

Religious Dialogue and Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's Views

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Abstract

The worldview of Islam is replete with an essentialist discourse laying a structural foundation for diverse offshoots through the prism of its divinely-ordained sources. This whole ideological aura revolves round the Quran and Sunnah--being the nerve center of Islamic intellectual tradition. The contemporary debate revolving around Islam portrays it as a fundamentalist and war-mongering radical extremist religion standing diametrically opposite to the essence of Islam. The clash of Civilization discourse has created more ripples in furthering the void between Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition and this misrepresentation can be widely inferred in the writings of post-Enlightened secular liberal western intellectuals like Bernard Lewis, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and others who extend their unflinching support to trans-historicize the clash of civilizational theory. On the other hand, we see the positive dichotomies gaining ground i.e. Dialogue and Pluralism which remains at the epicenter of Islamic discourse giving it a quasi-divine status and a point of reconciliation between the trialogue of faiths. The loss of mutual understanding and co-operation between people of different religious faiths has altogether -**-dismantled the pluralistic outlook of societies which needs to be revisited under the guidance of sacred texts. Badiuzzaman Said Nursi is one among the important figures who discusses the importance of such initiatives and formulates a methodology for establishing a discourse of Dialogue and Religious Pluralism.

- 1) This paper will focus on the manifestation of religious pluralism (*al-ta'addudiyah al-dīniyyah*) in the perspective of Badiuzzaman's Risala-i-Nur and how it act as a lynchpin for constructing and allocating multi-religious societies in its worldview.

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- 2) It will also highlight the implications of Dialogue for peaceful and harmonious development in the multi-religious and multi-cultural societies.
- 3) For the modern mindset, the choice is simply a religious theocracy (which denies pluralism) or an aggressive secularism (which allows pluralism but only a privatized form of religion). Having looked at the traditional debate, we shall see how Nursi argues for a rich alternative, which affirms diversity yet also remains committed to the public nature of religious traditions.

Introduction

Before dealing with the Ideas of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, a cursory glimpse to the world helps us to experience the fermented state of religious traditions around the world. Islam being a universal faith has a universal agenda of opening up the pathways for peace and Dialogue between diverse religious discourses. The Muslim Ummah is charged with the responsibility of creating a just world order where the main thrust should be laid to establish peace and justice. Islam is also a tradition that lays equal emphasis on thought and action, on theory and practice. The post-Renaissance secular onslaught has evolved an exclusivist interpretation of Religion. Islam being the last evolved form of Abrahamic tradition has shown glittering results in each and every field and an unrelenting growth of it being the tremendous civilization in the whole world. Abu Sulayman attests that “Islamic civilization has contributed from religious sciences upto the arts and left a great legacy respecting the traditions and religious underpinnings of different religions living within and in the peripheries of Islamic world”¹. Islam, in past so many centuries faced a lot of challenges internal as well as external which put a great pressure on its relevance in the modern ratiocinated post-modern world.

There are so much intellectual frustrations, challenges and loopholes in the Muslim world that it seems not to respond and come up with an alternate narrative. Ziauddin Sardar depicts the condition of Muslim world in these words “When we look today towards the Islamic world, we see that Islamic discourse is more eclectic than traditional. Contemporary Islamic thought shows little relevance to current

Muslim reality and is fast going towards redundancy. It moves in circles, is embarrassingly apologetic, looks nostalgically at its earlier achievements and provides emotionally gratifying rhetoric but no concrete guidelines for societal and political action”². Indeed, caught within the whirlpool of a rapidly changing technological world, traditional Islamic discourse runs the risk of disappearing altogether. And yet, the irony is that the historical legacy which it is heir to is so firmly entrenched in the Muslim mind, that it is virtually impossible to dislodge it from its enthroned position of infallibility and sacrosanctness with tearing Muslim societies apart³.

The Islamic world till today has often experienced the onslaught of various forms of distortion or pollution. Foremost in this distortion takes place in the form of ideology, moral degradation, injustices and encroachment upon the purity of the Islamic faith as *al-Din* (a way of life). Unfortunately, we have to mention here that the West has been in the forefront of various acts of mischief that is, launching overt or even covert operations, in their attempts to deride Islam and demonising it as a tyrannical, uncouth, uncivilised and an out-dated religion as well as an ineffective system of life. Prof. Jamil argues that as a part of this onslaught, “Western materialist culture has been sown widely in the fabric of the Muslim societies all over the world. At the same time, the practice of *Jahili* culture and blind imitation of the West have become something common within Muslim societies”⁴. In this struggle of narratives, we see a resplendent personality and scholar with a sagacious understanding of tradition and contemporary world presents intellectually sound ideas for Muslims in order to come out of their social, religious and civilizational milieu.

