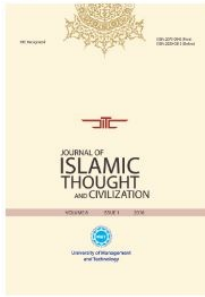


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Nationalism in the Light of the Teachings of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, and His Framework for Social Solidarity

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Abstract

During the past few decades, the impact of nationalism has been discussed widely by scholars both in the Western and the Muslim world from various perspectives. Some authors claim that nationalism has caused a lot of conflicts and wars among nations. On the other hand, others have argued that nationalism remains a binding force which stabilizes the fragmented territories of nation-states with nationalist sentiments. This paper attempts at analyzing Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's approach towards the issue of nationalism. He did not merely criticize nationalism; he offered a better way through his approach to a sociology of Islam. Nursi explains and advocates for positive forms of social solidarity and cohesion that elevate a group of people to noble action and he provides an Islamic basis for this purpose. Keeping in view various conflicts afflicting the world today, Nursi's ideas of nationalism and social solidarity are seen as relevant and necessary in the present context.

Keywords: Islamic nationhood, nationalism, negative nationalism, positive nationalism, Said Nursi Badiuzzaman, social solidarity.

Introduction

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi remains a prominent figure who contributed significantly towards the development of the Muslim *ummah* through various religious reforms. His life is divided into two main periods. The first period is known as the 'Old Said' which accorded with the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. It was the period when the Muslim world was divided geographically based on the spirit of nationalism. This scenario was one of the challenges faced by Muslims which weakened them not only physically but also spiritually. The second period of his life is referred to as the 'New Said'¹ which emerged following the Ottoman defeat in the

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¹The last period of Said Nursi's life, that is, 'Third Said' coincided with the Democrat Party era. This phase was a continuation of 'New Said' and combined with the characteristics of 'Old Said.' During this time, Democrat Party did not restrict the Nursi's movement. *Risalah al-Nür* was printed and widely read. In this phase, Nursi took an interest in the social life and

First World War and continued through the first four decades of the Turkish Republic. In the phase of ‘New Said,’ Nursi shifted his approach from active political engrossment to intellectual struggle by focusing more on writing activities. The ‘New Said’ had a significant impact not only on himself but on the whole Muslim community at large through his *Risalah al-Nūr*, which he wrote during his exile to western Anatolia. In *Risalah al-Nūr*, he focused more on contemplating the fundamental questions of life and tried to strengthen the faith of Turkish Muslims while facing the challenges posed by the newly established regime after the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. *Risalah al-Nūr* was a significant contribution of Nursi aimed to develop the Islamic personality, Islamic vision and Islamic awakening among the Turkish people in particular and the Muslim *ummah* in general. It was considered as his major contribution to encounter the misconception over religion generated by the enemy, to prove scientifically and rationally the truth of the Qur’ān, and to revitalize the faith of the Muslims. *Risalah al-Nūr* was also seen as a platform for Nursi to defend the Islamic faith against secular ideologies including nationalism which made a great impact on the Muslim *ummah*.

The ideology of nationalism was spread widely in the Muslim world during Nursi’s lifetime and it was considered as an alternative to the *ummah* identity. Nationalism divided Muslims into various ethnic, linguistic, political, and territorial boundaries. Those boundaries were considered as the manifestation of nationalism and the unity of Muslim *ummah* based on religious belief simply became irrelevant. Disunity among the Muslim *ummah* was reflected by the division of the Muslim world into different nation-states and their attraction to the Western ideology of nationalism. Nursi affirmed that this ideology of nationalism is not a new phenomenon; rather, it has existed throughout the history since the times of pre-Islamic Arabia. Islam rejected the spirit of tribalism in nationalism and this rejection of nationalism is manifested in a *Hadīth* of the Prophet (SAW), “Islam has forbidden the national or tribal zealotry of the age of ignorance. There is no difference between an Abyssinian slave and a leader of *Quraish* once they have accepted Islam.”²

It is at this juncture that Nursi tried to respond to the problem of nationalism by making his own interpretation. Nursi’s discussion of nationalism can be found in the third topic of the twenty sixth letter in *The Letters*. According to him, he wrote about nationalism “in order to serve the *Qur’ān* and to defend against unfair attacks with regards to social life.”³ Nursi discussed the negative implications of nationalism and he also tried to reconcile nationalism with the universal values of religion. In this sense, Nursi tried to expound the ideology of nationalism through its relationship with the universal values of right, justice, equality, and mutual assistance which are essential for maintaining peace, social stability and solidarity. Therefore, Nursi

developments in Turkey and the Muslim world at large. See Sukran Vahide, “Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi,” in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*; ed. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi’ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1.

