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Practical Wisdom of Pastoral Theology in the Muslim Tradition

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Abstract:

This paper sheds light on the meaning and treatment of a Christian doctrine 'pastoral theology' whose addressee is human soul and one of the objectives is to enable an individual to face the trials and troublesome situations of life courageously. Hence one can observe this purposeful training of an individual among the objectives of Muslim theologians as well. Though this term is not among recognized disciplines in Muslim theology, it does have an illustrious history in the writings of Muslim thinkers and scholars. This paper aims to study the examples of pastoral theology in the Muslim tradition, particularly the methodology of Badi'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī (A Turkish Muslim Revivalist of 20th century) as he described in his magnum opus Risālah-i Nūr (a thematic exegesis of the Quran). Nūrsī focused on the training of the human soul to enable it to take the trials and tribulation of human life as coming from the Divine will to strengthen it spiritually. Firstly, the term pastoral theology will be briefly examined. Secondly, a brief introduction of Badi'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī and his Risālah-i Nūr will be given. Thirdly, the answer to the question why Nūrsī addressed this aspect of human life and assigned treatises on different human tribulations would be explored. Fourthly, the examples of such kind of trainings of individuals will be studied from Risālah-i Nūr. The methodology of research adopted in this paper is qualitative. The findings of the paper show that pastoral theology is in accordance with the teachings of Islam; Nūrsī's elaborate explanation of this concept in his Risālah-i Nūr is unprecedented in the Muslim tradition; and despite the recent efforts there is a dire need that Muslim scholars explore this discipline further.

Keywords: Pastoral theology, human tribulations, Badi'uz-Zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī, Risālah -i Nūr.

Introduction:

The spiritual well-being of humans and helping those in distress is not exclusive to the teachings of any particular religion. It is a value that is preached by every religion. In Christianity it is recognized as a separate discipline known as 'pastoral theology'. It aims to explain the divine wisdom behind miseries and misfortunes which are inseparable from

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human life. Man is the victim of innumerable tribulations so every individual suffers tragic condition of some type in his life whether in the form of his personal physical illness or material loss or of those whom he is associated with. Physical sicknesses, natural disasters i.e. earth quakes, floods, pandemics etc. accidental loss of dear ones or any kinds of tribulation which an individual may encounter in his life leave a strong impact on his personality. Though one finds many examples in the Muslims' tradition of compassion for the fellow beings in need of spiritual and emotional reassurance, the term 'pastoral theology' has generally not been considered a Muslim's concept. There have been some initiatives in the Muslim academia to Islamize this term through its theoretical propagation and practical training of the Muslims. However, many scholars of the field still argue that pastoral care is a distinctively Christian and Jewish concept. They argue that the Muslim tradition of care and spiritual purification cannot be explained within the parameters of pastoral theology.¹ A careful study of the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Muslim history will reveal that this argument is not based on sound historical evidence. Muslim scriptures praise helping the fellow humans in distress irrespective of their religious beliefs as a highly desirable virtue. In the Muslim tradition Badi'uz-Zamān Sa'id Nūrsī, a 20th century Turkish Muslim scholar, is the most prominent figure whose works explain the concept of pastoral theology within the framework of Muslim teachings. Nūrsī, in his most influential work *Risālah-i Nūr*, laid great stress on the purification of the soul through worldly suffering. This concept of spiritual training also forms the bedrock of the teachings of pastoral theology. This paper will primarily focus on the work of Nūrsī in this discipline. He stressed the need to understand that worldly suffering was God's way to provide believers with an opportunity to strengthen their faith and purify their souls.

The objective of this study is to investigate in the Muslim tradition the aspects of pastoral theology that concern themselves with an individual's training in the face of hardships and suffering in this life. The paper will aim to explain in the light of Nūrsī's understanding that pastoral theology is not a non-Muslim concept as many consider it to be. In order to achieve these objectives, the researcher set following questions: What is pastoral theology? Who was Badi'uz-Zamān? And what is *Risālah-i Nūr*? Why one observes practical application of pastoral theology in Nūrsī's method of training?

