

**ESTABLISHING AN EXEMPLARY
ISLAMIC SOCIETY (IN TURKEY)
AN ANALYSIS OF
BEDIUZZAMAN SAÏD NŪRSI'S REFORM**

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The author provides a brief profile of Saïd NŪrsi (1877-1960) contributions to Islamic thought and specifically a content analysis of his *Risale-i NŪr (Risālah-i NŪr)* to explore his methods with regard to a moderate articulation of the Qur'ān's message. The paper also discusses Nursi's method of problem solving through an academic discourse that integrates revealed and acquired knowledge. This method strengthens faith and unity by identifying social and intellectual maladies and providing remedies. Nursi's *Risāle-i NŪr* focuses on an exegesis that targets individual training, family reform and the gestalt cultivation of a Muslim society. Contemporary challenges are addressed vis-à-vis dangers presented by Western imperialism as well as anti-Islamic dynamics, including Orientalism. We then introduce Nursi's educational reforms, which stressed a more proper integration of scientific and religious instruction with a view towards modern technology and political struggles. Finally, we review his emphasis on compassion and the importance of sincerity, in addition to the role of the *Sunnah* and the elimination of doubt in believing hearts.

Keywords: Saïd NŪrsi, *Risālah-i NŪr*, Turkey.

Introduction

Said NŪrsi's notable contributions to Islamic reform cannot be exaggerated, especially after the Islamic Caliphate's abrogation and

Turkey's secular state declaration. The latter transformation replaced the Islamic worldview with Westernized culture and radically affected various aspects of traditional Turkish society. Popularly known as Bediuzzamān, and despite unprecedented challenges and impediments, Saīd Nūrī proactively and pragmatically devised methods that dynamically differed from the traditional modalities of predecessors and contemporaries in the Muslim World. The primal cause of his reforms lay in the worst plight Islamic history has thus far recorded due to Muslim secularism and nationalists who were influenced by the Western zeitgeist that began to incorporate Turkey as part of Europe. During this period, all systems whatsoever be they intellectual, moral, political or academic seemed to thrust the Muslim *ummah* towards a qualitative debilitation, deterioration and devastation of its traditional identity, religiosity, epistemology, morality and spiritual capacities that nearly annihilated the time-honoured Islamic character of Turkey.

As secularism became the dominant national ideology, it entered every aspect of community living. Secular nationalist forces enjoyed an unprecedented freedom to enforce archetypal strategies that obtained materialistic objectives at the expense of religious consciousness, both individually and collectively. In particular, Turkey's traditional academic system suffered superlative insults and became voraciously biased towards Western pedantry with cunning results. Muslims acclimated to secular thinking and its philosophy of materialism but without knowing its true ideological, ideational, epistemological and methodological principles and foundations. Thus, these forces marginalized and gradually rejected Islam's exceptional ideals, essentials, principles, systems, values, laws and thoughts; all of which comprised a complete system that informed moral guidance based on a transcendent origin that preferred the felicity of true progress and success.

Turkey's political conditions descended into chaos during the first quarter of the twentieth century due to rapid secularization and modernization programs carried out by the state under Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, the so-called 'father of modern Turkey'. After analysing the abrogation of the Ottoman Caliphate, Saīd Nūrī came to appreciate Mustafa Kamal as an unpardonable foe of Islam, one who had wholeheartedly undertaken the task of destroying its edifice. Despite this pitiable climate and unprecedented challenges from political opponents, nationalists

and secularists, Nürsi advanced unique ideas to meet desperate social needs opposed by forces that prevented any successful application of his admirable reform proposals.

As Turkey endured a severe identity crisis induced by the official imposition of de-Islamization, Saïd Nürsi vigorously responded by writing, speech and debate. The present work analyses his reform efforts to maintain and improve Islamic culture, tradition, religiosity, unity and identity. Qualitative content analysis is applied to his works, ideals and numerous contributions, most of which were originally written in the Ottoman Turkish language. Hence, the scope of this paper is limited to works translated into Arabic and English, most especially his magnum opus, *Risāle-i Nūr*; which comprises 130 epistles. We focus on the methods he used to present Islam's message to the people of Turkey for purposes of religious awakening with a view towards a conscious and collective realization of a pressing need to restore Islamic living and counter contemporary moral decadence and ruination of sound traditions.

We introduce readers to Nürsi's profile to inform them of his intellectual credentials and contributions to contemporary Islamic thought while discussing his method as an instrument of moderation in the dissemination of Islam's message. A pertinent element is his approach to reform vis-à-vis *Risāle-i Nūr* in which he adopted an innovative form of exegesis that trains modern Muslims to better cultivate a society enlightened by Islam's worldview. The paper then reviews contemporary challenges to Nürsi's reforms as well as his admonitions regarding the dangers of Western imperialism and anti-Islamic influences such as Orientalism, etc. This work's final section concerns Nürsi's approach to the integration of the material sciences, modern technology and politics with religious curricula, which better guides students towards an informed and courageous confrontation of counterintuitive movements and thought. Such pupils are better enabled to care for the community's welfare while lauding the significance of sincerity among Muslims based on lessons taken from the *Sunnah*. Nürsi also emphasized the elimination of doubt from the hearts of believers and non-Muslims alike.

Saïd Nürsi's Profile

Hailing from a respectable family whose parents were characterized

by piety and steadfast God-consciousness, Said Nürsi, a descendent of the Prophet (ﷺ), was born in 1877 in the village of Nürs, an eastern province in Turkey.¹ His father's name was Mirza and his mother was called Nuriyah.² His lineage is traced to Hasan (R.A.) on his father's side and to Husayn (R.A.) on his mother's. His birth name was Said and Nursi was adopted from the town of his birth. He was also called Bediuzzaman, meaning "The Unique One of the Age". His mentor, Fathullah, gave him this title due to Nürsi's brilliance and titanic bank of commendable knowledge, and also because he always gave precise answers to the most difficult questions and held forth with expertise in different sciences, abilities and arts, especially when compared to his contemporaries.³

He was granted his *Ijāzah 'Ilmiyyah* (scholarly certificate) on completing *madrasah* studies, which was the traditional religious college of the Ottoman state. Being a genius with a photographic memory, he memorized the entire Qur'ān in fifteen days and continued on to memorize another ninety works on the Islamic sciences, including highly technical subjects. He also became an expert and competent scholar in the natural sciences owing to personal effort. It is no exaggeration to say he eventually became recognized as one of the most influential scholars and thinkers of the twentieth century.