²Bukhari: Ahkam, 4.

³Said Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief and Life*; trans., Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: The Light, Inc, 2007), 336-337.

proposed a new approach to nationalism by dividing it into two categories, that is, negative and positive nationalism.⁴ At the same time, he clearly distinguished between the two.

2. Negative Nationalism

Negative nationalism claims the superiority of nation over other nations. It instils in the populace the feeling of being unique and distinct from other nations, while being proud of their own nation. This nationalistic sentiment usually leads to prejudice against other nations. In sociological terms, it encourages people to love and praise their own nation and to regard others as disreputable enemies. It promotes self-glorification and does not promote sympathy and tolerance towards others. Nursi stated, “The negative nationalism is being aroused by racialist ambitions; and it is the cause of antipathy and mutual hostility.”⁵

Nursi emphasized that Islam does not approve the sentiment of national pride. Islam acknowledges one’s love towards the nation and country but totally rejects the sentiments of racial pride and prejudice. Nursi also condemned the principle of negative nationalism which approves invalid strategies to preserve the national interest. It obliges a person to support his nation whether it stands for right or wrong. In this sense, Nursi reminded that Islam advocates cooperation in acts of virtue and piety only; not in acts of sin/vice and injustice.

Nursi strongly criticized negative nationalism in his *Risalah al-Nūr* and argued that it is equivalent to racism; a sentiment which destroys the harmonious order of living in society. Racism produces the negative values of inequity, injustice and enmity among people.⁶ Nursi regarded it as something “inauspicious, and harmful, it is nourished by devouring others, persists through hostility to others. It is the cause of enmity and disturbance.”⁷

For him, nationalism or racism advocates discrimination and rivalry in society. In *The Letters*, he affirmed that the principles of nationalism and racism inflict tyranny towards other races. A ruler of racialist leanings, according to Nursi, prefers those of the same race and cannot act justly. This leads to mutual antagonism and discord which is obviously harmful to mankind. For instance, negative nationalism generates the spirit of dominating other nations. It forces nations to compete against each other in order to prove their superiority. In this sense, the survival of a nation depends on its ability to defend itself in the competition between nations. Unlike negative nationalism, Nursi affirmed that Islam advocates cooperation between nations for establishing the superiority of the will of God. All nations should mutually assist and contribute to each other for the common good. Islam also ensures

⁴Nursi, *Sunuhat*, quoted in Ahmed Davutoglu, “Badiuzzaman and the Politics of the Islamic Worlds in the 20th Century,” http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Bediuzzaman_and_the_Politics_of_the_20th_Century_198

⁵Ibid.

⁶Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*; trans., Huseyin Akarsy, 380.

⁷Ibid.

equal rights and equal opportunities for all. Therefore, it contradicts the spirit of the struggle for survival among nations as advocated by negative nationalism.

Due to the spirit of dominating other nations, negative nationalism provokes an economic rivalry which leads to conflicts and even war among nations as stronger nations exploit the resources of the weaker ones. It stimulates an economic race among nations for the sake of material goals with no emphasis on moral obligations. Nursi reminded that in Islam, the economic system is based on social justice and it is integrated with moral and spiritual aspects of human life. The principle of social justice in Islam emphasizes moral obligations, such as cooperation, affection, and sympathy towards others.

On the other hand, Nursi claimed that negative nationalism gives priority to nation over religion which is not acceptable in Islam. In negative nationalism, people direct their loyalty towards their nation and country and the loyalty to God or religious beliefs is subordinate to the loyalty to nation and country. Religious duty is also subjected to national duty. People are taught to sacrifice everything including their religious values for the sake of nation and country. In this sense, people's attachment to religion is greatly diminished. Nursi strongly criticized this idea of negative nationalism which demands the undivided loyalty of the people to the nation and country to the extent that people obey their country more than obeying God and follow the laws of the country instead of the laws of God. It is obvious that negative nationalism diverts the center of attention from religion to nation and country. It separates religion from law and politics but Islam does distinguish between the two.