The study will be beneficial for the scholars and learners for various reasons. It will be helpful to dispel the misunderstanding that pastoral theology is not Muslim concept. As has been mentioned above, there is a great need to contribute in this area from the Muslim perspective. The researcher believes this study will be a valuable addition to the body of knowledge available on the subject. The work will also provide motivation to both Christian and Muslim scholars to contribute towards forging better understanding between the two major religious communities by exploring further areas of common theological ground.

This study is qualitative in nature. The data was collected through an extensive study of relevant literature. Furthermore, the researcher listened to the lectures of the distinguished experts in this study area. Insightful discussion with the colleagues and teachers also proved a great help in data collection. The results were obtained after the careful analysis of data collected. Nūrsī's understanding of various aspects of pastoral theology was instrumental for the researcher to reach reliable findings.

Lastly, it needs to be mentioned that the present study has been confined to only the aspects of pastoral theology that deal with the training of human soul and the divine wisdom behind the worldly suffering. Any other areas of pastoral training fall outside the scope of the research.

What is pastoral theology?

The term 'pastoral theology' is reflective of an important Christian doctrine that forms the bedrock of many Christian beliefs. Pastoral is derivative of Pastor, which means an official in charge of a Church. Theology is a combination of two Greek words Theos and logos. Theos is rendered as God in English and logos stands for discourse or doctrine.² Graham defines pastoral theology in the postmodern context as "the articulation and excavation of sources and norms of Christian practices; the discipline that enables the community of faith to practice what it preaches."³ It is a discipline that deals with the training, manners and duties of a pastor as stipulated in the biblical teachings. A pastor, in the Christian tradition, is entrusted with various responsibilities from of moral and social guidance of individuals to more challenging ones of describing the rationale behind natural calamities. He is invested with the authority to explain the apparent injustice widespread in a world where the wicked and unsavory characters seem to enjoy the bounties of life and the innocent suffer for no fault of theirs. Pastoral theology explains this phenomenon as a transient phase and justifies the apparent inequalities in the world in the light of its eschatological teachings that view God as the great balancer.⁴

Although Pastoral theology does not exist in the Muslim tradition as a separate, recognized field, however, its aspect that studies human soul and its relationship with God, and the way it helps and strengthens individuals in order to enable them to face difficult situations and tough conditions of human life. This has been a subject of contemplation for many Muslim scholars through the centuries. As Colin Turner states:

“[W]hile there is no recognized discipline in the world of formal Muslim learning known as ‘pastoral theology’, that is not to say that it does not exist. *Ghazālī’s Ih. yā ‘ulūm al-dīn*, for example, contains much – particularly in its third ‘quarter’ – that could be described as practical wisdom and pastoral theology.”⁵

Among the scholars who partook in the study of this aspect of Pastoral theology, Badi’uz-Zamān Sa’īd Nūrī is a prominent name. This is one of the cornerstones of his teachings. In his works, he delved deep into this aspect of pastoral theology and devoted complete chapters to it. Turner mentions:

“Nūrī, in so many ways a legatee of *Ghazālī*, has an approach that is not dissimilar to that of his spiritual forebear. In the same way that one can see in *Ghazālī’s* practical wisdom the imprint of his own existential crisis, in Nūrī’s pastoral theology one is able to discern an understanding and sense of empathy that is born largely out of personal experience – and often very bitter experience at that.”⁶

Who was Badi’uz-Zamān? And what is Risālah-i Nūr?

Badi’uz-Zamān Sa’īd Nūrī (hence forth Nūrī), a 20th century Turkish revivalist, was born in 1876 in the eastern part of Turkey. He was given the title of Badi’uz-Zamān due to his extraordinary intelligence and remarkable memory. When he stepped into practical life after going through the stages of education, the great Ottoman Empire was experiencing its final decades. Various efforts were being rendered to save the Empire from decline. Nūrī not only identified the reasons of decline but also prescribed practical solutions for the revival of both the Muslims and the Empire. He exerted his efforts for the implementation of those practical measures in order to save the Empire.⁷ When the Empire could not be saved despite his tireless efforts in the wake of World War I and a secular national state of Turkey was emerged, a new phase of ordeal began for the Muslims there. The new government had launched a full-fledged campaign to oust Islam from all walks of life, be it politics, economy, education — citing Islam as the biggest cause of decline.⁸

In such circumstances Nürsî proved to be a savior for his nation as he initiated writing short treatises based upon thematic commentary of the Quran, collected them in volumes side by side and named them Risālah-i Nūr (hence forth Risālah). While interpreting the Qur'an, Nürsî paid special attention to the problems faced by the Muslims of that time. The major challenge was belief of the Muslims endangered due to prevalent influence of materialist philosophy and this degree of danger had never emerged before. So Nürsî focused all his attention on saving the belief. Therefore, subjects related to belief and its six tenets are the major themes of Risālah.