A universal thinker, Nürsi's works were written in prison, in exile and even on horseback and have since attained prominent positions in world literature. They substantially impact reader seven from other religions due to his moderate approach to exegetical presentations and religious exhortation. He is regarded as a *peace-making hero* who advocated unity and solidarity for the Muslim *ummah*, as have other writers such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni and Ḥasan al-Banna. His life was characterized by genuine sincerity, piety, steadfast God-consciousness and a deep commitment to the Islamic value of *ikhhlās*, as emphasised in his epistles. Nürsi's redoubtable courage never allowed any compromise of firmly held principles, policies and strategies in spite of persecution, constraints, assassination attempts (including poison), and tortuous abuse inflicted by secular state authorities. He upheld Islamic principles without concession and was determined to live in conformity with *Shari'ah* while conveying Islam's gestalt message to all of mankind.

A remarkable event occurred during First World War (1914-1918)

when Nursi volunteered as commander of a battalion that he formed with his owned students. He showed extraordinary heroism and was taken captive to Russia where he spent two and half years. He managed to escape and finally reached Istanbul to continue his activities.

Nürsi's Problem Solving Approaches

Following are some approaches adopted by Said Nürsi's *da'wah* that are related to holistic reforms.

Academic Approach

Saïd Nürsi did not fully rely on the traditional methods of education his contemporaries advocated and practiced in many Muslim nations. From his boyhood, he had discussed the matter of educational systems with several scholars, some of whom he emulated before ascending seats of fame and authority in the public eye. From the outset, unproductive teaching methods and reduced conditions in the *Madaris* (religious educational institutions) caused him to ponder educational protocols. He became engaged in tracing responsibility for educational declines and promulgated ways to overcome pedagogical fallacies, weaknesses and shortcomings and even ventured into establishing educational institutions. By using unique strategies he redesigned teaching methodology and learning protocols. Instead of emphasizing the traditional rudimentary focus on grammar, syntax, rhetoric, etc., he proposed motivational systems focused on meeting the challenges that faced the Muslim *ummah* of his time, particularly in Turkey, which had been the centre of a glorious Islamic Caliphate.

His contemporary scholars spent their time reading texts and commentaries using classical modalities. Although this contributed to the development of scholarship, their students were never immersed in emerging social issues and contemporary problems because this extremely conservative system lacked the curricula that developed critical/analytical thinking and problem solving skills, even though the science of logic was indeed taught but not appropriately emphasized. Hence, they were isolated from the prevailing tides of mainstream society. As such, they could not address challenges faced by the Muslim *ummah* in various parts of the

world. Nürsi therefore rejected their system(s) and advocated innovative academic approaches. He also struggled to establish institutions that would produce scholars who more competently responded to a changing and perplexing world. Considering his words and deeds, one can infer that he nearly succeeded in Islamizing modern educational systems.

In his day, teachers seldom embraced literature or other sources of knowledge until they finished one Islamic book from beginning-to-end with all attending commentaries and footnotes. The method consumed far too much time for more appropriate intellectual development, which Nürsi identified as a cause for insufficient utilization of knowledge and skills to benefit the *ummah*. Unlike his contemporaries, Saïd Nürsi raised his voice against these out-dated, conservative and classical methods, even from his youth. His personally effective approach is expressed in the following lines cited from his autobiography.

“Saïd Nürsi used to read one or two chapters and sometimes ten chapters of a book and leave it without finishing and then start another book. When his esteemed teacher Shaykh Muhammad al-Jalali asked him to explain why he did that which was alien to traditional practice he answered, ‘I could not go through all these books nor could I understand everything in it. For me, these books resemble pearls in a box. The keys are within you. All that I expect from you is to lead me to the path that helps to reveal what is in the box. That is, what is the content of these books, so that I can choose topics that better suit me.’”⁴

When his teacher asked, “*Of these which suit your nature*”? He answered, “*I could not differentiate between them. All are equal. Either I understand the whole or none at all.*”

Nürsi also indicated deficiencies and even fallacies of the arcane system and went further to criticize the rather poor and unhygienic conditions of scholars who practiced unsuitable and inappropriate life ways that weakened their effectiveness and favoured the failure of having positive impacts on society. Hence, he was not loath to condemn the various defects of contemporary scholars. In his words:

Scholars forget to distinguish between the present and the past.

They insist on adhering-to and establishing opinions without comparing authentic proofs. In their *da wah* activities they do not maintain equilibrium between Islamic and state laws and they also fail to differentiate between more and less important matters. They do not diagnose the social and political diseases of their time even within their own context. Regarding treatment, they appear to drag people backward to the past with approaches that even maintain the language of the past.⁵

Malevolent forces had infiltrated the Ottoman caliphate during the seventeenth century and according to Nürsi, the traditional system of education only served to quicken the decadence by its adherence to religious education at the expense of worldly knowledge. Hence, traditional educationalists had systematically isolated themselves and students from contemporary scenarios and needs for generations. Moreover, they had also destroyed or abandoned various branches of knowledge and sciences that had been handed down by highly esteemed predecessors who excelled in various scientific fields. Due to this absurd negligence, decadence advanced while Muslims became content within the confines of religious education yet actually expected development and success. An unimaginably huge chasm had therefore emerged between religious and non-religious knowledge; so much so, contemporary *'alim* claimed that even learning geography, chemistry and other natural sciences were acts of blasphemy. Thus contaminated by ignorance and superstition, they searched for solutions that only exacerbated the controversies and complexities of their darkened journey. What is worse, they marginalized modern Islamic scholars by branding them fabricators and antichrists. Islam thus came to exemplify an edifice of the well-deserved disdain offered by arrogant disbelievers and infidels.

