Islam and Christianity. Even though Islamic doctrine as found in the Koran rarely fares better than Christian theology, Draper praises

21 Fatma Aliye (1862–1936), the daughter of the historian and jurist Cevdet Pasha, and literary protégée of Ahmed Midhat, was the first Ottoman woman to publish novels and actively engage in public affairs. Her familiarity with the book suggests that Draper’s work was known among elite circles.

22 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. ix.

23 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 10. In the first volume of the *Apology*, published in 1883, Midhat elaborated on the inauthenticity of the Bible and the immorality of Christian clerics. Henry Otis Dwight, an American Congregational missionary in Istanbul, sent a reply, which Midhat reproduced in the second volume. In his own response, Midhat stated that in contrast with Dwight’s arguments, Protestantism was marred by the same problems as Catholicism. In the third volume, he criticized Chateaubriand’s *Génie du Christianisme* and the decadence of the Christian Europe of his time. See *Müdafaa* (Apology), 3 vols., Istanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat, 1883–1884.

the contributions of the ‘Saracens’ heartily, providing Midhat with a foundation for presenting Draper as an unwitting advocate of Islam.²⁴ I discuss below Draper’s arguments and Midhat’s comments in the sections on which he chooses to elaborate. Therefore this is by no means a comprehensive summary of Draper’s and Midhat’s works.²⁵

On the origin of science

In the first chapter of *Conflict* Draper argues that science originated in Alexandria after the Macedonian conquest.²⁶ The inductive philosophy of Aristotle, the source of ‘all the modern advances in science’, was cultivated at the Museum of Alexandria, while Stoicism provided the ethical principles that guided the Alexandrian school, namely that ‘we must learn to control our passions, and live free, intelligent, virtuous, in all things in accordance with reason’.²⁷ There was no personal god for the Stoics, but a vital force to which all souls would eventually return. As absolute truth was unattainable and first causes were incomprehensible, what man should do was to acquire knowledge and live a virtuous life guided by reason. Midhat, however, warns his readers that Aristotle’s inductivism was as ridiculous as Greek superstition when it attempted to explain the metaphysical, and that was why Zeno’s Stoicism came into being.²⁸ But while Zeno did come close to a true understanding of the Divine, the society he lived in was not as sophisticated as Draper portrays it. In fact, the Alexandria of the time was ‘like the Paris of today’: irreligious, immoral, insolent.²⁹ Their decadence reached levels beyond that of the pagan Greeks, which could actually lead one to ‘detest science and appreciate ignorance’.³⁰ Midhat’s obvious, but crucial, point is that in societies where scientific progress takes place, decline in morals is possible, if not unavoidable, with clear implications for Europe and the Ottoman Empire.

On the origin of Christianity

Draper’s central argument on the birth and spread of Christianity is that while it emerged as a doctrine of benevolence and brotherhood, it became ever more

24 Examples will be provided throughout the text, but see, e.g., Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 110–118.

25 I do not focus on Chapters 10 and 11 of *Conflict*, devoted to condemning Catholicism and praising the contributions of science, as Midhat’s comments are by and large expressions of his agreement. But while Midhat’s translation is loyal to the original work, Chapter 12 is missing in the Turkish edition. This chapter denounces the Syllabus of Errors issued in 1864 and states that the Catholic world must make a choice between the Church and science. Draper’s remarks on freedom of thought in this chapter could have got Midhat in trouble with the censors, yet his skill in handling such ‘dangerous’ discussions throughout the text suggests that this might not be the reason for the omission.

26 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 12, 33.

27 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 23–24.

28 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, pp. 116–117.

29 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 124.

30 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 125.

intertwined with the state and was modified in a regrettable way.³¹ Tertullian's Christianity, built on the principles of universal compassion and one, infinite God, was 'noble'.³² But Constantine's adoption of Christianity transformed it into a route to power, resulting in a process of paganization that 'eventually brought it in conflict with science'.³³ Amalgamated with the other religions prevalent in the empire, Christianity came to incorporate notions like miracles, the Trinity and transubstantiation, as well as practices including relic worship.³⁴

Most significantly for the purposes of Midhat, Draper asserts that the corruption of Christianity constitutes the main difference between this faith and 'Mohammedanism', which 'absolutely annihilated its antagonist, and spread its own doctrines without adulteration'.³⁵ It is thus Draper himself who makes exactly the same points Ahmed Midhat had made in the *Apology*;³⁶ hence, 'believers ... who respect the authentic truth of religion are with [Draper] in this'.³⁷

Even more tragic for Draper is that the new Christian clergy 'asserted that all knowledge is to be found in the Scripture and in the traditions of the Church', and, with the backing of the state, embarked on an attack on their intellectual competitors.³⁸ Thus started the process that turned the book of Genesis into not only the basis of Christianity but also the book with which all sciences should conform.³⁹ Once again Midhat is in agreement, but argues that Draper's own remarks indicate that the hostility of the Church towards all learning was 'not [about] "religion." It [was] politics'.⁴⁰ And if it is not even the authentic form of Christianity (which is Islam itself, according to Muslims) but its paganized, politicized version that committed these crimes, how can religion be claimed to be in conflict with science? The only heavenly book preserved in its true form, the Koran, also states that it contains everything, but Muslim scholars have always known that it 'would be a laughable naïveté to conclude from this statement ... that [the Koran] is an encyclopedia' and developed the sciences of exegesis (*tafsir*) and interpretation (*ta'wil*).⁴¹ Moreover, the God of the Muslims orders man to study the created to know the Creator,

31 Draper's approach to early Christianity is reminiscent of modernist Muslim authors of the time who argued that the backwardness of Muslim societies was due to their ignorance of authentic Islam and embrace of un-Islamic attitudes and superstitions. For representative texts see, for example, Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Modernist Islam 1840–1940*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

32 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 45. The theology of Tertullian is actually commonly regarded as the most anti-intellectualistic one that 'wished to substitute faith for reason'. See David Lindberg, 'Science and the early Church,' in Lindberg and Numbers, *God and Nature*, op. cit. (1), pp. 19–47, p. 25.

