

Reply to the Anglican Church

One time, as a artifice, a pitiless enemy of Islam, a cunning politician, a suspicious parson who wanted to swagger and show off, asked us four things, –in the form of denial, at a terrible time he had his claws at our throat, in his glee at our misfortune; he wanted six hundred words. A reply was needed like a slap in the face of his glee, and his wiles, and his denial, like spitting in his face, to silence him. I won't address him. I have the following answer for a lover of truth.

He asked first: "What is the religion of Muhammad (PBUH)?"

I replied: It is the Qur'an. The basic aims of the Qur'an are the six pillars of belief and the five pillars of Islam.

In the second he asked: "What has it given to life and thought?"

I replied: To thought, the affirmation of Divine unity; to life, moderation and the middle way. My witnesses for this are

*Say: He is God, the One.⁴⁶ * Therefore stand firm [in the Straight Way] as you are commanded.⁴⁷*

In the third, he said: "What remedies has it for the present discord and turmoil?"

I replied: The prohibition of usury and interest and the payment of *Zakat*. My witnesses for this are these:

*God will deprive usury of all blessing.⁴⁸ * God has permitted trade and forbidden usury.⁴⁹ * And be steadfast in prayer, and practise regular charity [Zakat].⁵⁰*

In the fourth, he asked: "How does it look on man's revolutions?"

I replied: Labour, striving, are fundamental. Wealth should not be accumulated in the hands of tyrants, and held on to. My witnesses for this:

*Man has nothing save that which he strives.⁵¹ * Those who store up gold and silver and do not spend it in God's way, announce to them a most grievous penalty.⁵²*

⁴⁶ Qur'an, 112:1.

⁴⁷ Qur'an, 11:112.

⁴⁸ Qur'an, 2:276.

⁴⁹ Qur'an, 2:275.

⁵⁰ Qur'an, 2:43, etc.

⁵¹ Qur'an, 53:39.

⁵² Qur'an, 9:34.

About the *Risale-i Nur*, *The Words*, and their Author

The Words forms the first part of the *Risale-i Nur* Collection, a Qur'anic commentary exceeding five thousand pages which was written in Turkish by one of the most important Islamic scholars this century, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, in order to prove and explain the truths of belief to contemporary Muslims and modern man. In Bediuzzaman's view, in the face of the assaults of materialist philosophy at the present time, the question which takes priority over all else for Muslims is the saving and strengthening of belief. For it is only in belief in God that man's true happiness and progress, and the cure for the wounds caused him by materialism and misguidance, are to be found. Bediuzzaman devoted his life and learning to the achievement of these.

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was born in 1877 in eastern Turkey and died in 1960 in Urfa in Turkey. Readers may refer to his biography for details of his long and exemplary life, which spanned the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, its collapse after the First World War and the setting up of the Republic, then the twenty-five years of Republican Peoples' Party rule, well-known for the measures taken against Islam, followed by the ten years of Democrat rule, when conditions eased a little for Bediuzzaman. Here we shall mention just a few points which are relevant to the *Risale-i Nur* and will assist in understanding *The Words*. With this same aim some general points about the *Risale-i Nur* are included, and the method, which is particular to Bediuzzaman, that it employs for teaching the Qur'anic truths.

Bediuzzaman displayed an extraordinary intelligence and ability to learn from an early age, completing the normal course of *medrese* (religious school) education at the early age of fourteen, when he obtained his diploma. He became famous for both his prodigious memory and his unbeaten record in debating with other religious scholars. Another characteristic Bediuzzaman displayed from an early age was an instinctive dissatisfaction with the existing education system, which when older he formulated into comprehensive proposals for its reform. The heart of these proposals was the bringing together and joint teaching of the traditional religious sciences and the modern sciences, together with the founding of a university in the Eastern Provinces of the Empire, the *Medresetü'z-Zehra*, where this and his other proposals would be put into practice. In 1907 his endeavours in this field took him to Istanbul where he presented a petition at the court of Sultan Abdulhamid. Although subsequently he twice received funds for the construction of his university, and its foundations were laid in 1913, it was never completed due to war and the vicissitudes of the times.