However, every time a distortion or destruction of the Islamic faith had taken place, Allah, the true Creator and Master of the whole universe, with all His Power and Mercy caused to rise an individual or groups of religiously charismatic and august personalities to carry out *tajdid* (reform) and *islah* (purify or correct) of the Muslim Ummah so that it would be back on the straight path. In this connection, it should be remembered that *tajdid* does not mean to launch a reform away from Islam or to create something new, but rather to rid Islam of all impurities that had crept into the Muslim society and uphold once again the teachings of pristine Islam based on al-Qur’an and Sunnah.

Meanwhile, the intellectual and religious challenges coming across to Islam from different sides has altogether convulsed the foundations of Islam. In order to present Islam as an important benefactor needs to be highlighted within the contemporary contextual challenges. Serving that cause is the dire need of the hour. For that challenge, the *mujaddid* and *muslih* guided by Islamic principles move forward to present the Islamic worldview and develop a narrative which answers the problems and challenges of contemporary times on a sound basis from Islamic intellectual tradition.

Regarding the phenomenon of *tajdid* and *islah*, Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. had truthfully testified in his famous hadith:

“Verily, Allah the Almighty shall give rise for this Ummah (community) at the beginning of each century a *mujaddid* who shall bring about the purification (revival) of their faith”⁵.

In accordance with this testimony, we have seen the rise of great figures such as Khalifah ‘Umar b. ‘Abdul ‘Aziz, Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Malik b. Anas, Imam Muhammad b. Idris as-Shafi ‘i, Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal (the founders of the four Sunni Madhabs), Imam al-Ghazali, Ibn Taimiyyah and so forth⁶. Such personalities had indeed contributed a great deal to the development of the Muslim ummah of their respective time. In the same tradition, we have also noticed the rise of a number of mujaddidun in modern times. Among them were Shaikh Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab, Sayyid Muhammad ‘Ali as-Sanusi, Shaikh Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Maulana Sayyid Abul A’la Maududi and Ustaz Badi ‘uzzaman Sa‘id Nursi.⁷

Rethinking Badiuzzaman Said Nursi’s worldview

Islamic history is replete with axiomatic figures and cherished ideologues that have changed the course and destiny of civilizations. Badiuzzaman Said Nursi⁸ as a thinker and architect of Islamic movement in modern Turkey has an unadulterated contribution in shaping the fate of Turkey in particular and Muslim world in general. Sa‘id Nursi did not establish an Islamic movement like the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood) of Egypt or the *Jama ‘at-e Islami* of Indo-Pakistan region. His writing, mainly his magnum opus *Risale –i*

Nur (Arabic, Rasail an-Nur) did not discuss a political or economic programme for social change. But, his contribution towards the building of Islamic personality, Islamic vision and Islamic awakening in Turkey has been enormous and colossal⁹.

During the time in which he lived, materialism and communism were at their peak, and the world's psycho-sociological condition was disturbing, viz. the world was in great crisis. On the other hand, there were enormous advances in the field of the modern sciences. These improvements in science were used as a tool for irreligion; to create doubt about religion in the minds of Muslims, as well as in the minds of Jews and Christians. It is unfortunate that Badiuzzaman Said Nursi ideas are living an exiled life in this ever-shrinking and globalized world divorcing the Ummah from his intellectually vibrant and dynamic understanding of Islam. His name has only recently started to appear in books dedicated to modern Islamic thought and Muslim intellectuals. One major reason for the growing interest toward Nursi and his teachings in the eastern and western world is due to his faith-based understanding of Islam and his insistence on keeping Islam distinct from politics. Nursi was deeply concerned with the challenges facing humanity, believers, and the Muslim Ummah in particular. He had a very vast understanding and saw Islam in its sacred historical contextual episteme.