33 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 39.

34 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 47–49.

35 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 46.

36 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 186.

37 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 195.

38 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 52.

39 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 57–58.

40 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 211.

41 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 212.

and asserts that those who do not possess true knowledge could never be equal to those who do.⁴²

On Islam, or 'the Southern Reformation'

An important development in the history of Christianity, Draper suggests, was the emergence of Nestorianism in the fifth century. An Aristotelian reaction to anthropomorphic and Trinitarian views, Nestorianism was particularly popular in Western Asia. And it was a Nestorian monk who first influenced Mohammad, a young merchant from idolatrous Arabia, and instilled in him a hatred of idolatry as well as of Trinitarianism.⁴³

Even though Draper's remark about Nestorian influence is intended to praise, not belittle, Mohammad, Midhat states, it is simply unacceptable.⁴⁴ Also appalling are Draper's argument that Mohammad was, nevertheless, unable 'to emancipate himself from anthropomorphic conceptions',⁴⁵ his dramatic depictions of the conquests of Muslim armies, and his allusion to the story concerning the destruction of the library of Alexandria by the Arabs.⁴⁶ Midhat writes,

Draper wrote this book in order to tear down Christianity, and replace it with a philosophy which is supposedly based on science but is essentially nothing but atheism. Despite that, one should note how saddened he is by the takeover of Syria by Muslims from Christians and realize that this remorse is because he has only read books written with Christian zeal ... [This is why] Draper occasionally has such anti-Islamic slips of the tongue even though he is not an enemy of Islam.⁴⁷

If even a 'studious author like Draper' can misrepresent Islam, the blame lies with the Church that has long been disseminating lies about the Muslim faith, and 'even the friends of Islam sometimes unwillingly fall into these falsities'.⁴⁸ Indeed, for Midhat, Draper's positive remarks about Mohammad's aversion to Trinitarianism and his insistence on being but a messenger of God are strong evidence that the more Western thinkers learn about Islam the more likely they are to appreciate it. Moreover, as studying the history of Islam and interpreting the Koran are subtle tasks even for

42 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, pp. 232–236. Midhat refers to Koran 41:6, which stresses that Mohammad is but a human being, with the sole distinction that he received revelation, and 39:9, which states, 'Say, "Shall those who know be deemed equal with those who know not?"'. For Midhat, the equality of all humans, with knowledge as the true basis of distinction, rendered Islam so unique. Midhat's portrayal of the Koran as a book containing fundamental principles rather than facts is similar to that of another Muslim intellectual of the period, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who stated that with the Koran, God 'planted the roots of philosophical sciences into purified souls' who, in turn, developed these sciences and were 'transferred from the sphere of ignorance to knowledge'. See Afghani, 'The benefits of philosophy', in Nikki Keddie (ed.), *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani"*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968, pp. 109–122, p. 114.

43 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 79.

44 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, pp. 345–351.

45 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 84.

46 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 88–103.

47 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, pp. 489–490.

48 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, p. 421.

Muslims, 'an American professor should always be excused for his lack of comprehension of them'.⁴⁹

This is particularly true, of course, if the 'American professor' has favourable opinions about Islam. One such opinion concerns Draper's views on a 'characteristic' of Muslims commonly reviled in orientalist texts: fatalism. A fatalistic world view, for Draper, is particularly suitable for the emergence of a scientific outlook, and in this respect Islam is the opposite of Christianity. While 'Christendom believed that she could change the course of affairs by influencing the conduct of superior beings[,] Islam rested in a pious resignation to the unchangeable will of God'.⁵⁰ Christians insisted on a God who would constantly intervene in the workings of the world, whereas Muslims developed a conception of an orderly, consistent world where the 'iron chain of destiny' is formed by facts causally linked to one another.⁵¹

While Midhat feels the need to also emphasize the importance of individual will and worldly activity in Islam,⁵² on the contributions of Muslims the two authors agree. Draper devotes many pages to the Saracen Empire, and commends Muslims for adopting the inductive method and making great advances in mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, optics and so forth. Libraries in Muslim lands were exquisite, educational institutions were the finest on earth, arts flourished and industry boomed.⁵³ Muslims even developed a theory of evolution extending 'even to inorganic or mineral things'.⁵⁴

What Draper finds fundamentally praiseworthy, however, is not Islamic doctrine itself. Indeed, what is commendable about Muslims is the 'sophisticated philosophy' they were able to construct once they abandoned 'the fallacies of vulgar Mohammedanism' such as anthropomorphic depictions of God, thanks partly to the Nestorians and Jews they interacted with.⁵⁵ Such an approach, which distinguishes Islamic philosophy from the Koran, is untenable for Midhat. After all, if the book that their religion was based on had not made it possible, how could Muslims have encouraged astronomical and natural research so early, at a time when they were such fervent believers in that very book as to eradicate all forms of false belief in their surroundings? Muslims embraced and furthered Greek science simply because every statement in their Holy Book relies on 'scientific judgements and truths', and when Muslims perceive a body of knowledge that shares the same characteristics they claim

49 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 2, p. 63.

50 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 108.