Saïd Nürsi knew that development of society could not occur unless Islamic scholars took up contemporary science and actually practiced *Shari'ah*, especially as applied to modern education. He also believed the old approach to the study of Logic inadequately prepared students to answer modern questions and challenges or rebut doubts and misconceptions posed by Islam's detractors. The integration of religious and so-called 'worldly' materialist studies was required for a healthy balance rather than the unilateral biases either induced on their own. In

the absence of such an effort, man was coerced to entertain decadence and misery. Nūrsi therefore concluded that Muslim nations would not survive modern transformations if they adhered to archaic traditions.

Saīd Nūrsi solved the problem by integrating religious studies with modern worldly learning. He knew that Islam's enemies possessed technologies and inventions that were effectively applied to weaken and reverse any Muslim advance. Muslims would not survive these challenges unless they assiduously applied themselves to scientific and technological disciplines in the same manner as their enemies. Hence, Nūrsi offered a uniquely integrated curriculum that used religious studies to enlighten the heart while modern scientific learning informed powers of reasoning. The integration allowed reality to stand forth as entirely self-evident as student faculties flourished in a well-adjusted manner. To the contrary, on their own, either learning pools collapsed into the tyranny of dogmatism in religion and the mistrust engendered by materialism.

Contemporary Muslim scholars blindly believed that modern science and technology contradicted Islam. Hence, Nūrsi attempted to remove this reckless misconception by seeking to establish that all modern learning and technological developments were actually the legacy of Muslim forefathers who had been inspired by Islam's worldview and successfully substantiated that true credit for the booming development of modern science undoubtedly belonged to Islam. On the other hand, contemporary Muslim lethargy also accorded room for the West to take credit-for and abscond with patents of modern science and technology. Nūrsi therefore stressed that Muslims must obtain all disciplines from the West and redefine them according to the Qur'ānic paradigm with the decorum that attends Islam's tenets and *tawhidic* worldview. This is more precisely known as the '*Islamization of human knowledge*' in the words of Mohamed Kamal Hassan, the twenty-first century Malay intellectual whose contributions to the development and understanding of contemporary Islamic thought is humbling.

Diseases of the Ummah

As a reformist, Saīd Nūrsi diagnosed diseases of the Muslim *ummah* and provided appropriate remedies. By doing so, he disentangled the web of decadence that had trapped the Muslim world. The most epidemic of

several diseases was a profound lack of confidence among Muslims in terms of socio-political living. Consequently, many Muslims preferred adolescent hostility while forgetting the inseparable relationships that bound the *ummah* by universal brotherhood. Moreover, autocracy has also infected the *ummah* with egoist who snubbed *Shari'ah*. Hateful fanatics subjected scholars and laymen to vain disputes and all were tempered by the subversive influences of Western culture, ideologies and civilization. Autocracy was enormously harmful because it aborted the consultative system of the *shurā*, which is the backbone of the Muslim executive world. Nūrī therefore suggested a revival of the *shurā* that would liberate Islamic legislators and allow them to gravitate towards the rejection of Western culture.⁶ Hence, one-by-one Saīd Nūrī diagnosed socio-political diseases and prescribed qualified approaches to remediation. By not accurately diagnosing a disease, any expert allows its advance to irremediable pathological complexity and demise. Likewise, a reformer who holds forth answers to contemporary challenges must find the root of intellectual diseases and prescribe definitive treatment(s).

Conveying Imān

Imparting *imān* (faith) to the hearts of believers accompanied by the firm establishment of Qur'ānic miracles are two realms in which Saīd Nursi's dynamism differed from the traditional *ʿIlm al-kalām* of the past. Saīd Nūrī posited that knowing and/or understanding God through arguments presented by *ʿIlm al-kalām* were inadequate and did little to satisfy the mind. He also owned that *Ṣūfī* mysticism failed to comprehensively introduce the truth as irrefutably contextualized by the Qur'ān and the Prophet's (ﷺ) contributions.⁷ Here it is where Saīd Nūrī and Sayyid Qutb agreed that Muslims should not rely solely on theological or mystical approaches to strengthen *imān*.

Nursi emphasized strengthening *imān's* foundation in the life of a Muslim. He considered this the basis of the entire edifice of Islamic civilization. Arguably, if the foundation is weak building on it is futile. In his *Risāle-i Nūr*, Nūrī explained that strengthening the basis of *imān* in an era of globalization and post-modern propaganda bears the utmost significance:

The foremost and preferable duty is to kindle the light of faith and

strengthen it, and help the faith of others to flourish accordingly. Be aware of selfishness and deception and move away from all elements that lead to these diseases. This is the foremost and expected duty. All other problems and diseases are caused by these key ailments. Reasonably, true Muslim scholars should cultivate amiability and humbleness in their life.⁸

We hold that Saïd Nürsi developed a unique method of presenting arguments to establish the significance of *imān* in the hearts of men. By advancing textual documents and reasonable opinions, he explained the particulars of *iman* and Islamic conviction to all Muslims.⁹ Nürsi soundly dealt with belief in Allah, Angels, Scriptures, God's Messengers, Divine destiny and eschatology.

Encouraging Unity

Profoundly concerned about the *ummah's* disintegration, Saïd Nürsi noted that reformation and *da'wah* efforts required motivational forces and meaningful actions if Muslims were to stand united under the roof of Islam's edifice. He concluded that the division of the Muslim world into nation states with compartmentalization based on nationalism provided Western oligarchs with opportunities to infuse their venomous hostility to Islam. Toxic disunity spread like a pestilence and Nürsi consequently emphasized the matter of Muslim unity while innovating instruments of consolidation.¹⁰

One threatening division conspicuously arose that derived from differences in opinions and interpretations between Muslim scholars. Variations in understanding and applications of *madhahīb* (jurisprudence) regarding socio-moral and legal matters were primarily responsible for the discord. Saïd Nürsi was not unaware and raised his voice in protest. But this does not imply that he disbelieved in a diversity of legal doctrines that had developed over fourteen hundred years. However, he attempted to remove misconceptions of *madhahīb* disputes that provoked division. Indeed, he honoured prevailing legal doctrinal differences and specifically followed the Shafī'i School himself.¹¹ However, he never tolerated discord over trivial matters that imperilled the *ummah*.