Contrary to the practice of religious scholars at that time, Bediuzzaman himself studied and mastered almost all the physical and mathematical sciences, and later studied philosophy, for he believed that it was only in this way that Islamic theology (*kalam*) could be renewed and successfully answer the attacks to which the Qur'an and Islam were then subject.

In the course of time, the physical sciences had been dropped from *medrese* education, which had contributed directly to the Ottoman decline relative to the advance of the West. Now, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Europe had gained dominance over the Islamic world, and in efforts to extend its dominance, was attacking the Qur'an and Islam in the name of science and progress in particular, falsely claiming them to be incompatible. Within the Empire too were a small minority who favoured adopting Western philosophy and civilization. Thus, all Bediuzzaman's endeavour was to prove and demonstrate the falseness of these accusations, and that far from being incompatible with science and progress, the Qur'an was the source of true progress and civilization, and in addition, since this was the case, Islam would dominate the future, despite its relative decline and regression at that time.

The years up to the end of the First World War were the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and were, in the words of Bediuzzaman, the period of the 'Old Said'. He strove to serve the cause of the Empire and Islam through active involvement in social life and the public domain. In the War, he commanded the militia forces on the Caucasian Front against the invading Russians, for which he was later awarded a War Medal. To maintain the morale of his men he himself disdained to enter the trenches in spite of the constant shelling, and it was while withstanding the overwhelming assaults of the enemy that he wrote his celebrated Qur'anic commentary, *Signs of Miraculousness (Isharat al-I'jaz)*, dictating to a scribe while on horseback. Stating that the Qur'an encompasses the sciences which make known the physical world, the commentary is an original and important work which, in Bediuzzaman's words, forms a model for the commentaries he hoped would be written in the future, which would bring together the religious and modern sciences in the way he proposed. Bediuzzaman was taken prisoner in March 1916 and held in Russia for two years before escaping in early 1918, and returning to Istanbul via Warsaw, Berlin, and Vienna.

The defeat of the Ottomans saw the end of the Empire and its dismemberment, and the occupation of Istanbul and parts of Turkey by foreign forces. These bitter years saw also the transformation of the Old Said into the New Said, the second main period of Bediuzzaman's life. Despite the acclaim he received and services he performed as a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, and combatting the British, Bediuzzaman underwent a profound mental and spiritual change in the process of which he turned his back on the world, and realizing the inadequacy of the 'human' science and philosophy he had studied as a means of reaching the truth, took the revealed Qur'an as his "sole guide". In recognition of his services to the Independence Struggle, Bediuzzaman was invited to Ankara by Mustafa Kemal, but on arrival there, found that at the very time of the victory

of the Turks and Islam, atheistic ideas were being propagated among the Deputies and officials, and many were lax in performing their religious duties. He published various works which successfully countered this.

Remaining some eight months in Ankara, Bediuzzaman understood the way the new leaders were going to take, and that on the one hand he could not work alongside them, and on the other they were not to be combated in the realm of politics. So when offered various posts and benefits, he declined them and left Ankara for Van, where he withdrew into a life of worship and contemplation; he was seeking the best way to proceed.

Within a short time, Bediuzzaman's fears about the new regime began to be realized: the first steps were taken towards secularization and reducing the power of Islam within the state, and even its eradication from Turkish life. In early 1925 there was a rebellion in the east in which Bediuzzaman played no part, but as a consequence of which was sent into exile in western Anatolia along with many hundreds of others. Thus unjustly began twenty-five years of exile, imprisonment, and unlawful oppression for Bediuzzaman. He was sent to Barla, a tiny village in the mountains of Isparta Province. However, the attempt to entirely isolate and silence him had the reverse effect, for Bediuzzaman was both prepared and uniquely qualified to face the new challenge: these years saw the writing of the *Risale-i Nur*, which silently spread and took root, combating in the most constructive way the attempt to uproot Islam, and the unbelief and materialist philosophy it was hoped to instil in the Muslim people of Turkey.

Thus, it may be seen from this that the *Risale-i Nur* was written to expound and explain the truths of the Qur'an and belief to modern man, bewildered as he is by the assaults of materialist philosophy, so that he may attain true and certain belief which will not be shaken by those assaults. In explaining these truths, the *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates the Qur'an's superiority in every respect, and, although "in order not to cause aversion" philosophy's ideas are rarely openly stated, is in one respect a refutation of materialist Western philosophy. It should be stated here that Bediuzzaman was not anti-Western as such, -- indeed, he differentiated between harmful and beneficial philosophy, and hoped for the salvation of all mankind -- but was uncompromising against the unbelief and atheism which is opposed to religion; in recent times the weapon of this has mostly been materialist philosophies such as Positivism and Naturalism, which use science to justify their ideas.