51 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 108. The possibility and nature of God's activity in the world had become a major topic of debate in the Victorian era, epitomized by Tyndall's campaign to put the impact of prayer to the test. See Robert Bruce Mullin, 'Science, miracles and the prayer-gauge debate', in Lindberg and Numbers, *When Science and Christianity Meet*, op. cit. (1), pp. 203–224.

52 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 2, p. 50.

53 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 110–118.

54 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 118. He states without evidence that the 'modern doctrines of evolution and development' were taught in the schools of the Saracens. Draper's evidence for the Muslim 'extension' of the idea of evolution to inorganic things, on the other hand, is a quote from Al-Khazini stating that an idea held by common people was that gold passed through the forms of other metals before becoming gold, i.e. an argument on alchemy. See sections below for Draper's and Midhat's specific arguments on evolution.

55 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 106; on the abandonment of anthropomorphic conceptions see p. 124.

it.⁵⁶ Hence, with his usual pragmatism, Midhat treats the Koran and the achievements of Muslims as inseparable from one another, as 'Islam' itself and this flexible definition of Islam allow a variety of ways to 'demonstrate' the harmony between Islam and science.⁵⁷

On the 'conflict respecting the nature of the soul'

Whether souls were created and whether they survive death are questions that Draper discusses with reference to the principle of 'the indestructibility of matter and force'.⁵⁸ The idea that nothing can come out of nothingness, in turn, is most harmonious with religious outlooks that emphasize an 'impersonal intelligence, or indeterminate God, and a soul emerging from and returning to him'.⁵⁹ In other words, it is the ideas of emanation and absorption that are closest to a scientific understanding of 'the soul'.

Draper argues that the idea of the conservation of force can be found in Buddhist and Indian beliefs, and while John Erigena had introduced similar ideas in the Christian world, his works had been destroyed due to their conflict with the idea of creation out of nothing.⁶⁰ However, Draper's main focus in this chapter is once again 'Mohammedanism'. With a lengthy quotation from al-Ghazzali, Draper attempts to illustrate the Muslim belief in the return of souls to their source after death.⁶¹ But real 'philosophical Islamism', he argues, was Averroism, a system of thought that transcended anthropomorphic conceptions, and interpreted God as the 'active intelligence' that the 'intelligent principle, or soul [of an individual] ... is absorbed in' after death.⁶²

56 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 140.

57 The limits of this flexibility need to be noted, however, as Midhat's is still a Sunni Islam. His patron, Abdülhamid II, has also been defined as a pragmatist, including in religious issues. See Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 156, 253. Yet Sunni Islam was central to the notion of 'Ottomaness' advanced by the Hamidian regime, and Shi'i Iran was seen as a rival against Abdülhamid's claim to leadership over the Muslim world. See Selim Deringil, 'The struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: a study in Ottoman counter-propaganda', *Die Welt des Islams* (1990) 30, pp. 45–62.

58 As this principle is central to Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*, Draper's arguments linking it to Islamic philosophy are uniquely valuable for Midhat.

59 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 140.

60 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 122, 126. One reason for Buddhism's popularity in the West in the late nineteenth century was that it was seen to be in harmony with science. See Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, *passim*. Midhat's interpretation of the spread of Buddhism in Europe was similar: 'people whose mind and vision are enlightened by the light of science' could not remain Christian, and as philosophies like materialism failed to instill a sense of security in people's souls, Europeans started 'begging for a religion' in India. See his 'Paris'te Otuzbin Budi' (Thirty Thousand Buddhists in Paris), in Erdoğan Erbay and Ali Utku (eds.), *Felsefe Metinleri* (Philosophical Texts), Erzurum: Babil, 2002 (first published 1890), pp. 112–192, p. 131.

61 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 127–128. Draper does not cite his sources, and Midhat admits that he could not identify the source of the quotation. For another critique of Draper's 'quotation' see notes 120–121 below.

62 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 124, 139. Curiously, by identifying 'philosophical Islamism' with Averroes, a twelfth-century scholar, Draper ends up implying that the contributions of many Muslim scientists that he refers to had taken place before 'philosophical Islamism'.

The individual, or passive, intellect was an emanation from the active intellect and what would remain from all human souls in the end would be the aggregate of them all.⁶³

While he was familiar enough with the history of Islamic philosophy to know about the disagreements between Averroes and al-Ghazzali that Draper ignores, what is still most important for Midhat is that Draper was not alone in appreciating the harmony between Averroes's philosophy and science: 'From Renan, Cousin and Comte, to finally Schopenhauer and Büchner; from the naturalists and materialists, to realists and atheists, all make this confession.' Furthermore, the gist of the matter is that even though Averroes did have disagreements with al-Ghazzali, in his rebuttal he had 'succeeded in demonstrating that he had true faith'.⁶⁴ Thus the hero of the proponents of all the new Western philosophical trends is a true Muslim.

On the 'conflict respecting the nature of the world'

As the Church discouraged scientific research and regarded the Scriptures as the only reference to be consulted in all matters, by the sixteenth century 'Christianity had been in existence fifteen hundred years, and had not produced a single astronomer', Draper contends. Muslims, on the other hand, had adopted and built upon the Greek tradition, made significant observations and calculations, and thus rendered a great service to the progress of science.⁶⁵

Muslim astronomers' works had popularized the idea of a spherical Earth in the West and Columbus himself had been influenced by Averroes, but this view was deplored by Christian theologians as the Scriptures suggested a flat Earth.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in Draper's account, Copernicus's heliocentric theory was unacceptable for the Church as it turned the Earth into a planet of no particular importance, and brought up questions about the religious implications of the possibility of life on other planets, such as whether they had also fallen and had Saviours of their own.⁶⁷ Then, of course, came the ordeal of Galileo that Draper recounts in a moving fashion, concluding with the

63 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 139.