He claimed to be a follower of *ahl Sunnah wa al jama'ah* but

never condemned *Shī'ahs* as infidels (*kafīr*) nor did he ever revile them. Instead, he politely advised them to conform to the overriding importance of *ahl al-Sunnah*. In one such speech he proclaimed:

O *ahl al-Haqq* who claim to be the *ahl Sunnah waal jamā'ah* and O *ahl al-Shī'ah* who claim to love the family of the Prophet (ﷺ) much more, mitigate your conflict. Demands of the time make this conflict meaningless. If you do not abstain from this debate, your enemies will use their strategies to destroy you. They will add fuel to the discord and thereby cause you to stand against each other until the turmoil leads to your ultimate destruction. So reject all trifling matters of disagreement. As you believe in the Oneness of the Almighty, you have so many sacred relations that bind you together and lead the way to unity and alliance.¹²

Saīd Nūrsi's *Risāle-i Nūr*

Saīd Nūrsi opined that the crucial problem confronting Muslims was their lack of a true understanding of the Qur'ān. Hence, he immersed himself in the Qur'ānic Ocean to produce an intellectual exegesis even laymen can use. His *Risāle-i Nūr* (The Book of Light)¹³ was written primarily for Turkish Muslims who had been forcibly isolated from the rest of the Muslim world. These exegetic epistles are now being translated into major world languages including Arabic, English and French. Led by Ustaz Saīd Nūri, the Hayrat Foundation in Isparta, Turkey is engaged in the effort, although other organizations produced earlier editions regarded as inadequate.

Nūrsi's Approach to Exegesis

Nūrsi did not apply the earlier methodologies or those used by medieval exegetes and his *Book of Light* is taken neither from Eastern nor Western philosophies but documented directly from the High Throne of Heaven in consonance with the Qur'ān. Moreover, *Risāle-i Nūr* is not a traditional exegesis and cannot be classified as modern because it is *tafsīr ma'nawī 'aqlī*. This singular intellectual effort sheds light on verses of the Qur'ān in a manner that answers all questions and clarifies

doubts that can arise in the minds of readers and critics. Saïd Nürsi expounded verses that include the belief in Allah, the characteristics of His Beautiful Names, and the divine power that plays an absolute role behind changes and exchanges in the universe.

Nursi's singular interpretation also explains Qur'ānic verses in accord with modern sciences. Thereby he provides evidence to prove that the Qur'ān is central to all manner of knowledge and invention. He also argued that as the realities of the Qur'ān unfold, the inferiority complex that infected the Muslim world would disappear, whereupon Muslims would recover lost heritage, prestige and dignity. Saïd Nürsi successfully marshalled a complete rethinking of the splendid contributions of the Muslim world that distanced Islam from Western intellectual trends and philosophies.

Nürsi's Tarbiyah

As in other fields, Saïd Nürsi placed much import on the nurturing of spirituality within the human soul. This implies purification, reformation and guidance: spiritually, morally, intellectually and physically in manners that befit human dignity. Because education is the most effective way of rearing dignified humans, students of *Risāle-i Nūr* in contemporary Turkey manifest spiritual enhancement by the remembrance of Allah in *halaqat al-dhikr*.

Nurturing is essential to Islam as a religious obligation that helps produce trustworthy individuals, ideal families and a superb society, which the Qur'ān calls the *ummatan wasatan* (a balanced or moderate nation). Hence, Muslim scholars are obligated to pay stringent attentions to the guidance and nurturing of individuals and the *ummah* to create and maintain the continuum of this 'balanced nation'. This is why Saïd Nürsi left no stone unturned in nurturing and development schemes for which he applied numerous strategies.

The Training of Individuals

Saïd Nürsi maintained that the nurturing of trustworthy individuals was the basis for constructing a sustainable Muslim society. The manner in which individuals are daily guided to learn and develop is prescribed

in the section of his *Risāle-i Nūr* dedicated to learning the realities and beauties of Islam and the fundamentals of Islamic individualism. Exploitation of these lessons necessitate that students of *Risāle-i Nūr* obtain and engage lifelong learning skills. In terms of guidance, he emphasized the integration of knowledge with faith, saying, “*A human being comes to this world so that he can develop and perfect himself by dint of knowledge and prayer*”. Hence, knowledge is disseminated and but tressed by informed faith.

Nurturing Individuals

When a Muslim reminds himself of the teachings of both Qur’ān and *Sunnah*, s/he becomes a very influential figure, a more complete human being and a practicing Muslim caliph over other creatures. When individuals take time to fulfil obligations and repent for misdeeds while avoiding sinful acts, they contribute to selves, relatives, friends and national dignity. They also obtain a dwelling in *Jannah* (Paradise). A man must therefore protect himself from lying and backbiting and also keep his tongue alive by reciting the Qur’ān while remembering, glorifying and magnifying Allah and sending greetings to the Prophet (ﷺ). He also keeps his sight lowered and away from what is prohibited, and removes his ear from ribald words. These efforts promote perfection throughout a Muslim’s life because/he pays closer attention to sincere service in the Cause of Allah.

Guiding individuals to know Allah perfectly and to correctly approach society are two major mechanisms Nūrsi advised for implementation. The former builds a strong relationship with Allah and the latter does the same with society. Thus, a man/woman earns honourable positions.

The Rearing of Families

For Nūrsi, the rearing of families was another important matter of equal importance because excellent families perfect society and thus reform every aspect of life. Each person’s home is a small world where, should belief in the Hereafter fail to rule, whimsical desires cause it to be thrown into hellfire. To the contrary, when faith rules it is filled with the light of *imān*. Relationship and affection are engendered on the basis

of *imān* and cannot be limited to the boundaries of time and space but extend to the Hereafter. Hence, home life generates an enduring fortune wherein each individual lives with honour when his or her focus pivots on belief in *ākhirah*. Affection therefore makes the home a micro-paradise on earth.