Pluralism in Quran and Risala-i-Nur

The subject of religious pluralism is given immense importance in Quranic discourse and substantiates its trans-historical importance beyond religious boundaries. The Quran affirms in the verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا
لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ
خَبِيرٌ

(O men! Behold, we have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware.)¹⁰

The post-enlightenment west and its colonization of Eastern world have altogether shifted the paradigm of pluralistic and dialogic understanding among religious worldviews. Mawlana Mawdudi believes “that western colonization had severely influenced the relationships between different religions especially amid Christianity, Judaism and Islam beyond boundaries”¹¹. In these relentless circumstances, scholars like Wahiddudin Khan and Abul Kalam Azad in East and Badiuzzaman Said Nursi in the West understood the discourse of confrontation. They tried to create a balance and trace out the pluralistic underpinnings which are inherent in religious scriptures. One of the main concerns of inter-human dialogue as well as religious pluralism is the concept of the other(s). This concept uses such social/ethnic divisions, categorizations, and labeling as believers/non-believers, Jew/Gentile, Christian/non-Christian to maintain traditional religious polarity. From the very beginning of history, human nature has led people to construct the other(s) and then try to challenge and change it/them. If this goal has not been possible, one side has tried to destroy the other. In this regard, history is full of religious commitments to and wars for absolutism.

The ideological ruptures permeated through Enlightenment project and propagated in the Clash theory of Huntington was furthered by the academic writings of Bernard Lewis, Christopher Hitchens have created fierce animosity among the Abrahamic religions. This theory was further more strengthened by Norman Podhertz’s World War IV which placed Islam and West at the loggerheads dismantling and deconstructing the roots of pluralistic underpinnings in Judeo-Christian and Islamic world. The Challenge of contextualizing the clash and creating a space of understanding the other(s) was an important task in 19th and 20th century. For this attitude are essentially an attempt to understand differences in order to promote life and the universe. How did Said Nursi (1876-1960), a twentieth-century Turkish Islamic scholar, view others who believe and worship differently? Can believers co-exist peacefully within the same societal structure? Is there any way to share the world with those who have different religious practices and beliefs? Is a person from another faith need to be saved? How should unbelievers be treated? His responses to such questions will be used to connect the issue of religious

pluralism and tolerance with contemporary events. Especially after 9/11, we discuss practical aspects of his approach to the other(s), and their different doctrines, ideologies, and religions in order to promote different views of life and the universe that reflect Islamic universalism¹².

Nursi asserted that since truth is not limited to one understanding, there can be many different understandings that vary in form according to time and place. Even sacred laws change according to the times. Indeed, one age may have seen several Prophets,¹³ and there were different Prophets and laws in the same continent during the same century.¹⁴ On the diversity of Islamic faith, Nursi states: When you know your way and opinions to be true, you have the right to say, 'My way is right and the best.' But you do not have the right to say, 'Only my way is right.' According to the sense of 'The eye of contentment is too dim to perceive faults; it is the eye of anger that exhibits all vice, your unjust view and distorted opinion cannot be the all-decisive judge and cannot condemn the belief of another as invalid.'¹⁵

Given this context, John Voll opines that Nursi's approach can be considered pluralistic. Voll writes: In terms of Qur'anic commentary, Said Nursi argues that the verses of the Qur'an reflect the vastness of God's message and depths of meanings. He then quotes Nursi: As the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition expresses truths through its explicit, clear meanings and senses, so it expresses many allusive meanings through its styles and forms. Each of its verses contains numerous levels of meanings. Since the Qur'an proceeds from all-encompassing knowledge, all its meanings may be intended. It cannot be restricted to one or two meanings like man's speech, the product of his limited mind and individual will. It is because of this that innumerable truths contained in the Qur'an's verses which have been expounded by Qur'anic commentators, and there are many more which have not been expounded by them.¹⁶ According to Voll: This openness to many different levels of understanding reflects a pluralism that is not a relativist position, but rather emphasizes the importance of the role of the individual in the interpretation.¹⁷

A Muslim scholar from Stanford University also sounds similar and thus emphasizes:

We need to commit ourselves to pluralism, [for] it is a part of the vision imparted to us by the Qur'ān and the example of the Prophet (saas). It is important for progressive Muslims, and Muslim communities in general, to return to the pluralistic vision of the Qur'ān and establish cooperative relations with other religious communities¹⁸.