64 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 147. Additionally, the disagreement between al-Ghazzali and Averroes on the 'nature of the soul' was not considerable. See *idem*, op. cit. (4), vol. 2, pp. 432–433. Midhat devotes a special section to this issue at the end of the second volume of *Niza*, and presents the views of the young theologian and future *Şeyhülislam* Musa Kazım, who at the time was teaching Midhat Islamic hermeneutics. On Musa Kazım see Kevin Reinhart, 'Musa Kazım: from "ilm" to polemics', *Archivum Ottomanicum* (2001) 19, pp. 281–305. On al-Ghazzali and Averroes see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 280–302. Interestingly, in a letter to Beşir Fuad (see note 103 below), Midhat had confessed his ignorance in these matters: 'When necessary, we brag, saying that we produced Avicenna [and] Averroes ... Do we have knowledge of what they said? Even though it is essential to know Arabic or Persian to know them, how many of us are able to truly understand one sentence in these languages?' See Ahmed Midhat, 'Voltaire/Musâhabât-ı Leyliyye', in Erbay and Utku, op. cit. (60), p. 289.

65 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 158.

66 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 160.

67 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 169.

question, 'Must not that be false which requires for its support so much imposture, so much barbarity?'⁶⁸

Draper's examples provide fodder for Midhat's further comments on Christianity's problems: the Church propagated the idea that Heaven was above and Hell was below the flat Earth, tried to base this view on corrupted books, and, seeing itself as a mediator between God and His subjects, dared to regard it as in its authority to declare who would go where after death. In order to maintain this false authority, the Church 'never missed an opportunity to hinder the progress of science'.⁶⁹ In fact, that the Earth should be the centre of the universe is a specifically Christian concept: the Church exaggerated the importance of the Earth to strengthen its own this-worldly authority. But Islam, a faith without a Church, considers this world incomparably insignificant when compared to the afterlife. Thus 'in this issue, too, the comparison shows that the philosophy of Islam ... is ... harmonious with scientific theories'.⁷⁰ Giordano Bruno, another victim of the hostility of the Church towards science, and another hero of Draper, was influenced by Averroes.⁷¹ Midhat underlines that no incident such as the burning of Bruno ever took place in the history of Islam,⁷² but his comment on Draper's hope that a statue of Bruno will one day be unveiled under the dome of St Peter's⁷³ is much more striking:

Draper beautifully states that Bruno was the means through whom [the philosophy of] Averroes was transmitted to Spinoza ... Now if Bruno himself, whether consciously or not, was a speaker of the philosophy of Islam in Europe, then seeing in the temple of St. Peter the *minbar* of the philosophy he preached would certainly gratify his soul more than seeing his own statue there.⁷⁴

On the 'controversy respecting the age of the Earth'

Even though Draper does not even see as worthy of criticism the notion that the universe was created in six days, Midhat feels the need to clarify the position of Islam. Jews and Christians had, once again, misunderstood and misinterpreted the Word of God,

68 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 171–172. For a critical analysis of the historiography of the 'Galileo affair' see Chapter 4 of John H. Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature: The Engagement of Science and Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

69 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 69.

70 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 92. Note that although he held the heliocentric view, Midhat ignores the fact that classic Muslim scholars espoused geocentrism as well. For a contemporary work agreeing with Midhat on the broader question, and arguing that the introduction of Copernican theory into the Ottoman world in the seventeenth century did not cause a stir, see Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, 'Introduction of Western science to the Ottoman world: a case study of modern astronomy', in Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (ed.), *Transfer of Modern Science and Technology to the Muslim World*, Istanbul: IRCICA, 1992, pp. 67–120. Nevertheless, there is evidence that in the early nineteenth century, geocentric views were still common among Ottoman religious scholars. See Robert Morrison, 'The reception of early-modern European astronomy by Ottoman religious scholars', *Archivum Ottomanicum* (2003) 21, pp. 187–195.

71 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 179.

72 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 150.

73 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 181.

74 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 156. A *minbar* is a pulpit in a mosque.

and had either taken the phrase literally, or interpreted it as six thousand years. The Koran states that a day of God is *like* a thousand years, and Muslim scholars know that this is simply in order to give subjects an idea about the length of this time.⁷⁵

As for the Deluge, there are stark differences between the Koran and the Old Testament. Midhat admits that there exist interpretations of the Koran that resemble the views Draper ridicules, but it is because '[t]he story of the deluge as recounted in the book currently known as "The Old Testament"' ⁷⁶ influenced some Muslim scholars as well. But Midhat discusses at length newer interpretations that, once again, reveal the difference between the related verses in the Koran and the Old Testament. The central difference is exactly the point that 'materialists' use to denounce Christianity: the Koran clearly states that the Deluge was a local catastrophe; it did not affect the whole world.⁷⁷ Stories such as the Tower of Babel or those concerning the repopulation of the earth after the Deluge are also absent from the Koran.⁷⁸ Therefore Muslims should know that their religion is exempt from 'the harsh criticisms directed at Christianity by the proponents of science'.⁷⁹

In fact,

while new philosophers ... do not find harmony between truths uncovered by science and the philosophy and postulations of the Church, and have only recently started to say: 'These are impossible. Such things cannot be reconciled with reason,' the Holy Koran said the same things thirteen centuries ago.⁸⁰

Also indispensable for the Church's narrative, in Draper's account, was the idea of the perfect condition of Adam at the time of creation, so as to make the belief concerning the fall and salvation meaningful. Even more importantly, for this reason, Christian theologians were 'constrained to look with disfavor ... on the *Mohammedan* theory of the evolution of man from lower forms'.⁸¹ Muslims had developed the notion of the transformation of beings towards perfection as well as a strong conviction in the orderly procession of events due to their uncompromising fatalism, and that made Islamic thought sympathetic towards the idea of evolution.