Saīd Nūrsi encouraged married couples to embed love and affection as their family roots with goodly treatment for each other so that the nurturing of children is perfected. The model couple loved each other and stood upon *imān* and treated each other accordingly in a heavenly manner because in leading a family in this manner they would never lose their company, even in the Hereafter. Thus, home life is the essential core of society and when correct, the entire society becomes correct. For this reason Nūrsi spent remarkable amounts of time on the reformation of home life and family living.

Saīd Nūrsi wrote an epistle on *al-Hijab* in which he warned women of the *ummah* to protect themselves from the destructive forces of secular thought, especially suppositions that induced disrespect-for and denial of the tenets and rituals of *Shari'ah*. He encouraged women to follow the commands of Allah as he unravelled the lifeless tenor of Western culture and caused them to acknowledge their duties and responsibilities for the household. A child's first school is mother's lap where conduct and behaviour are inscribed as never-ending influences upon the heart. Mothers have an undeniable scope of influence in leading the *ummah* on the straight path.

Choosing a righteous wife is important because she has the most crucial role in conjugal living and duties in the home, even more so than her husband because she prepares both home life and atmosphere as well as instructs and cares for the children. Justifiably, therefore, the home is regarded as her special kingdom. Her behaviour impacts children more so than their father's. To settle this matter with a sound Islamic base, Saīd Nūrsi quoted the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet (ﷺ) said that a wife is the shepherd of her husband's home.

Saīd Nūrsi said that a father must exhibit behaviour that sculpts his children's sense of etiquette. Hence, a father is careful to conduct his social and religious lives because if he fails in his commitment to the guidance of Allah severe negative impacts will fall upon his children, even should they have religious instruction from the very outset of life.

Hence, religious learning under an un-praiseworthy father cannot possibly function properly and will cause children to lean towards the commission of sins. Therefore, both parents must do their best to practice Islam's codes of conduct to formulate and perfect their children's behaviour.¹⁴

Cultivating Society

Said Nürsi deemed the development and reformation of society his utmost priority and rendered lessons from *Risāle-i Nūr* to people at all social levels. This effort comprised an institute called *Madrasah-i Nūriyyah* in which people learned issues related to *imān* and Qur'ānic realities. *Madrasah-i Nūriyyah* was known as a fountain of learning and nurturing in which Nürsi frequently called on his students to establish it nationally. Nürsi taught in this *Madrasah* where people gathered with great enthusiasm daily. Even if they only received lessons on *Risāle-i Nūr* for fifteen minutes or so they considered themselves among the fortunate.¹⁵ Graduates from higher *Madrasahs* and Islamic universities also disseminated knowledge herewith the goal of teaching everyone irrespective of age. Hence, people from all levels of society attended Nürsi's lectures and those of his students. In fact, they became great social gatherings and subsequently played an unimagined role in returning secular Turkey to Islam.

The *Madrasah-i Nūriyyah* adopted a two-way traffic system. On one hand, Said Nürsi tried to accelerate *da'wah* activities towards the true teachings of both Qur'ān and *Sunnah* and on the other he filled gaps created by a poorly systematized traditional educational system. With the establishment of *Madrasah-i Nūr*, Nürsi could implant seeds of faith and rejuvenate waning enthusiasm with a genuine thirst for knowledge. Shortly after its establishment, the *Madrasah-i Nūr* appeared in almost every Turkish home as a mini version wherein family members gathered to learn *Risāle-i Nūr*. In many other places people also gathered to learn. Hence, *Risāle-i Nūr*, in this context, initiated a revolution that prompted dynamic social transformations.

Reforming Society

When rendering services for reformation and the rearing and nurturing of trustworthiness, Said Nürsi was completely altruistic and

never expected worldly gain except for the pleasure of Allah. He always advised his students to do the same.

Nürsi held that differences in opinion should be constructive rather than destructive and that every scholar should respect and tolerate the opinions of others. If an opinion seems defective from the perspective of either the Qur'ān or *Sunnah*, the defect should be traced and established in a friendly manner and in conformity with the *Sirah*. Reconciliation is always preferable when possible because it preserves the integrity and unity of the *ummah*. All differences leading to separation and ultimately to the destruction of unity must be rejected; as such practices generate hostility and the mistrust that gravely erode Muslim concord.

With this in mind, Nursi also advocated the negation of the term 'I', which he considered harboured pride and arrogance, which are unsuitable for believers. Hence, he recommended never saying 'I' but rather 'We' as required. Moreover, he rejected malicious conduct of any kind and taught that envy harms the envious a hundred times more than the envied, especially as envy does nothing to the envied. Therefore, an envious man should consider what he does because he stands out as a denier of Allah's will and eventually earns God's wrath and harms himself.

Moderation should be established in all societies and the rich should honour and show affection to the poor and vice versa. Saïd Nürsi taught that this is not possible until the practice of usury is ended and *zakah* for property is properly collected and administered. Economic observance of *zakah's* relevance is not limited to small personal areas or for certain individuals or society. *Zakah* is a concrete pillar of all social life and functions to improve the financial life of all human beings by strengthening affection, love and honour between the rich and poor. In this regard, Saïd Nursi considered that true and effective nurturing of a human being and their community involved the purification of character as emphasized in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ānic propositions thereby suggest that the foundation of a society is mutual support rather than coercive power and greed. Hence, to obtain a thriving society it is necessary to replace envious competition with mutual cooperation and support.

Significance of Saïd Nürsi's Methodology of Learning

The discussion has thus far conveyed that Western education brought

drastic changes that victimized an extremely vulnerable Islamic academia. Muslims abandoned the reading of the Qur'ān in Arabic in deference to English translations and engaged entertainments causing them to spend much time in vain activities and even became contemporary couch potatoes at local cafes discussing imported theoretical gibberish. It was therefore hardly possible to revert to Islamic knowledge and Qur'ānic education without introducing unique methods that would appeal to the great Muslim retreat. Nūrī knew they must become re-attracted and consequently return to Islamic knowledge and Qur'ānic education in a new way. Here is where he successfully originated effective realms and for which Allah facilitated the design of an epoch-making agenda that has since immensely influenced the *ummah* of Mohammad (ﷺ).