Nursi mentioned some examples of the manifestation of negative nationalism. For instance, the *Ummayad* government prioritized Arabs over others which offended other Muslims and frightened them. Besides, the *Ummayad* government also imposed tyranny towards other races and this caused various problems in society.⁸ In *The Words*, Nursi stated that negative nationalism “flourishes through harming others and is nourished through devouring others.”⁹ Nursi also highlighted the impact of negative nationalism in Europe where it led to a conflict between France and Germany and resulted in the First World War. Moreover, the fall of the Ottoman Empire was also due to internal divisions along racial lines where many minority-based groups were formed, especially among the Greeks and Armenians, at the beginning of the state's second constitutional period.¹⁰ Nursi added that nationalism in the Muslim world provided the opportunity for the European powers to attack Muslims. He addressed the situation in Turkey in which national integrity was challenged by hostility and enmity against the Arabs. He reminded the Turks that “there is no reason for enmity towards our southern co-religionists from where the *Qur'ān*'s light and Islam's radiance came to us, for such national conflicts only benefit Europe. Also, such feelings may cause enmity toward the *Qur'ān* and Islam which means treachery to all Muslims' worldly and otherworldly lives.”¹¹

⁸Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 338.

⁹Nursi, *The Words*; trans., S. Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2004), 745.

¹⁰Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 338.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 338-339.

Some authors relate nationalism in Turkey with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and with its secular policies. With its establishment, people began to identify themselves on the basis of their ethnic group and their religious identity as Muslims greatly diminished. In response to the issue of nationhood, Nursi took an integrative approach. He seemed to reconcile the two identities. For him, national identity is significant and is part of an Islamic identity.¹² He stated that “with us Muslims, religion and nationhood are united.” At the same time, he also claimed that the nationality of the Turkish people is blended with Islam and is inseparable from it. If they separate, they will be lost.¹³ Nursi responded to the issue of religious zeal and national zeal in the following statement:

With us Muslims, religion and nationhood are united, although there is a theoretical, apparent and incidental difference between them. Indeed, religion is the life and spirit of the nation. When they are seen as different and separate from each other, religious zeal includes both the common people and upper classes. Whereas, national zeal is peculiar to one person out of a hundred, that is, to a person who is ready to sacrifice his personal benefits for the nation. Since this is the case, religious zeal must be the basis with regard to the rights of all people, while national zeal must serve it and be its fortress.”¹⁴

Religious zeal and Islamic nationhood have completely fused in the Turks and Arabs, and may not now be separated. Islamic zeal is a luminous chain which is most strong and secure and is not born of this world. It is a support that is most firm and certain, and will not fail. It is an unassailable fortress that cannot be razed.”¹⁵

In this regard, Nursi emphasized the significance of nationhood but reminded that it must be used in a positive manner in accordance with the Islamic religious identity and should not be used to claim its superiority over others. At the same time, Nursi reminded Muslims to identify themselves with the concept of Islamic nationhood instead of their national identity. Nursi believed that the nationhood of Muslims is only one, that is, Islamic nationhood. He stated, “Since in constitutionalism sovereignty belongs to the nation, the nation’s existence has to be demonstrated, and our nation is only Islam. For the strongest bond of Arab, Turk, Kurd, Albanian, Circassian, and Laz, and their firmest nationhood, is nothing other than Islam.”¹⁶

Nursi condemned Turkish nationalism for advocating the irreligious value of disunity¹⁷ and he stated that the Turkish nationalists attacked him and provoked their followers to be attached with the national zeal, “You are Turkish. God bless the Turks and they have many scholars in every field and people of perfection. Said is a Kurd.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 339.

¹⁴Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*; edited by S. Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Nesriyat, 2nd edition, 1996), 46.

¹⁵Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*; trans., Huseyin Akarsy, 338- 339.

¹⁶Ibid

¹⁷Ibid., 406-408.

How can you reconcile cooperating with a non-Turk with your national zeal?”¹⁸ In response to this claim, Nursi emphasized his good relationship with all Muslims and the Turkish Muslims in particular as they uphold the same religious beliefs, thus, belong to same Islamic nationhood.