Draper discusses extensively the geological findings of his time and asserts as a result that what should be admitted is not only the fact that humans have existed for longer than a quarter of a million years, but also 'a primitive animalized state, and a slow, gradual development'.⁸²

⁷⁵ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, pp. 176–177. This approach resembles the 'day-age theory' that interpreters like the geologist William Buckland (1784–1856) developed in order to reconcile Genesis with new findings about the age of the Earth. See Mott T. Greene, 'Genesis and geology revisited: the order of nature and the nature of order in nineteenth-century Britain', in Lindberg and Numbers, *When Science and Christianity Meet*, op. cit. (1), pp. 139–159.

⁷⁶ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 187.

⁷⁷ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 208.

⁷⁸ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, pp. 233–250.

⁷⁹ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 221.

⁸⁰ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 228.

⁸¹ Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 188. *Italics mine.*

⁸² Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 199.

That man existed on earth before Adam is not an idea Muslims should fear, Midhat argues. The Koran defines Adam as a 'successor' rather than as the first man, which implies the existence of a predecessor.⁸³ Some interpreters had suggested the existence of a tribe before Adam, and some mystics believed that there had been five Adams before the last one.⁸⁴ All these make it clear, just as Draper posits, that man had existed on earth for much longer than Christian theologians claimed.

Evolution, on the other hand, appeared to be an idea contradicting the Koranic verse 'He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only "Be" and it is' (2:117). Midhat's interpretation, based on those of his teacher, Musa Kazım, and of Fahreddin Razi (1149–1209), is that this verse does not necessarily mean that the whole universe came into existence all at once after God's utterance; it simply asserts God's power to make anything happen when He so desires. Furthermore, even if the verse is taken to mean a sudden, perfect creation, it still does not necessarily conflict with the idea of a gradual transformation. Essences gradually change, but they become what they were to become in one, final step and all at once. The embryo constantly changes, but at some specific point it suddenly becomes something that is called 'man'.⁸⁵

Yet another reason why Islam is harmonious with the idea of the gradual development of man on earth lies in two other verses from the Koran: 'We established his power in the land, and gave him the means to achieve everything' (18:84), and, more importantly, 'Such was Our way with the messengers we sent before you, and you will find no change in Our ways' (17:77). While the former states that the universe is characterized by regular causes and effects, the latter makes clear that, even though God is never bound by any constraints, His way (*sünnet*) is to keep things the way they are. As God 'made it a "way" for Himself to keep the existence of everything linked to a cause,' Muslim scholars characterized the universe as 'a universe of causes'.⁸⁶ This understanding of the universe, for Midhat, is evidently completely harmonious with the two ideas Draper constantly emphasizes: the existence of an unchanging natural law as well as a gradual, rather than sudden, emergence of life on earth.⁸⁷

On the 'conflict respecting the criterion of truth'

Draper condemns Catholicism for considering doctrines established 'by the number of martyrs who had professed them, by miracles, by the confession of demons ... or of persons possessed of evil spirits',⁸⁸ and for strengthening the Inquisition after the fourth

83 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 304. Midhat's approach to the notion of 'successor' based on Koran 2:30 is a particular one, as the 'predecessor' is commonly interpreted as angels or God. See Cornelia Schöck, 'Adam and Eve', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 5 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006.

84 Note, once again, Midhat's pragmatism, which allows him to refer to a particular, mystical interpretation of the Koran in order to make his case.

85 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, pp. 329–331.

86 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, p. 330.

87 While Midhat's comments tackle the issue of the gradual transformation of humans, they have more to do with social, rather than biological, evolution. Like Draper, Midhat focuses on the latter in the chapter on 'the government of the universe'.

88 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 205–206.

Lateran Council to suppress the formation of new sects. This is valuable material for Midhat, who argues that it is the beliefs these Councils imposed that alienate scientists like Draper from Christianity.⁸⁹

What followed the spread of scepticism in Europe was the advent of Protestantism, which, according to Draper, did not bring forth a sympathetic attitude to science, as it simply repudiated tradition and granted full authority to the Scriptures in all matters, including the study of nature. Thus antagonism to science deemed not agreeable to the Scriptures constituted the one point that both factions of Christianity agreed upon.⁹⁰ Draper's detailed criticism of early Protestantism is sufficient for Midhat to declare all Protestants equally as hostile to science as Catholics.⁹¹ Midhat and his ally also condemn the idea of an infallible Pope espoused by Catholicism, which for Draper is anti-scientific, and for Midhat un-Islamic.⁹²

On the 'controversy respecting the government of the universe'

Draper's remark that the law concerning the government of the solar system is the 'issue of mathematical necessity'⁹³ ends Midhat's agreement with him. This is too trivial an explanation to substitute for the Divine, Midhat contends, as mathematics cannot necessitate anything by itself, and can only be a way to see the wisdom in the creation of the universe.⁹⁴ The reason why Draper resorts to such an inadequate explanation is simply his frustration with the anthropomorphic God of Judaism and Christianity.⁹⁵ In the Koran, God states that the universe was created upon an 'unchanging way',⁹⁶ and this is precisely what the new scientists refer to as 'law,' 'nature' or *force de matière*.⁹⁷ If there is order and law in nature, it is God's creation, and denying it due to the absurd notions that the Church invented is equivalent to throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

But this is also the point where Midhat has to elaborate on the question of evolution, as Draper claims that the idea of creation itself is rendered untenable by geological discoveries indicating the slow, incessant transformation of Earth, adding that changes in the organic world can also be explained with reference to the impact of this transformation. Moreover, these changes are characterized by the replacement of imperfect forms by more perfect ones, then a point of culmination followed by gradual decline.⁹⁸ Midhat agrees that disregarding geological findings 'would [only] befit those ignor-amuses unable to appreciate the value of scientific discoveries', yet geology is still a very

89 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, pp. 352–370.