The foremost cause of decadent education was a defectively dogmatic pedantry that failed to meet or respond to contemporary needs. They had even abandoned practical subjects such as history, chemistry, geography, etc. Thus, scholars of Saīd Nūrī's time and even preceding generations had become satisfied and were complaisant with the inadequate status quo that never turned an eye towards contemporary developments in various realms throughout educational history. At the same time, the West grew all too rapidly advanced by standing on the firm scientific foundations that were laid by Islamic forefathers.

Saīd Nūrī stood his ground to raise an intractable voice against the obsolete educational standards of his day. He rejected the unproductive teaching methods that required disproportionate periods of student time to study the useless minutia of obscure commentaries and footnotes. In a very short period of time he himself was able to read several books without resorting to commentaries and notes. In contemporary shadows of defeat and backwardness, Muslims had actually begun to believe the West was their undefeatable master; one with which they could not compete. The fact was that this happened due to endogenous weakness directly consequent to a rather destitute Muslim educational system. Islam's forefathers had indeed left a precious store of knowledge and sciences that had been dismissed as irrelevant by a contemporary army of ignorant mullahs and so-called scholars. This abandoned cache of knowledge contained a precious heritage that would help Muslims recover and resurrect knowledge of their glorious past in preparation for a more glorious future. This is the aspiration that Saīd Nūrī imparted.

One of Saïd Nürsi's deepest concerns regarded stereotypic Muslim reading of the Qur'ānic language. Hence, he encouraged people to read the Qur'ān in Arabic rather than translations.

Saïd Nürsi's Approach to Political Domains

Saïd Nürsi took two different approaches to political interests. When the government helped religion, he cooperated but when it didn't, he opposed it. Hence, when the Kemalist regime of Turkey appeared to be destroying Islam's honour, Nürsi bravely came forward to raise his voice against the government. He stood beside democrats hoping to create an environment that would aid and uplift the words of Allah, restore *Shari'ah* and re-establish Islamic culture and values. However, democracy under Mustafa Kamal's leadership changed everything after he completely barred *Shari'ah* along with Islamic symbols and displays, many of which were actively destroyed. At this point, Nürsi raised his voice against Kamal's government as he attempted to re-orient Turkish Muslim towards *Shari'ah*. When his opposition became too conspicuous, Mustafa Kamal invited him to negotiate and even offered Nürsi a position in his government, which Nürsi rejected for the sake of Islam because Ataturk's power and influence served only to erode Turkey's Islamic culture. When Adnan Mundaris later declared *Shari'ah's* restoration, Nürsi encouraged his students to assist Mundaris.

Thus, we have Nürsi's typical political approach. His strategy was always to create an affable environment with political rulers, one through which Islam could be taught and consequently spread without major impediments. Nürsi did not, however, favour contemporary politics due unethical norms and practices, many of which were qualified by western philosophy. He complained that politics held forth a satanic sphere of ideas and that it was best to seek refuge with Allah from them. According to him:

The politics of the present, which is founded on self-interest, is a rapacious beast. If you feign affection for a ravenous beast, you will not attract its compassion but rather its appetite. It will turn on you with claws and fangs to rend what it desires from you.¹⁶

When he was asked a question as to why does the New Said avoid politics with such vehemence? He answered:

He avoids it so vehemently in order to serve belief and the Qur'ān, which is of the greatest importance, the greatest necessity and is most pure and most right, and so as not to sacrifice unnecessarily and officiously for one or two doubtful years of worldly life the work of gaining more than millions of years of eternal life. For he says: 'I am growing old and I do not know how much longer I shall live'; so for me the most important question should be working for eternal life. The prime means of gaining eternal life and the key to everlasting happiness is belief, so I have to work for that. And since I am obliged by *Shari'ah* to serve people in respect of learning so that they may also profit, I want to perform that duty.¹⁷

Nursi's Attribution of Courage

Courage or bravery is a must for every Muslim. History records that whenever anyone invites people to the truth, the regime of the day offers hostile opposition, which requires a fearless Muslim and is also why all prophets (ﷺ) were brave, straightforward and uncompromising. For example, Prophet Sulaymān (ﷺ) wrote to the ruler of Saba' saying: "*Be ye not arrogant against me, but come to me in submission (to the religion).*"¹⁸ Saīd Nāursi feared no one and he showed exemplary courage throughout his life, especially in the face of rulers and governors. An incident that occurred on 13 April, 1909 bears evidence. He was arrested with others on the charge of being a 'destructive element' and threat to national security. He addressed army officials several times and eloquently defended himself in a court of martial law.

I am a student of *Shari'ah*. Hence, I assess everything in light of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Islam is my religion. Reasonably, I evaluate everything in light of Islamic values ... Thus I am addressing not only you but also all human beings of our time. Realities will unfold and it is worth mentioning this here (with regards to the day when all hidden things shall be made manifest).¹⁹ Therefore, I am preparing with all my strength for the life of the Hereafter. If we are thousands of souls ready to be sacrificed for the sake of Allah and His Religion, it is therefore because *Shari'ah* is nothing but a great

fortune for us. I advocate true *Shari'ah*, not that which hypocrites claim.²⁰

When the court witnessed his sincere bravery and courage, it released him, although many others who were arrested with him were convicted and even sentenced to death.

Concern and Caring

Muslim scholars should responsibly care, train and nurture people at all societal levels. Their duties are not only confined to non-Muslims but also include the purification of non-practicing Muslims. Nürsi's contemporary era was filled with corrupting influences and people who ignored the Islamic pillars of faith and which devastated the development of individual righteous characteristics and communal respectability, many of who resorted to drunkenness and shameful moral decadence. Hence, Muslim scholars are burdened with the substantial responsibility of cleansing and reforming members of such a dissipating *ummah*. Saïd Nursi was prompt to respond to this obligation by adopting three graduated forums that nurtured of a more forthright community: for individuals, families and society, respectively.