According to Said Nursi balance is extremely important in religious matters, since exaggeration and understatement do no justice to a true faith. One must grasp the essence and the original purpose of religion. But only the intellect of the individual and its heart solely are able to reach the cognition. It requires merely small sparks and impulses to get going what slumbers in them. According to the Quranic conduit "See and comprehend", Said Nursi analyzes himself and the world. Thus his conclusions are results of his intensive profound analyses. They also bear proof of the intensity and determination with which Nursi himself wrestled. It is in this manner that Nursi reveals manners of self-exploration to those who read his works. All subtle derivations from his observations result in only one aim: Come to faith and you will be part of the sublimit of the universe.

The wave of atheism created an anarchist movement against religion in western world and the idea was transferred into the eastern world. Nursi also indicated his acceptance of pluralism by writing that Muslims should ally themselves with Christians to fight atheism,¹⁹ and that all of the People of the Book should cooperate against the common enemy of atheism or other unreligious ideologies. He wrote: It is even recorded in authentic traditions of the Prophet that, at the end of time, the truly pious among the Christians will unite with the People of the Qur'an and fight their common enemy: irreligion. And at this time, too, the people of religion and truth need to unite sincerely not only with their own brothers and fellow believers, but also with the truly pious and spiritual ones among the Christians, temporarily [disengaging] from the discussion and debate of points of difference in order to combat their joint enemy "aggressive atheism"²⁰.

The cursory glimpse of pluralistic discourse in Risala-i-Nur establishes a dynamic model which is helpful to implement into the more multi-religious and multi-cultural societies and can prove much effective for creating a more dynamic and pluralistic society in eastern

world especially India. The clash of religions, ideologies and narrative can be settled down if there is a common narrative which helps us to sustain and equally bear the strands of thought in the respective discourses of multi-religious societies.

Dialogue in the perspective of Quran and Risala-i-Nur

While the world has witnessed a growth in the number of conflicts ostensibly fuelled by religious motives, there is a growing international trend to encourage interfaith dialogue. Several conflicts in Asia and Africa have been attributed to a clash between the Islamic and 'Western' civilizations or as a religious war between Islam and Christianity²¹. In February 2004, an International Symposium on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations was held in Yemen, organized by the Centre for Yemeni Studies and Research. Among the resolutions adopted by the Symposium were the following:

1. a dialogue among cultures and civilizations between the Arab region and other regions that challenges old and new forms of ignorance, prejudice and assumptions about 'Otherness';
2. a dialogue that promotes mutual understanding and exchange, tolerance and a culture of peace at the level of political decision-makers, intellectuals, actors of civil society, and individuals;
3. a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts²²

Following these developments, coupled with recent appeals by the current pope for dialogue, the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue held in Makkah in June 2008 issued a public statement called 'the Makkah Appeal for Interfaith Dialogue' (see Initiative for Interfaith Dialogue). Subsequently, the World Conference on Dialogue held in Madrid, Spain, in July 2008 under the auspices of the Muslim World League issued the *Madrid Declaration*. In order to fulfil the objectives of dialogue, participants agreed on adopting, inter alia, the following:-

1. cooperation among religious, cultural, educational, and media establishments to deepen and consolidate ethical values, to encourage noble social practices and confront sexual promiscuity, family disintegration and other vices

2. organizing inter-religious and inter-cultural meetings, conducting research, executing media programs and using the Internet and other media for the dissemination of the culture of peace, understanding and coexistence
3. Promoting the issue of dialogue among the followers of religions, civilizations and cultures in youth, cultural, educational, and media activities.

One of the most prominent Muslim scholars to promote inter-faith dialogue is the Turkish scholar, Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, a scholar who has had a tremendous impact on the new generation of Turkish Muslims²³. Nursi's Approach to Dialogue begin with, it is clear that said Nursi was not an exclusivist in the sense described above. It is known that during his lifetime, he reached out to Christian leaders. Two prominent examples that are cited are (a) Nursi sent a collection of his works to Pope Pius XII in 1950; and (b) he visited the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul in 1953 to request cooperation between Muslims and Christians against atheism (Michel 2005b: 36f). This raises a question: knowing that Said Nursi was highly critical of Western Civilization (as discussed above), how do we explain his willingness to have a dialogue with Christians? In this section, we will examine (a) Said Nursi's rationale for dialogue; (b) what he considered to be the necessary conditions for dialogue; (c) what he proposed as a foundation for dialogue; and (d) what he perceived to be the objectives of dialogue.