90 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 217.

91 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, pp. 424–430.

92 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 226; Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, pp. 506–515.

93 Draper, op. cit. (4), p. 238.

94 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 4, p. 86.

95 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 4, p. 87–88.

96 Midhat's references are to Koran 18:84 and 17:77. Also see note 86 above.

97 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 4, p. 89. Midhat uses the latter two phrases in their original form.

98 Draper, op. cit. (4), pp. 246–248.

young branch of science, and, contrary to Draper's claims, the evidence it works with is minuscule. Thus geological postulations cannot be compared in strength to mathematical or physical facts, and disagreements abound among geologists.⁹⁹

The conspicuous lack of a detailed discussion on the emergence and evolution of mankind itself in *Conflict* does not go unnoticed by Midhat, who attributes it to the absence of findings suggesting an earlier type of human. Indeed, Midhat claims, geologists are astounded by the fact that all human remains discovered so far are identical to contemporary man.¹⁰⁰ The material composition and gradual development of human embryos that Draper discusses within the context of an analogy with evolution, on the other hand, amounts to a scientifically informed interpretation of the Koranic verses 23:12–14:

And certainly We created man of an extract of clay. Then We made him a small seed in a firm resting-place. Then We made the seed a clot, then We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made (in) the lump of flesh bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation, so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.¹⁰¹

Midhat's approach to the question of evolution is thus simple and clear: while at present there is no reason for a reinterpretation of the Koran, it can be done in case such a need arises.

Midhat, Draper and the 'two conflicts'

Ahmed Midhat's portrayal of *Conflict* clarifies his perception of Draper's work. It is a book that should be read by Ottoman youth, but under the guidance of Midhat.¹⁰² Because 'our youths who learn the new scientific ideas in European languages' are ignorant about Islam, they are vulnerable to the attacks on 'so-called' religion, and they can easily 'lose their way'.¹⁰³ The fundamental mistake that these young men make is

⁹⁹ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 4, pp. 152–153.

¹⁰⁰ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 4, pp. 165–166.

¹⁰¹ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 4, pp. 171–172. The Lebanese author Hussein al-Jisr, a contemporary of Midhat, analysed these verses as well. He argued that they appeared to indicate special creation for each species, and while he was open to the possibility of future reinterpretation, recommended upholding traditional interpretations unless new evidence for evolution was obtained. See Adel A. Ziadat, *Western Science in the Arab World: The Impact of Darwinism, 1860–1930*, London: Macmillan, 1986, pp. 92–95. Al-Jisr may be seen as a Lebanese counterpart to Midhat, as Abdülhamid II rewarded him in 1891 for his work on the harmony between Islam and science published in 1888. This is particularly significant as the 1880s is also when Büchner's commentary on Darwin was popularized in Lebanon by Shibli Shumayyil as a condemnation of religion and of the backwardness of 'all theocratic autocracies', i.e. the Ottoman Empire, in his case. See Marwa Elshakry, 'The gospel of science and American evangelism in late Ottoman Beirut', *Past and Present* (2007) 1, pp. 173–214, p. 212.

¹⁰² Not surprising for a staunch advocate of the patriarchal family. See Findley, op. cit. (8), p. 47.

¹⁰³ Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 1, 200–201. An event that indisputably encouraged Midhat to translate *Conflict* is the suicide of Beşir Fuad. Fuad (1852–1887), a graduate of the War Academy, published pieces on science in the journals of the period. Midhat admired and corresponded with Fuad, and was devastated when he slit his wrists, and observed the process to write a 'naturalistic account of dying'. In a book he published after the incident, Midhat portrayed Fuad as the archetype of the well-educated Ottoman youth with inadequate knowledge of Islam. See Ahmed Midhat, *Beşir Fuad*, Istanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat, 1887. See also

assuming that all religions are identical and equally inimical to science, and adopting atheism. For Midhat, it is almost inevitable for Christian scientists to denounce their religion, as faith in 'their religion means intellectual imprisonment'.¹⁰⁴ But Islam is absolutely unlike Christianity, as admitted by none other than Draper himself.¹⁰⁵

As has well been documented, proving that Islam was not an obstacle to progress was a key motive for numerous Muslim intellectuals in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ A salient aspect of this attitude was the depiction of Islam as a 'science-friendly' religion – a portrayal backed up with references to the achievements of Muslim scholars in the Middle Ages that were then claimed to be the basis of contemporary European sciences.¹⁰⁷ European authors' works on the hostility of Islam to science, such as Ernest Renan's lecture on 'Islam and science', attracted swift reaction, and encouraged the steady publication of works defending Islam.¹⁰⁸

Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad: İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti* (The First Turkish Positivist and Naturalist), 2nd edn, İstanbul: Dergah, 2008.

104 Ahmed Midhat, 'Şopenhauer' in *Hikmet-i Cedidesi* (The New Philosophy of Schopenhauer) (1887), in Erbay and Utku, op. cit. (60), pp. 12–68, p. 33.