The Significance of Sincerity

Sincerity (*ikhhlās*) is the backbone of any deed (*'amāl*) but its absence renders a believer's efforts fruitless. A da'i should especially conduct him/herself with sincerity because artificial efforts have no impact in this world and neither do they bring benefits in the next. This great virtue was not absent in the life of Saïd Nürsi, who said:

O my brothers, who are involved in serving the Holy Qur'ān, be informed that sincerity is the soul of a deed and the foundation of all efforts and renders the shortest way to the desired goal. It is the great virtue that adorns the attributes of a believer²¹ when handling worldly life and its necessities. We have striven wholeheartedly to succeed and we must cultivate the sense of sincerity in all of our efforts so that we can benefit from the mercy of Allah. If we fail to practice sincerity we are doomed. As Allah says "Nor sell My Signs for a small price; and fear Me, and Me alone."²²

O brothers of mine in the Hereafter! And O my companions

in service of the Qur'ān! You know and you should know – and you do know – that the most important basis, the greatest strength, the most acceptable intercessor, the mightiest tower of strength, the shortest way to the truth, the spiritual supplication most likely to be accepted, the most wondrous means to all aims, the loftiest character trait and the purest worship in this world and especially in services related to the Hereafter, is sincerity.²³

Thus, according to Saīd Nūrsi, sincerity is the soul of a deed and the foundation of all efforts. It is the shortest way to reach the expected goal. It is the great virtue that adorns the attributions of a believer when handling worldly life and necessity. Muslims must cultivate this sense of sincerity to benefit from the mercy of Allah. If they fail to practice sincerity they will be doomed. Therefore, it is manifest from his words that he paid much attention to the value of sincerity.

Contemporary Challenges

In the present era of scientific and technological advances the world constantly changes and reshapes cultural, social and political realms. As a result, the Muslim world confronts unprecedented complexity. To accommodate and survive numerous challenges, contemporary Muslim scholars must develop new approaches and modalities that defend against the materialism that causes Muslims to fall from God's many graces. The enemies of Islam have fashioned multi-dimensional swords to attack its fundamentals. Of these, materialistic humanism is the foremost ideology that serves to erode basic Islamic values. Orientalism is another challenge that strengthens the Western hold on the Muslim zeitgeist.

Western Imperialism

Colonization by Western imperialists challenged the Muslim world with a civilization built on materialistic cravings. Allah says:

Which then is best? – he that layeth his foundation on piety to Allah and His good pleasure? – or he that layeth his foundation on an undermined sand-cliff ready to crumble to pieces? and it doth crumble

to pieces with him, into the fire of Hell. And Allah guideth not people that do wrong.²⁴

Western materialism tempted the Muslim world away from its culture of following Qur'ānic knowledge and codes of conduct. This loath some consequence of colonization snatched Muslim youths from the hearth of Islamic education. When pinpointing the truth of the matter, we prefer to call this a Judeo-Christian effort to optimize opportunities to destroy the Islamic edifice of world history.

Colonial powers initially attacked a rather dismal Muslim educational system, one that provided a vulnerable gateway and allowed pervasive decadence to infiltrate the *ummah*. Eventually, Muslims rejected rather than repaired their traditional educational systems and accepted alien curricula. This purchased the loss of Islamic perspectives that espoused the Divinely articulated characteristics that decent societies required. At times, a student might have become vibrantly enthused with knowledge gained by worldly education “*But could not advance in the formulation of a superb moral ground and spiritual premise in his life as the required elements of knowledge used for the utilization of human benefit rather than destruction.*”²⁵

Thus, moral weakness infused intellectual capabilities and only worsened Muslim decadence. The West then encouraged the translation of *Shari'ah* into Western languages, a process that further weakened skills in the Arabic language and its venerable literature, the very medium of Islamic education. These efforts led to numerous English translations of the Qur'ān so that people became accustomed to reading translated versions and left the original text behind. Thereby, Muslim propositions became fused with the subversive influence of Western oriented academic pursuits. Eventually, the Muslim world accepted the English language and Arabic lost its significance and appeal as the authentic language of the Qur'ān upon which the colossus of Islamic literature had been constructed.

Moreover, Islam had always emphasized that males and females should not mix freely. From an Islamic viewpoint, the mixing of the genders in secluded spaces is prohibited and unlawful. Nevertheless, Western education systems caused the forbidden to become commonplace. They devised co-educational systems that the Muslim world unhesitatingly followed. Unfortunately, the pandemic spread across

the entire Arab-Muslim world and some Muslim scholars still advocate eco-education.

Orientalism

Orientalism holds robust, enigmatic opposition to Islam and non-Western cultures. This academic movement claims the Qur'ān is a product of Prophet Muḥammad's (ﷺ) imagination and further argues that the *Sharī'ah* is also man-made and contains numerous conspicuous defects. They therefore hastened to correct these faults with facile challenges appear plausibly irrefutable.

The Occident ignores that its actual advances were founded on Muslim science and educational protocols that also allowed the absolute faith in Allah to flourish deep in Muslim hearts and generate the inherent power that once maintained Islam's invincibility. Hence, Orientalism's success depends on its ability to distort Islamic knowledge at its sources. Nonetheless, because the Judeo-Christian world separated religion and state vis-à-vis Orientalism and secularism, they also managed a division between *Sharī'ah* and legislation that is alien to the Islamic world. Likewise, Orientalism distorted elements within *Sharī'ah*; thus creating confusion and suspicion regarding the validity and practicability of Islamic jurisprudence. This poses a monumental menace to the Muslim *ummah*.