Raison d'être for Dialogue

Badiuzzaman Nursi was quite aware of the paradigmatic shift in the contemporary western societies and how religion is de-contextualized for petty gains. Fore mostly, Nursi having a deep knowledge and understanding of Islamic tradition evolved a strategy to cope up with this continual dismay among religious classes of our society. Now, there are several factors that contributed to Nursi's promotion of dialogue in the contemporary world. I will list what I consider to be the most crucial.

a) The Qur'an's Call for Dialogue:

In his writings, Said Nursi cites Qur'anic verses which encourage or endorse dialogue between faiths. In his commentary on the Qur'anic verse,

'O People of the Book! Come to a common term between us and you, that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah',²⁴

He stated:

Modern civilization, which is the product of the thought of all mankind and perhaps the jinn as well, has taken up a position opposed to the Qur'an, which individuals and communities have failed to dispute.

In this situation, the Qur'anic injunction to come to a 'common term' with the People of the Book implies that Muslims and Christians must come to a mutual awareness that as communities founded on faith in God, they have a common mission to bear witness to Divine values in the midst of modern civilization. Far from being divided by a supposed 'clash of civilizations', they are called to work together to carry on a critical civilizational dialogue with the proponents of modernity²⁵. Nursi refutes the contention that Muslims may not befriend or collaborate with Jews and Christians based on the following verse:

O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your friends and your protectors.²⁶

He asserts that the proscription on befriending Jews and Christians applies only in a situation where they reflect the qualities of disbelief. He further argues that the fact that Islam permits Muslim men to marry Jewish and Christian women implies that Muslims are permitted to have love and compassion for them. The above verse should, therefore, be understood in its proper context. It is this approach of Nursi's, which stands in sharp contrast to that of many traditionalist scholars who reject any co-operation even with those whom the Qur'an describes as 'People of the Book' that I believe is very relevant in our present context.

b) Threat of Atheism, Materialism, Secularism to Religion in General

Said Nursi argued that there is a need for a common struggle against irreligion, atheism, tyranny and evil.²⁷ In his view the dominant challenge to faith in the modern age lay in the secular approach to life. He was equally critical of communism and capitalism, the former for denying God's existence and consciously denying religion any role in society and the latter for ignoring the question of God and promoting a consumerist, materialist way of life. Nursi wrote a refutation of atheism in Arabic entitled *Zayl al-Zayl*. Apart from atheistic committees that were established to sever Turkey's relationship with the Islamic World, communism had spread rapidly in the country in the 1940s and this development was a matter of great concern to him. For Said Nursi, the enemy of human happiness and ethical uprightness is unbelief and irreligion. By this he means the tendency by people to ignore Divine Guidance, their unwillingness to give up their own desires and ideas and submit to divine teachings about human nature. In their quest for a Divinely-guided way of life in the modern age, Muslims will find common cause with Christians who are committed to the teachings of Jesus. The reasons why Nursi was preoccupied with atheism can be found in *Mesnevî-i Nuriye*. They include the following:

- a) Unbelief renders the universe meaningless;
- b) Unbelief severs the bonds that connect man [human beings] both to himself and to all other creation; and
- c) Unbelief extinguishes the soul and heart and leaves them in darkness²⁸.

c) Common Values

Said Nursi was deeply cognizant of the fact that the theological differences between Islam and Christianity could not be washed away. However, he acknowledges the commonalities between them. Nursi argues that there can be no clash of civilizations between real Christians and real Muslims. There is nothing surprising in this, because both communities believe in the one and only God and both seek to construct society on divine principles and values. If there is a clash, it is between, on the one hand, the civilization envisioned by

‘people of faith’, or in the words of Said Nursi, ‘the God-conscious’ and, on the other, a civilization that tries to banish God from everyday life, from politics, economics, and social interaction, and to reduce religion to privately-held beliefs, to ineffective ritual, to colourful folklore. Said Nursi found justification for his rapprochement with Christians in the hadith or Prophetic traditions which predict that at the end of time, pious Christians will unite with Muslims to fight their common enemy, atheism. In short, Said Nursi sees the need for dialogue as arising from the challenges posed by secular society to Muslims and Christians.

Conditions for Dialogue

Said Nursi established several ground rules for successful dialogue. These include:

- a) Taking into account the core principles of all religions and there should be no attempt by any one faith to compel other faiths to accept its teachings or impose its beliefs on all others;
- b) Placing dialogue above self-interest and/or thoughts of worldly gain;
- c) Basing dialogue on the responsibility and mission of vicegerents;
- d) Understanding the complexities of our reality in the global age and finding ways of revitalizing the role of religion in addressing human problems.
- e) Avoiding disputes on questions of belief.