Nursi obviously worried about the division of the Muslim nations and he was concerned about the need for the unity of Muslims. He wrote; “For the strongest bond of Arab, Circassian and Laz, and their firmest nationhood is nothing other than Islam.”¹⁹ He was opposed to the idea of negative nationalism which considers cultural affiliation as its basis. Therefore, Nursi emphasized that the culture of Islam is different as it is founded on divine guidance. All Muslims residing in any geographical territory express their cultural affiliation to the universal Islamic culture; and not to the culture of their respective political nationality. In this sense, the culture of Muslim community is different from other cultures since its nucleons are based on religious beliefs.

There is some evidence of Nursi’s call for Muslim nations to be united on the basis of religious identity. For instance, in his sermon delivered at the *Umayyad* Mosque in 1911, Nursi addressed the need for unity among the Turks and Arabs as a response to a crucial conflict between the two nations upon political issues. Nursi reminded that Muslims in Turkey and the Middle East should not be influenced by the idea of negative nationalism advocated by the West. The true nationality or nationhood of both Turks and Arabs is Islam. He said:

The foundation and spirit of our true nationhood is Islam. And in so far as they have carried the standard of the Ottoman caliphate and Turkish army in the name of that nationhood, the two true brothers of Arab and Turks, who are like the shell and citadel of the nationhood of Islam, are the sentries of that sacred citadel. Thus, through the bond of this sacred nationhood, all the people of Islam are like a single tribe. Like the members of a tribe, the groups of Islam are bound and connected to one another through Islamic brotherhood. They assist one another morally and if, necessary, materially. It is as if all the groups of Islam are bound to each other with a luminous chain.²⁰

Nursi strongly emphasized that all Muslim ethnic groups belong to the common nationhood of Islam; thus, they are considered members of the Islamic nation. He consistently posited Islamic nationhood as the basis of unity among different Muslim ethnic groups. In contrast to negative nationalism, Islamic nationhood is able to establish social harmony not only within various Muslim ethnic groups but also with other religious groups.

In contrast to Islamic nationhood, Nursi claimed that the principle of people’s relationship in the Western civilization is based on nationalism or racism. He stated, “The present-day civilization considers the bond between communities to be racism

¹⁸Ibid., 405.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 38-40.

and negative nationalism”²¹ and this principle cannot provide equality and justice within society. Nursi wrote:

and since the benefits are insufficient to meet all needs, their mark is that everyone tussles and jostles over them. The mark of conflict is contention, and their mark of racialism, aggression, since it thrives on devouring others. Thus, it is because of these principles of civilization that despite all its virtues, it has provided a sort of superficial happiness for only twenty percent of mankind and has casted eighty percent into distress and poverty.²²

Negative nationalism, according to Nursi, has caused the problem of social, political and economic injustice in the society. He argued that disunity and injustice has led to antagonism among people and antagonism in turn has led to weakness which prevents progress in society. Nursi proclaimed that “the mark of negative nationalism and racialism is ghastly clashes, disastrous collisions, and their result, annihilation.”²³ Therefore, Nursi emphasized that in order for a society to be able to function justly and to progress, the members need to be united. He urged people to apply the values of right, justice, and mutual assistance to ensure social stability.

In short, Nursi identified ignorance, poverty, and conflict as the three main obstacles to human happiness; and he related negative nationalism as one of the main causes of conflict among the Muslims. Therefore, in order to overcome this conflict, Muslims should unite under the umbrella of Islam. Nursi believed that Muslim unity was a religious obligation and one of the means for social change.²⁴

3. Positive Nationalism

Nursi approached the idea of positive nationalism in a different manner as compared to the Western perspective of nationalism which is based on the spirit of competition or racial conflicts. He tried to identify the positive aspects of nationalism which can bring about the universal values necessary for social solidarity. In other words, Nursi tried to undermine the negative connotations of nationalism by implementing it for positive purposes. He described positive nationalism as a natural feeling of human beings which acts as a protective measure when their group members are threatened particularly by the European powers. It is the bond of unity among people of different groups; therefore, Nursi was more concerned about societal unity when he described positive nationalism. Nursi described positive nationalism as the cause of mutual recognition and assistance. It “arises from an inner need of social life; it is aroused through compassion for one’s fellow men, and is the cause of mutual assistance and solidarity; it ensures a beneficial strength; and it is a means for further strengthening Islamic brotherhood.”²⁵

²¹Nursi, *The Words*, 420.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 745.