Imitation of Western Civilization

Nursi was aware of the significance of equality and fraternity for a healthy society. But Western social systems exhibit the opposite. It is because modern western civilization has taken up a position opposed to the Qur'ān and failed to appreciate Qur'ān's elliptical inimitability and miraculousness. According to him, the law of the jungle rules in the West.²⁶ Nürsi also held the view that the contemporary civilization has mesmerised people, and numbed the senses to such a degree that the civilized do not feel pain, hardship and suffering. The veil of carelessness is being rent through increased sensitivity due to developments in science. Europeans' idols and sciences of Naturalism lead thousands of people to regret for blind imitation of western civilization. Nürsi states:

O sons of this land! Do not try to imitate Europeans! How can you

reasonably trust in and follow the vice and invalid, worthless thought of Europe after the boundless tyranny and enmity it has shown you? No! No! You who imitate them in dissoluteness, you are not following them, but unconsciously joining their ranks and putting to death both yourselves and your brothers. Know that the more you follow them in immorality the more you lie claiming to be patriots! Because your following them in this way is to hold your nation into contempt, to hold the nation up to ridicule! God guides us and you in the Straight Path.²⁷

Concerns for ‘Truth’

As a result of profound and serious analysis of the existing circumstances of his time, Nürsi articulates on what philosophy and science, and Qur’ānic wisdom offer to social life of man. According to him, philosophy and science give rise to and support ‘force’, which is contrary to the Islamic method of moderation that we derive from the wisdom of the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Example. Islam never condones ‘force’ but modern knowledge and systems are not only silent but do not make sincere efforts to develop proper and permanent solution to solve this crisis. Truth is hijacked and overshadowed by modern education and learning that were designed to serve certain vested-interest groups and establish their political supremacy and hegemony. Nürsi remarks:

Philosophy accepts ‘force’ as its point of support in social life. It considers its aim to be ‘benefits’. The principle of its life it recognises to be ‘conflict’. It holds the bond between communities to be ‘racialism and negative nationalism’. And its fruits are ‘gratifying the appetites of the soul and increasing human needs’. However, the mark of force is ‘aggression’. The mark of benefit – since they are insufficient for every desire – is ‘jostling and tussling’. The mark of conflict is ‘strife’. And the mark of racialism – since it is to be nourished by devouring others – is ‘aggression’. Thus, it is for these reasons that it has negated the happiness of mankind.²⁸

Having delineated briefly with transparency the objective and function of philosophy which is implicitly inspiring force and not peace

and truth as essential for humanity, Nürsi draws the attention of people, particularly his students to contemplate on the revealed message registered in the Qur'ân and its eventual wisdom. He is of the view that the Qur'ân provides remedies to all sorts of social, moral, and spiritual diseases of mankind. The chronic disease of the support for 'force' is replaced by the cure of 'truth' in the wisdom of the Qur'ân. One of the essential criteria to establish an exemplary Islamic society is exploring wisdom of the Qur'ân for all probable solutions. He remarks:

As for the Qur'ânic wisdom, its point of support is 'truth' instead of force. It takes 'virtue and God's pleasure' as its aims in place of benefits. It takes the principle of 'mutual assistance' as the principle of life in place of the principle of conflict. And it takes 'the ties of religion' class, and country to be the ties bonding communities. Its aim is to form a barrier against the lusts of the soul, urge the spirit to sublime matters, satisfy the high emotions and urging man to the human perfections, make him a true human being. And the mark of the 'truth' is accord. The mark of virtue is 'solidarity'. The mark of mutual assistance is 'hastening to assist one another'. The mark of religion is 'brotherhood' and 'attraction'. And the mark of reining in and tethering the soul and leaving the spirit free and urging it towards perfections is 'happiness in this world and the next'.²⁹

So during his reform endeavours, Nürsi appealed to his countrymen to understand and realise the complications and implications of blind following of western philosophy and its systems including value free science which is secular in nature and materialistic in its aim. While doing so, he called on people to return to the Qur'ân in order to understand its wisdom that inspires truth instead of force.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, we assert that Saïd Nürsi's place in Islamic history is indelibly momentous. This noble man realized the speed and scope of the decadence that was leading Turkey to destruction and treated the Turks in such a manner that they began to turn around.

Sensible Islamic scholars from around the globe are well advised to look into Saīd Nūr̄si's work and make use of what is practically applicable. The Turks had been rushing like cattle over a cliff into secularism but Nūr̄si stood his ground and called them to comprehend Islam's comprehensive universality, and with singular approaches to the propagation of Islamic message to which they responded with enormous zeal and enthusiasm. Consequently, they are presently involved in compensatory efforts to restore *Sharī'ah* in Turkey and repair aculture that was nearly destroyed by the Kamalist regime.

Notes and References

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2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
4. Saīd Nūr̄si, *Sirah Dhatiyyah*, p. 46.
5. Bediuzzamān Saīd Nūr̄si, *Sayqal al-Islam*, Ihsan Qasim al-Salihi (Trans.), Istanbul, Dar Sozler, 2004, p. 473.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 574.
7. Saīd Nūr̄si, *al-Maktubat*, Ihsan Qasim al-Salihi (Trans.), Istanbul, Dar Sozler, 1992, p. 306.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Saīd Nūr̄si, *Sirah Dhatiyyah*, p. 35.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Bediuzzamān Saīd Nūr̄si; *al-Lama'at*, Ihsan Qasim al-Salihi (Trans.), Istanbul, Sharikat al-Nasl li al-Tiba'ah, 1993, p. 38.
13. Collected from *Lamhat min Hayat wa Athar Saīd Nursi*, p. 40.
14. Abū Dawūd, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. III, p. 91.
15. It was reported by scholars such as *Al-Minhaj* (via Imām Nawawi) that a long term of learning is the best 'ibadah a mu'min accomplishes and constitutes his/her best moments spent.
16. Saīd Nūr̄si, *The Words*, p. 751.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 740.
18. Al-Qur'ān, XXVII:31.
19. Al-Qur'ān, LXXXVI:9.
20. Saīd Nūr̄si, *Sirah Dhatiyyah*, p. 105.
21. Saīd Nūr̄si, *Al-Lam'at*, p. 241.

22. Al-Qur'ān, II:41.
23. Imām Beduizzamān Saīd Nūrsi, *The Five Epistles from Risala-I Nur*, Trans. Hasan Spiker, Isparta, Hayrat Publishing, 2016, p. 83.
24. Al-Qur'ān, IX:109.
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28. Beduizzamān Saīd Nūrsi, *The Words*, Trans. Sukran Vahide, Istanbul, Sozler Publications, 1992, p. 146.
29. *Ibid.*