Foundation for Dialogue

For Nursi, the foundation for dialogue has to be Islamic civilization. The reason why Western civilization could not be considered as the basis is that (a) it relies on force; (b) its goal is self-interest; (c) its principle in life is conflict; (d) it uses racism and negative nationalism to hold the masses together; and (e) its enticement is inciting love and passion and gratifying desires.²⁹ Western civilization, according to Nursi, became distant and estranged from true Christianity and based its personal and societal views on the principles of an anthropocentric Greco-Roman philosophy which exalted the human person to the centre of the universe and pushed God to its margins. Said Nursi held that European societies replaced divinely guided Christian ideals with

the philosophical principles of the Enlightenment, focusing on the freedom of the individual, dismissing the formative role and rights of society, and reducing religious faith to a private, personal commitment with no voice in the autonomous spheres of politics, economics, and social relations. This, however, does not suggest that Nursi saw no value in Western civilization. To the contrary, he admired the advances made by Western civilization in the fields of science and technology and urged Muslims to emulate European nations. We know that among the disciplines Nursi taught were chemistry and physics. And he encouraged the integration of Islamic and modern disciplines.

For Nursi, Islamic civilization is better suited to provide a basis for establishing a just and peaceful world because it has the following characteristics:

- a) it is truth (not might) which makes right;
- b) virtue is the motivation for human acts;
- c) unity is the basis of social relations;
- d) it encourages mutual assistance; and
- e) It upholds divine guidance as the norm of ethical behaviour.

If any effort at dialogue were to succeed, he holds, Christians and Muslims will have to refrain (at least for some time) from disputes between themselves. In saying this, Said Nursi did not imply that there are no differences between Muslims and Christians or that those differences are not important. His point is that concentrating obsessively on these differences can blind both Muslims and Christians to the even more important common task which they share, that of offering the modern world a vision of human life and society in which God is central and God's will is the norm of moral values³⁰.

Purpose of Dialogue

What exactly did Said Nursi hope to achieve through interfaith dialogue? In my view, Nursi was desirous of achieving two major objectives.

- a) **Establishment of Divine Values:** To Nursi, the threat of atheism far outweighed any other threat. He was hoping that through interfaith dialogue the world would be more accepting of ‘divine’ values which have been ignored or discarded as a result of the secularisation of societies. In one of his letters which appears in a collection called *Emirdağ Lahikası* he states: Since modern Western civilization acts contrary to the fundamental laws of the revealed religions, its evil has come to outweigh its good aspects, its errors and harmful aspects its benefits.

There are two essential points to note here. Nursi does not refer to Islam exclusively, but to allrevealed religions. So he could be called a ‘universalist’ in the sense that he is concerned about the fate of all nations. And he deems the reestablishment of divine laws as crucial to the quest for a just and peaceful world.

- b) **Attainment of Human Dignity, Justice, and Fellowship:** Nursi’s central thesis is that Muslims and Christians together can build a civilization in which human dignity, justice, and fellowship will be the norm. This is possible if they seek to ground their mutual relationships on love.

Conclusion:

The divorce of pluralistic and dialogical discourse from public sphere in the post-renaissance west and colonial east has deeply influenced the scope for religious discourse. In such prevailing situations, there are very few scholars like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, Allama Iqbal in the East and Rashid Rida and Muhammad Abduh in Middle East vis-à-vis voices like Fethullah Gulen and Badiuzzaman Said Nursi in west who have tried to respond against the discourse animosity of clash of civilizational narrative. In the western world, Scholars like Timothy Winter, Tariq Ramadan, Ibrahim Moosa, Abu Abdul Rabia, Sherman Jackson have also took

pains to reconcile this clash mentality and striving to evolve a platform for peace, reconciliation, dialogue and pluralism among the religions of the world. Badiuzzaman Said Nursi has intellectually contextualized this whole ideological tussle and reconciled it through the scriptural analysis. Berghout also asserts that Nursi's call for dialogue and understanding stems not only from the critical situation of the world's alarming problems but initially and basically from the inner call of his human nature as well as from the deep wisdom enshrined in the Qur'anic text. Nursi's interfaith initiative has been instrumental, in my view, in encouraging Muslim scholars and religious leaders to pursue interfaith dialogue within Turkey, in Muslim majority countries such as Egypt and Malaysia, as well as in Muslim minority communities globally.