²⁴Colin Turner, and Hasan Horkuc, *Said Nursi* (London: I. B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2009), 96.

²⁵Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 381; Nursi, *Sunihat*, quoted in Ahmed Davutoglu, “Badiuzzaman and the Politics of the Islamic World in the 20th Century,”

For Nursi, it is necessary to love fellow members to ensure the internal strength of brotherhood.²⁶ The possession of sentiments of belonging to a certain group, according to Nursi, is a natural phenomenon. It is acceptable as long as there is no claim of superiority over others and no preference of the loyalty of nation over religion. Positive nationalism is only a single aspect of Islamic unity. It enables Muslims to gather and unite among themselves.²⁷ Therefore, positive nationalism serves Islam for the cause of unity but should not replace it. Nursi highlighted the application of positive nationalism in the defense of a Muslim country. A Muslim country has been able to maintain its existence despite its relatively small number of population and despite European hostility due to the willingness and readiness of the Muslim soldiers to sacrifice their lives and fight against the European imperialist powers with the conviction that if they die, they die as martyrs; and if they live, they live as defenders of Islam. Nursi believed that there is no other nationalistic zeal that can substitute this religious zeal.²⁸

In positive nationalism, Nursi seemed to stress on the dynamics of social relationship and social solidarity which eventually contribute to not only social stability but also to political power. In this sense, people must not be individualistic because individualism is one of the main reasons for the downfall of society. People should bind together through the unifying force of religion. When people have emotional attachment to a group, they do not become selfish but act in collective interest. Nursi reminded people not to focus on their own benefits but to consider other fellow beings at the same time. In his view, a person who only cares about his personal benefits has abandoned his humanity.²⁹ Therefore, positive nationalism in the discourse of Nursi can be considered as the dynamic power for social cohesion. The absence of this sentiment leads to social disintegration.

Like al-Afghani with his idea of *Pan Islamism* and Abduh, who were both known due to their ideas of necessity of Islamic solidarity, Nursi also strongly advocated it in a similar voice. He shared a similar concern to prevent the fragmentation of the Muslim world. For Nursi, the need for social solidarity is not a political agenda; rather, it is a religious obligation. This claim is supported by his interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other."³⁰ Nursi interpreted the verse that God has created different people, nations, and tribes so that they should know one another and have relations in social life. They should assist and acknowledge one another and should not regard each other as strangers and not be hostile towards each other.³¹ The division into groups and tribes, according to Nursi, is not meant for mutual hostility; rather, it should lead to mutual

http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Bediuzzaman_and_the_Politics_of_the_20th_Century_198

²⁶Nursi, *The Letters*, 380-381.

²⁷Ibid., 338-339.

²⁸Ibid., 341.

²⁹Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 41, 42, 45.

³⁰Al-Qur'ān al-Hujurāt 49: 13.

³¹Nursi, *The Letters*, 337.

assistance. He drew an analogy between the divisions of people into different nations and the division of army into different ranks. The division of army into different ranks is not meant for hostile competition but it is intended for serving the common objective of safety and protection of the nation. Similarly, the division of Islamic society into different groups of nations is not meant for hostile competition; rather, it is intended for knowing each other and serving the same objective of worshipping God. They are all united under the same God, the same Prophet (SAW), the same scripture, and the same direction of *qiblah*.³²

In short, Nursi tried to reconcile the sentiments of nationalism with religious identity. He affirmed that the nationhood of Muslims should be based on their religion, that is, Islam. Nursi used the term 'nation' (*millet*) and nationhood (*miliyet*) in accordance with their Arabic meanings. In Arabic, the word *millet* denotes a religious community and its membership, and it has also replaced the word *ummah*. For Nursi, the Islamic nation is a body, its spirit is Islam, and its intellect is the Qur'ān.³³ Nursi advocated the idea of Islamic nationhood which makes Islam the basis of unity among all nations.