As the New Said, Bediuzzaman had immersed himself in the Qur'an, searching for a way to relate its truths to modern man. In Barla in his isolation he began to write treatises explaining and proving these truths, for now the Qur'an itself and its truths were under direct attack. The first of these was on the Resurrection of the Dead, which in a unique style, proves bodily Resurrection rationally, where even the greatest scholars previously had confessed their impotence. He described the method employed in this as consisting of three stages: first God's existence is proved, and His Names and attributes, then the Resurrection of the Dead is "constructed" on these and proved. Bediuzzaman did not ascribe

these writings to himself, but said they proceeded from the Qur'an itself, were "rays shining out of from [its] truths."

Thus, rather than being a Qur'anic commentary which expounds all its verses giving the immediate reasons for their revelation and the apparent meanings of the words and sentences, the *Risale-i Nur* is what is known as a *manevis tefsir*, or commentary which expounds the truths of the Qur'an, that is, explains and proves the verses containing the Qur'anic teachings about the essential truths of belief. For there are various sorts of commentaries. The verses mostly expounded in the *Risale-i Nur* are those concerned with truths of belief such as the Divine Names and attributes and the Divine activity in the universe, the Divine existence and Unity, resurrection, prophethood, Divine Determining or destiny, and man's duties of worship. Bediuzzaman explains how the Qur'an addresses all men in every age in accordance with the degree of their understanding and development; it has a face that looks to each age. The *Risale-i Nur*, then, explains that face of the Qur'an which looks to this age. We shall now look at further aspects of the *Risale-i Nur* related to this point.

In numerous of its verses, the Holy Qur'an invites man to observe the universe and reflect on the Divine activity within it; following just this method, Bediuzzaman provides proofs and explanations for the truths of belief. He likens the universe to a book, and looking at it in the way shown by the Qur'an, that is, 'reading' it for its meaning, learns of the Divine Names and attributes and other truths of belief. The book's purpose is to describe its Author and Maker; beings become evidences and signs to their Creator. Thus, an important element in the way of the *Risale-i Nur* is reflection or contemplation (*tefekkkür*), 'reading' the Book of the Universe in order to increase in knowledge of God and to obtain 'certain, verified belief' in all the truths of belief.

Bediuzzaman demonstrates that the irrefutable truths, such as Divine Unity, arrived at in this way are the only rational and logical explanation of the universe, and making comparisons with Naturalist and Materialist philosophy, which have used science's findings about the universe to deny those truths, show the concepts on which they are based, such as causality and Nature, to be irrational and logically absurd.

Indeed, far from contradicting them, in uncovering the order and working of the universe, science broadens and deepens knowledge of the truths of belief. In the *Risale-i Nur* many descriptions of the Divine activity in the universe are looked at through the eyes of science, and reflect Bediuzzaman's knowledge of it. The *Risale-i Nur* shows that there is no contradiction or conflict between religion and science.

In addition, all these matters discussed in the *Risale-i Nur* are set out as reasoned arguments and proved according to logic. All the most important of the truths of belief are proved so clearly that even unbelievers can see their necessity. So too, inspired by the Qur'an, even the most profound and inaccessible truths are made accessible by means of comparisons, which bring them close to

the understanding like telescopes, so that they are readily understandable by ordinary people and those with no previous knowledge of these questions.

Another aspect of the *Risale-i Nur* related to the face of the Qur'an which looks to this age, is that it explains everything from the point of view of wisdom; that is, as is mentioned again below, it explains the purpose of everything. It considers things from the point of view of the Divine Name of All-Wise.

Also, following this method, in the *Risale-i Nur* Bediuzzaman solved many mysteries of religion, such as bodily resurrection and Divine Determining and man's will, and the riddle of the constant activity in the universe and the motion of particles, before which man, relying on his own intellect and philosophy, had been impotent.