105 Draper had made similar arguments about Islam and defined Mohammad as the man who 'has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race' in his *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1864, p. 244. Midhat praises this work in his introduction, but it is not clear if he had actually read it. Draper's American readers were familiar with it, however, and their impression of that book appears to have shaped their reactions to *Conflict* that I discuss below. In this respect Draper may be seen as a representative of the approach initiated in the 1840s by Thomas Carlyle's and Washington Irving's works on Mohammad. Carlyle referred to him as a 'great' and 'original' man in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, London: Oxford University Press, 1959 (first published 1840), pp. 59–60. Likewise, Irving described Mohammad as a person with an extraordinary intellect and an 'inventive genius' in his *Life of Mahomet*, London and New York: Everyman's Library, 1949 (first published 1849), p. 230. These works also made the point that the spread of Islam could not be due to the sword alone. Draper never cites his sources but the similarity between his arguments and Carlyle's and Irving's portrayals is striking. Another work published at roughly the same time as *Conflict* and making similar arguments, Reginald Bosworth Smith's *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1875, lists Carlyle and Irving among its sources. Smith, a fellow of Oxford's Trinity College, argued (p. 162) that comparative religion revealed many strengths of Islam. Most importantly, Mohammad 'treated the miraculous as subordinate to the moral evidences of his mission, and struck upon a vein of thought and touched a chord of feeling which ... is reconcilable at once with the onward march of Science, and all the admitted weaknesses of human nature'. For changing views on Islam in the Victorian era see Philip C. Almond, *Heretic and Hero: Mohammad and the Victorians*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989; and Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

106 See Kurzman, op. cit. (31). A classic analysis of the development of this approach in the Arab world is Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

107 The Egyptian author Rifaa al-Tahtawi presented an influential version of this narrative in his travelogue published in 1834 after his visit to Paris, and similar views were voiced by many Muslim authors in the following decades. For Tahtawi's work see Daniel Newman, *An Imam in Paris: Al-Tahtawi's visit to France (1826–31)*, London: Saqi, 2002. Ottoman Turkish works making similar claims are, for example, Mustafa Sami, *Avrupa Risalesi* (A Treatise on Europe), İstanbul: Takvimhane-i Amire, 1840; and Şemseddin Sami, *Medeniyet-i İslamiye* (Islamic Civilization), İstanbul: Mihran, 1879.

108 Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's response to Renan is the best-known of these. On the debate between Renan and Afghani see Keddî, op. cit. (42), pp. 84–95. Afghani's reply can be found at pp. 181–187. For an Ottoman Turkish response see Namık Kemal, *Renan Müdafaaanesi* (Defense against Renan), İstanbul: Mahmud Bey, 1908.

Another common theme in these works was a criticism of materialism, and the idea that Muslim societies should avoid this philosophy when appropriating the new sciences. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, for instance, wrote that the spread of such a philosophy that led people to 'have no possible motive for virtue and nothing to prevent vice' would weaken Muslims against European encroachment.¹⁰⁹ His idea that Muslims did not need such a philosophy, as Islam, unlike Christianity, provided virtues while simultaneously encouraging freethinking, is very similar to Midhat's characterization of the two religions.¹¹⁰

While it is thus a contribution to the ongoing debate on science and Islam, Midhat's work is particularly multilayered and is an outstanding effort in its 'enrolment' of an American critic of religion for an attack on Christianity, and defence of Islam as well as of the Hamidian regime. To achieve all these aims, Midhat adopts a flexible understanding of Islam, and while keeping principles such as the unity of God indisputable, he exhibits a striking openness to new interpretations of the Koran in the light of scientific research. When their arguments appear absolutely irreconcilable with the Koran, Midhat declares branches of science like geology 'underdeveloped'. Yet when these sciences do provide 'definite results', he is certain that they will be in harmony with Islam,¹¹¹ with the implication that the Koran can be reinterpreted accordingly, in order to constantly distinguish Islam from Christianity and keep Islam *the* science-friendly religion.

Also note, however, that Midhat was not alone in reading *Conflict* as a book on Islam versus Christianity. Draper's portrayal of the achievements of Muslims was certainly noticed and harshly criticized by his American reviewers in general and Christian reviewers in particular. *The Nation* argued that in both *Intellectual Development of Europe* and *Conflict* Draper demonstrated 'an indiscriminating admiration for everything ... that [had] ever worn the garb of Islam', and made one think that 'the Mohammedan civilization was of a higher type than the Christian'.¹¹² For *Scribner's Monthly*, 'one would gather from [*Conflict*] that the failure of the Mohammedans to conquer Europe ... was the greatest calamity of modern history'.¹¹³ The *Presbyterian Quarterly* complained that Draper 'referred to Saracen attainments in science with a romantic enthusiasm'.¹¹⁴ Similarly, according to *Liberal Christian*, Draper had a 'peculiar spite against the Christian religion and a chuckling delight at every triumph of Mohammedanism'.¹¹⁵ For the *Christian Advocate* Mohammedanism seemed to be Draper's 'special favorite among the religions of mankind'.¹¹⁶ Even a cartoon was

109 Afghani, 'The truth about the Neicheri Sect and an explanation of the Neicheris' in Keddie, op. cit. (42), pp. 130–174, p. 167.

110 Afghani, op. cit. (109), pp. 171–172. For similar views of Muhammed Abduh, a follower of Afghani, see Hourani, op. cit. (106), pp. 148–149.

111 '[E]ven when [geological] research yields a definite result, it will serve to understanding God, rather than denying Him'. Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 4, p. 167.

112 'Draper's science and religion', *The Nation*, 25 November 1875, pp. 343–345, p. 344.

113 'The conflict between religion and science', *Scribner's Monthly* (1875) 5, p. 635.

114 'Draper's religion and science', *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* (1875) 13, p. 160.