4. Nursi's Views on Social Solidarity

The conflicts and disagreements between nations are primarily due to the lack of universal principles necessary for social solidarity, as well as due to enmity, injustice, and hostility manifested in negative nationalism. Therefore, Nursi emphasized the necessity of social solidarity to overcome the problem of nationalism. Nursi emphasized that upholding solidarity among Muslims is a religious obligation and an essential duty. The concept of social solidarity for Nursi carries a sense of responsibility and cooperation of each member with others in a society. A person who lacks this feeling, according to Nursi, is more lifeless than a stone. He added that a person who only cares about his personal benefits has abandoned his humanity because man is by nature connected to his fellow beings and must consider them.³⁴ Nursi's discussion on the issue of social solidarity is very significant as it is not confined to political and economic integration only but encompasses all aspects of life.

According to Nursi, social solidarity is a source of strength. Therefore, he tried to unite different schools of thought and various ethnic groups in the Muslim world. The fundamental principle of solidarity is to acknowledge one another and work for a common goal. Nursi believed that social solidarity can be obtained firstly through the personality transformation of the Muslims to the Islamic model of the early Muslim community in Madinah during the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) lifetime.³⁵ Once the personality has been transformed, Muslims will be able to achieve

³²Ibid.

³³M. A. Khaja, "Nationalism in the Writings of Iqbal and Said Nursi: A Comparative Study of their Perspectives," *A Social Science Journal* 11, no. 1 (2018): 49-62.

³⁴Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 41, 42, 45.

³⁵Elmira Akhmetova, "Ideas of Muslim Unity at the Age of Nationalism: A Comparative Study of the Concept of the *Ummah* in the Writings of Musa Jārullāh and Said Nursi," *Islam and Civilizational Review* 4 (4), (2013): 615-633.

power in economic, political and military affairs. For Nursi, the basic step of personality transformation is strengthening the faith of Muslims. In this sense, Nursi put much emphasis on the significance of faith and religion in the process of social solidarity. He said, “Man’s personal life can continue only through the point of support and point of assistance that proceed from belief, so too, can his social life endure only through the mutual consultation enjoined by the *shari‘ah*”.³⁶

Based on his statement, Nursi observed that the problem of the Muslims was from within, that is, the weakness of faith. Therefore, the first step to overcome it is purifying faith on the basis of Qur’ān and *Sunnah* as well as adhering to the principles of the *shari‘ah*. As a result of social solidarity, Muslims would be able to practice a mutual consultation or *shūra* which Nursi described as the key to happiness as well as progress in Islamic social life.³⁷

Nursi mentioned few sicknesses of Muslims in his *Damascus Sermon*; such as the rise of despair and hopelessness in social life, the death of truthfulness in social and political life, love of enmity, not knowing the luminous bonds that bind the believers to one another, and restricting endeavor to what is personally beneficial. Nursi believed that Muslims can only be united by eliminating all these sicknesses.³⁸

Besides their internal weaknesses, Muslims also faced an outside challenge of European domination and Nursi stressed that the only force that could save Muslims from European domination is their unity as an Islamic *ummah*. Nursi stated, “Against these terrible forces of destruction, only and solely the Islamic unity surrounding the truths of the Qur’ān can endure. And it is the only way to save this land from the occupation of foreigners and this nation from falling into anarchy, and the means to save mankind from these dangers.”³⁹

In addition to rescuing Muslims from European domination, Nursi also believed that the unity of Muslims under the common banner of Islam would also rescue Muslims from economic and social backwardness as well as from the conflict among the followers of different schools of thought. Nursi argued that the necessity for social solidarity has been frequently mentioned in both Qur’ānic verses and the *Hadīth*; therefore, it is one of key factors for the strength of the *ummah* in various affairs of life. It is obvious that Nursi highlighted the issue of social solidarity as a response to various conflicts within the Muslim world encompassing the social, economic, political and legal issues.

³⁶Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 48.

³⁷Muhammad Ajmal, “Globalization and the Thought of Unity in Diversity of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi in the Light of His Magnum Opus Risalah al- Nur,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 135-153.

³⁸S. J. Thomas Michael, “Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-Operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” *The Muslim World* LXXXIX, no 3-4 (July-October 1999): 325.