While in Barla, Bediuzzaman put the treatise on Resurrection and the pieces that followed it together in the form of a collection and gave it the name of *The Words* (*Sözler*). The pieces were thirty-two in number, the thirty-third was added later. The treatise on Resurrection became the Tenth Word. The first nine are short, simple pieces describing through the use of comparisons the virtues and benefits of belief and of worship -- in the *Risale-i Nur* are many analyses and comparisons of guidance and misguidance, belief and unbelief, which point out the grievous pains of unbelief and demonstrate that man's true happiness and progress are only to be found in recognition of the world's Owner and submission to Him.

The *Words* that follow the Tenth comprise numerous subjects, all of great importance; among them are the Twelfth and Thirteenth Words and their comparisons between the Qur'an and philosophy; the explanations of Divine Unity, Oneness, and God's closeness to us and our distance from Him in the Sixteenth and Thirty-Second Words; the proofs of the Qur'an's miraculousness in the Twenty-Fifth Word, which answers in particular criticisms made by atheists and scientists; the Twenty-Sixth on Divine Determining and man's faculty of will; the immortality of man's spirit, the angels and resurrection in the Twenty-Ninth Word; and the nature of man's ego and the transformation of minute particles of the Thirtieth. Readers may refer to the Contents at the beginning of the book for details. *The Words* was followed by *Mektubat, Letters*, a collection of thirty-three letters of varying lengths from Bediuzzaman to his students. And this was followed by *Lem'alar, The Flashes Collection*, and *Şualar, The Rays Collection*, which was completed in 1949. Included in these last two are Bediuzzaman's defence speeches from the trials at Eskişehir in 1935, and Afyon in 1948-9. Together with these are three collections of letters, one for each of Bediuzzaman's main places of exile: *Barla Lahikası, Kastamonu Lahikası*, and *Emirdağ Lahikası*.

The way the *Risale-i Nur* was written and disseminated was unique, like the work itself. Bediuzzaman would dictate at speed to a scribe, who would write down the piece in question with equal speed; the actual writing was very quick. Bediuzzaman had no books for reference and the writing of religious works was

of course forbidden. They were all written therefore in the mountains and out in the countryside. Handwritten copies were then made, these were secretly copied out in the houses of the *Risale-i Nur* 'Students', as they were called, and passed from village to village, and then from town to town, till they spread throughout Turkey. Only in 1946 were *Risale-i Nur* Students able to obtain duplicating machines, while it was not till 1956 that The Words and other collections were printed on modern presses in the new, Latin, script. The figure given for hand-written copies is 600,000.

It may be seen from the above figure how the *Risale-i Nur* movement spread within Turkey, despite all efforts to stop it. After 1950, the period of what Bediuzzaman called 'the Third Said', there was a great increase in the number of Students, particularly among the young and those who had been through the secular education system of the Republic. At the same time the number of Students outside Turkey increased. It is no exaggeration to say that with its conveying the Qur'anic message in a way that addresses and answers modern man's needs, the *Risale-i Nur* played a major role in keeping alive the Islamic faith in Turkey in those dark days, and in the resurgence of Islam that has occurred subsequently.

Above all, the people of this age want reasonable answers to everything, they want to know "why?" And although science has opened up the universe from the minutest sub-atomic particles to the obscurest, most distant reaches of space, it has remained impotent before this question; it has been unable to provide the answer to the question "why?" Whereas, taking its inspiration from the Divine Revelation of the Qur'an, the *Risale-i Nur* looks at things from the point of view of wisdom; it explains the wisdom, purposes and aims of all the various matters it discusses. It points out the purposes of everything, from the universe and all the beings in it and all the realms of creation to man and his comprehensive disposition and his duties of worship; it answers the question "why?" In addition it provides reasonable, satisfying answers to all sorts of questions to do with belief, life, man, and existence; parts of it are even written in the form of question and answer. One of the *Risale-i Nur*'s most important characteristics is this, which accounts for its unparalleled success in saving and strengthening the belief of many hundreds of thousands, and probably millions, of people throughout the world. Philosophy, and science when in the service of philosophy, cast the world into ultimate meaninglessness and man into a mire of doubts, fears, and ultimate hopelessness. In explaining the Qur'anic message for man in this modern age, the *Risale-i Nur* raises man out that dark hopelessness by illuminating with meaning both himself and the world in which he finds himself.