Nursi's methodology can be transported and taught in different courses of Islamic Studies across different universities in the world. He is one of the important voices in the discourse on interfaith dialogue and pluralism and equally relevant to the countries like the South East Asia. The "ratiocinated and materialist" understanding of Modernity and post-modern narrative of "meaninglessness of world" can be only confronted through the sacred roots of religion. The unrelenting war struggles between different countries can only be reconciled by creating a platform for dialogue and guiding them back to the roots of religious pluralism inherent in different religious discourses. Muzaffar Chandra argues that "no civilization in history has demonstrated a more resolute commitment to dialogue and pluralism than Islam"³¹. For not only the Qur'an itself but also the 'Charter of Medina' and the acts and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad attest to Islam's affirmative stance on dialogue and pluralism³².

References and Notes

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- ¹¹Mawlana Mawdudi, *Islam and the World*, Adam Publishers, 2001, p. 121
- ¹²T. S. J. Michel, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," *The Muslim World* 89, nos. 3-4 (1999): 326-27.
- ¹³ Compare this with B. S. Nursi, *The Words*, in *Risale-i Nur 1.0 CD* (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil, 2000), 501. Then, since with the coming of the Prophet of the end of time, man as though advanced from the primary to the secondary stage, and through numerous revolutions and upheavals reached a position at which all the human peoples could receive a single lesson and listen to a single teacher and act in accordance with a single law, no need remained for different laws, neither was there necessity for different teachers. But because they were not all at completely the same level and did not proceed in the same sort of social life, the schools of law became numerous. If, like students of a school of higher education, the vast majority of mankind

were clothed in the same sort of social life and attained the same level, then all the schools could be united. But just as the state of the world does not permit that, so the schools of law cannot be the same.

¹⁴See conclusion in *ibid.*, 500.

¹⁵B. S. Nursi, *The Letters*, in *Risale-i Nur 1.0 CD*. (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil, 2000), p. 314.

¹⁶Voll, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 255-56.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Amir Hussain, as quoted in Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims*, 266–7

¹⁹In this regard, see John Obert Voll, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and Religion in the 1950s*, *The Muslim World* 89,no.s 3-4 (1999): 255-56.

²⁰B. S. Nursi, *The Flashes*, in *Risale-i Nur 1.0 CD*. (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil, 200), 203, note 7.

²¹In this regard, Samuel Huntington's theory in a *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) which posited a clash between Western civilisation and an Islamic/ Chinese axis has been challenged, both by those who are convinced that such a clash was not imminent as well as by those who believe that future conflicts will be driven by considerations that have little to do with religion or culture (see Fox & Sandler 2004: 119-124).

²²Russell, FW & T Bovermann, *Dialogue among Civilizations*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Paris, p.14.

²³Ünal, A & A Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue: Fethullah Gülen*, Fairfax (VA): 2000, p.15.

²⁴Quran 3: 64

²⁵Michel T, Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. In Vahide, Şükran (ed): *Said Nursi's Views on Muslim-Christian Understanding*. Istanbul: Söz Basım Yayın2005b, P .31.

²⁶Qur'an 5: 15.

²⁷Berghout, A. The Muslim World and the West: Nursi's Vision for a New Universal Dialogue Culture. In *Bringing Faith, Meaning & Peace to Life in a Multicultural World: The Risale-I Nur's Approach*. Istanbul: Nesil. 2004, p. 29.

²⁸Ulosoy, Hatred as the Root of Violence, the Trap of Hatred and Said Nursi. In *Bringing Faith, Meaning & Peace to Life in a Multicultural World: The Risale-I Nur's Approach*, Istanbul: Nesil 2004, p.183f.

²⁹Michel T, Grappling with Modern Civilisation: Said Nursi's Interpretative Key. In Vahide, Şükran (ed): *Said Nursi's Views on Muslim-Christian Understanding*. Istanbul: Söz Basım Yayın. 2005 a p. 83.

³⁰Berghout, The Muslim World and the West: Nursi's Vision for a New Universal Dialogue Culture. *In Bringing Faith, Meaning & Peace to Life in a Multicultural World: The Risale-I Nur's Approach*. Istanbul: Nesil 2004, p.28.

³¹Chandra Muzaffar, "*What Pluralism Means to Islam*", Sunday Star, Kuala Lumpur (18 June 2006), p.28.

³²*Ibid*