³⁹Nursi, *The Letters*, quoted in A. Berghout, “The Concept of Imān Tahqīqi as a Founding Element in the Process of Muslim Unity,” Paper presented at the *Two-Day Seminar on Badiuzzaman Said Nursi: A Contemporary Approach to Realizing Muslim Unity* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), 2005)

The important point to be noted in Nursi's discussion on social solidarity is that it is not confined to Muslims alone but also addresses foreigners. Nursi encouraged a form of relationship with foreign socio-political groups that should be based on respect while fulfilling the mutual need for freedom and cooperation.⁴⁰ Moreover, Nursi extended his idea of social solidarity to all religious groups of people as he believed that not only Islam but other religions also oppose the ideologies of nationalism, secularism, and atheism. For him, social solidarity is a fundamental issue which concerns all religious groups of people, particularly Muslims and Christians, as he discussed to a large extent. He claimed, "Believers should now unite, not only with their Muslim fellow-believers but with truly religious and pious Christians, disregarding questions of dispute and not arguing over them, for absolute disbelief is on the attack."⁴¹

Therefore, he urged Muslims to cooperate peacefully for achieving social stability. As a practical manifestation of his idea, Nursi himself initiated contacts with Christian leaders by sending copies of *Risalat al-Nūr* to the Pope in Rome and he received a positive response. Moreover, Nursi also took an opportunity to visit Athenagoras, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Istanbul, during his stay in Istanbul in 1953 in order to cooperate with Christians against the dangers of atheism.⁴²

Nursi built a good relationship based on respect and cooperation with Christians. He advocated Christian-Muslim dialogue to resolve conflicts and worked on common goals. For Nursi, both Muslims and Christians faced the same kind of challenges in terms of lack of religious values in various affairs of life which he termed as 'aggressive atheism.'⁴³ Irreligiosity, according to Nursi, is a great challenge resulting from the modern civilization. It is devoid of God's consciousness and man creates his own philosophy of life irrespective of God's guidance. Nursi acknowledged the doctrinal difference between Islam and Christianity; however, his advocacy for cooperation was based on calling people to a similar vision of life on the basis of God's will. He criticized both Muslim and Christian societies, which are very much influenced by the secular principles of *Enlightenment* which focus on the freedom of man in determining the affairs of life, reduce religious faith to a personal sphere, and remove religion and God's guidance in the spheres of social, political, economic, legal, cultural, educational, and other systems of life. The proclamation of spiritual and moral values advocated by the principles of *Enlightenment* would not only endanger both Muslims and Christians but would also create enmity between them. He said, "It is essential that missionaries, pious Christians as well as Muslims

⁴⁰Nursi, *The Letters*.

⁴¹Nursi, *Emirdag Lahikası*, 1: 265. Quoted in S. J. Thomas Michel, *Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in the Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, 325. http://groups.creighton.edu/sjdialogue/documents/articles/michel_muslim_christian_dialogue.htm

⁴²Sukran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 241-242, 317.

⁴³S. J. Thomas Michel, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-Operation in the Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi," 325-335.

(Nurcus), be extremely careful, for with the idea of defending itself against the attacks of the religions of Islam and Christianity.”⁴⁴

By referring to the *Qur’ānic* term ‘People of the Book’, Nursi reminded Muslims and Christians that they both are communities founded on the basis of faith in God, therefore, they should have a common mission to bear witness to divine values in the midst of modern civilization and to establish God-centered societies. Nursi believed that the factor that prevents us from establishing a God-centered society is not the other groups of people but rather the dark sides of our own selves acting to dominate and control each other. For this reason, both Islam and Christianity stress the need for repentance as the key for personal and societal transformation. By stressing the common weaknesses, Nursi’s idea could become relevant to overcome the conflicts between Muslims and Christians in contemporary times. Nursi was serious in the idea of building social solidarity via Muslim-Christian relationship. In his support of the Baghdad Pact,⁴⁵ he emphasized that the advantage of the pact was not only that Turks would gain four hundred million brothers and sisters among Muslim peoples, but that the international accord would also gain for Muslim Turks the friendship of eight hundred million Christians.⁴⁶ This scenario, according to Nursi, would be a step towards a general reconciliation between the two communities of faith. Nursi was confident that Muslims and Christians together can build a true civilization on the basis of God’s will in which justice, human dignity and other universal values should be preserved. This is possible if they seek to ground their mutual relationship on love as he stated, “It is love and loving that render people’s social life secure and lead to happiness. It is these which are most worthy of love and being loved. The time for enmity and hostility is finished.”⁴⁷