115 *Liberal Christian*, as paraphrased by *New York Observer and Chronicle* (1875) 2, p. 10.

116 'History of the conflict between religion and science', *Christian Advocate* (1875) 4, p. 26.

published in a New York newspaper showing Draper dressed as an Arab and proclaiming, in the presence of the Pope, 'Tis I who am infallible, as all the world doth know! By Science bright and Islam's might, tis I who tell thee so!'¹¹⁷ This is hardly surprising, if one takes into consideration that Draper was declared 'the new apostle of Islamism' by the journal *Catholic World*.¹¹⁸

We come across a condemnation of Draper's ideas on Islam and science even in the diary of Dostoevsky. At the height of the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman war, one thing that infuriated the Russian author was what he perceived as the popularity of pro-Turkish opinions in the West. Represented by names such as Buckle, and 'even Draper', the emerging view was that Christianity was the source of ignorance and that science had been brought to the Christian world by the Mohammedans. The admiration of the strict monotheism of Islam 'is a hobbyhorse of many of those lovers of the Turks', Dostoevsky complained.¹¹⁹

Cyrus Hamlin, who was at the time the president of the American missionary school in Istanbul, the Robert College, mentioned Draper in his memoirs as well. For Hamlin, Draper

professe[d] to quote from Al Ghazzali as though he believed in the material origin of the soul by law, and its reabsorption – whatever that is ... [but] his quotation is a *hash* made up of sentences brought together from distant pages, and, like some other hashes, it contains ingredients which can not be identified with any honest and honorable origin.¹²⁰

The 'quotations' Draper used to explain the affinity between the idea of 'natural law' and Muslim fatalism were, Hamlin argued, marked by 'culpable carelessness'.¹²¹

This connection makes Ahmed Midhat's choice to translate and comment on Draper even more strategically apt. Draper's arguments, particularly in the sections Midhat highlights, suggest that Islam is harmonious with science, and these are the parts that Midhat hopes will help 'save' Ottoman youth. But Draper also makes clear which religion is the enemy of science, and Midhat uses this part of Draper's text as ammunition in his battle against the missionaries. Many of Midhat's sentences begin with a phrase like 'even though what Draper says may apply to other religions', and the 'other religion' in question is always Christianity. Making the most of Draper's arguments about early Protestantism, Midhat confronts the American missionaries in the empire and refers back to the debate between himself and Henry Otis Dwight, regarding Midhat's *Apology*. Now it is his hope that Dwight, and the likes of him, will read Draper and concede.¹²² In this representation, Draper, the American scientist, is on

117 Donald Fleming, *John William Draper and the Religion of Science*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950, p. 135.

118 'Draper's conflict between religion and science', *Catholic World* (1875) 122, p. 178.

119 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, vol. 2: 1877–1881, tr. Kenneth Lantz, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994, p. 1023.

120 Cyrus Hamlin, *Among the Turks*, New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1877, p. 347, original italics.

121 Hamlin, op. cit. (120). The fact that a missionary in Istanbul felt the need to criticize him suggests that Draper was popular enough among Ottoman Muslims to concern the missionaries.

122 Midhat, op. cit. (4), vol. 3, pp. 424–426. Also see note 23 above.

Midhat's side against the claims of the Protestant missionaries, and Midhat is more than ready to interpret Islam in a way that will assure the alliance of science against Christianity.

Allying with Draper to fight missionary influence was, interestingly, not a strategy used only by Ottoman intellectuals. Ishizaka points out that authors like Draper, Huxley and Buckle were commonly read in Japan, and Christian missionaries often found themselves in 'the most embarrassing situation by their inability to give satisfactory answers' to anti-missionary Japanese critics referring to the arguments of these authors.¹²³ Similarly, Schwantes refers to the writings of 'an anxious missionary [who] estimated [in 1883] that several thousand young men were endangering their souls' by reading Draper's *Conflict* in Japan.¹²⁴

Ahmed Midhat was certainly speaking from within a debate between Islam and Christianity that had been going on for centuries.¹²⁵ There already existed a vast repertoire of arguments and counterarguments and the debate about the harmony or lack thereof between science and either of the two religions could not take place without reference to the 'big debate' about the superiority or authenticity of Islam and Christianity. Draper's comparative approach inevitably placed him within this 'big debate' and made his testimony so crucial for Midhat. But, more importantly, what is common to all examples referred to throughout this paper – in addition to Midhat's commentary on Draper, such as the Japanese reaction to missionary activity, the popularity of Buddhism in the West, and the protests of the Christian critiques of Draper – is that they all demonstrate how thoroughly connected the 'conflict between religion and science' and the conflicts among religions were in the late nineteenth century. 'Harmony with science' was becoming a major criterion for the increasingly popular exercise of comparing religions, and a question concerning religion and science was one that was simultaneously about one religion with respect to another. Midhat's contribution also suggests that the 'conflict between religion and science' is not necessarily an idea that travels by itself, so to speak. Midhat appropriated the idea to put it to work in a particular context, with particular aims in mind. By imagining an alliance between Draper and himself, Midhat was envisaging an alliance of Islam and science, and if there was a conflict, it was between this alliance and Christianity.

123 Masanobu Ishizaka, 'Christianity in Japan 1859–1883', Ph.D. dissertation AAT 0228037, Johns Hopkins University, 1895, p. 28.

124 Robert S. Schwantes, 'Christianity versus science: a conflict of ideas in Meiji Japan', *Far Eastern Quarterly* (1953) 2, pp. 123–132, p. 127.

125 For a historical survey of Muslim commentaries on Christianity see Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003, esp. pp. 133–161. For nineteenth-century debates in particular see Hourani, op. cit. (106).