For Nursi, the enemy of both Islam and Christianity is not seeking for and submitting to divine guidance. Therefore, Muslims and Christians who are committed to the true teachings of religions have the common task, namely, affirming a divinely-guided lifestyle in the modern age. Nursi stated, “Muslims should unite not only with their fellow-believers, but also with the truly pious Christians.”⁴⁸

On one hand, Nursi acknowledged the benefits brought by the European societies and on the other hand he condemned their irreligious values. He said, “Europe is two. One follows the sciences with serve justice and right and activities beneficial for the life of society through the inspiration it has received from true Christianity. This first Europe I am not addressing. Rather, I am addressing the

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵The Baghdad Pact was signed in February 1955 between Turkey and Iraq, and was subsequently joined by Pakistan, Iran and Britain.

⁴⁶S. J. Thomas Michel, “Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-Operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” retrieved from http://groups.creighton.edu/sjdialogue/documents/articles/michel_muslim_christian_dialogue.htm

⁴⁷Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 49-50.

⁴⁸Lem’alar, *Sincerity and Brotherhood* (Istanbul: 1991), 146 quoted in Thomas Michel, “Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” 327.

second, corrupt Europe, which through the darkness of the philosophy of naturalism that considers evils of civilization to be its virtues, has driven humankind to vice and misguidance.”⁴⁹

5. Conclusion

The problem with Muslims in the Muslim world today is that they follow the standard principles of nationalism according to the Western perspective. They condemn one another and defend their own ethnic group. This anti-religious nationalism has proven to be harmful for the well-being of the Muslim nations. Muslims are divided and have become weak, thus, giving an opportunity to the enemies of Islam to attack and empower them. Nursi’s thoughts on negative nationalism pose various lessons to our contemporary lives. In response to the issue of nationalism, Nursi drew a clear line between negative and positive nationalism in terms of their principles and application. Although nationalism is considered a dangerous ideology which leads to the disunity of people and eventually brings about the destruction of society, Nursi argued that it would not be harmful if it was understood as the unity of Muslims as the *ummah* under the umbrella of Islam. Muslims are bound together not by racial, linguistic, or geographical ties, but by their religious belief and communal brotherhood as Islam is a universal religion.

In combatting anti-religious nationalism, Nursi urged for Muslims regardless of their nationalities to be united. He believed that social unity or solidarity would ensure stability in society. The phenomenon which hindered the stability of society observed by Nursi during his time, such as despotism practiced by Muslim rulers and their opposition to the *shari’ah* as the supreme law, are still relevant factors today. Therefore, Muslims should play a significant role in upholding unity as advocated by Nursi.

It is significant to note that Nursi promoted co-existence not only among Muslims but also with other religious groups, particularly Christians. His ideas are grounded in an authentic *Qur’anic* framework keeping its core principles in focus. In doing so, he applied holistic and integrative approaches. In our opinion, the idea of social solidarity of Nursi which crosses the boundaries of one’s religious community is very relevant today since many conflicts between nations around the world occur today and lead to destruction. Nursi’s idea should also be acknowledged since he presented a distinct approach as compared to other thinkers. He advocated a new opinion that the task of criticism against the secular principles of modernity should be carried out together by Muslims and Christians.

Moreover, Nursi did not only pose his ideas and thoughts theoretically but he translated them into practice. The principles of mercy, love, justice, compassion, and respect were not only abstract ideas for Nursi but were manifested through his own actions and are continued to be practiced by millions of his followers. Nursi obviously urged Muslims back to the core principles of the *Qur’an* and an Islamic worldview

⁴⁹Lem’alar, *Sincerity and Brotherhood* (Istanbul: 1991), 111 quoted in Thomas Michel, “Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in the Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi,” 328.

based on it. Although there were many social-political conflicts during his time, he never sacrificed his *Qur'ānic* principles and this attitude has made him known as a devout Muslim practitioner and an influential Muslim thinker in both the Muslim and the Western worlds.

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