Moreover, the questions that his students would ask him through correspondence on various topics related to faith, and Nürsî's answers to them were later adjusted as a permanent part of the Risālah. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the secular government oppressed the religious-minded sections of the Turkish society. Severe restrictions and punishments were imposed on religious activities. A number of people were arrested, exiled or imprisoned and numerous others were assassinated on allegations of involvement in writing, reading and propagating religious literature. Nürsî himself and many of his students were sent into exile to remote places. They were also arrested and imprisoned many times, which continued for almost 25 years. So this was the period of a real trial for Nürsî, his students and other Muslims. During these difficult circumstances, Nürsî kept on writing consoling pieces to his peers and students. Besides, he wrote treatises for the spiritual counseling of the people who were afflicted with natural calamities or any misfortunes. Since loss in such accidental tragedies caused people to suffer spiritual and psychological problems, even to the point of sometimes threatening their faith, it was imperative to guide them in the light of the Quranic verses. In order to protect their faith from danger even in the face of tribulations, Nürsî made such topics a permanent part of his writings and added them as chapters of Risālah which worked as spiritual counselors for all Muslims.

Why one observes practical application of pastoral theology in Nürsî's method of training?

Nürsî himself went through prolonged and severed hardship in his life in the form of exile, imprisonment, sudden death of his close ones etc. So he was well aware of the impacts of these miseries on human personality. Thus, he has given particular importance to this bitter aspect of human life for training individuals in his collection of Risālah.⁹

Secondly, he sees illnesses and calamities of human life as sources of spiritual progress for individuals. One can obtain number of spiritual benefits in this world and the hereafter by facing hardships and his belief can be further strengthened. Nūrsī not only provides guidance to the Muslims on the right conduct while facing problems and tribulations but most importantly, “to see God through any problem that one encounters”. He enables one “to realise that wherever one looks, there is the face of God.”¹⁰ This is the reason that Nūrsī’s methodology has also been observed under pastoral theology. Turner states:

“Pastoral theology in the Nursian sense is the means whereby the afflicted are encouraged seeing problems, trials and tribulations as coming from the Divine will, and also the means whereby they are given the conceptual and emotional tools needed in order to face those trials.”¹¹

One can find numerous treatises in *Risālah*, which can be categorised as pastoral theology. Here some examples will be studied.

On Death of a child:

Nūrsī’s view about parent-child relation was embedded in Islam’s notion of this world being a temporary place. Since no one is to stay here forever, grief on the departing of a family member should not undermine one’s faith God’s will. His view on the early death of a child is manifest in his condolence note written to his friend *Hāfiz Hālid Efendī* and in a passage where he drew an analogy between a prison and this world.¹² Nūrsī dedicated a complete chapter (The Seventeenth Letter) in second volume ‘Letters’ of *Risālah*.

He further explained his understanding on the death of little children by describing the believers’ children as adorable beings living in the eternal bliss of paradise. They would be joined by their God-fearing parents to abide in everlasting happiness, that is, if their parents surrendered their will to the will of God. He also discredited the notion held by some people that since the hereafter would not be a place for procreating; and that the worldly bond of parent-child affection will be an empty feeling in the next life. He maintained that the parents’ love for their children, particularly the ones whose kids died before maturity, was just a short lived experience compared with the eternal love that the parents would feel for their offspring in paradise. He explained that the believers who lost their children at early age should find solace in the fact that if they would show contentment in God’s will, an eternal abode would be awaiting them in heaven where they would be united with their beloved

children for eternity. He explicated his view further in his famous prison allegory. He likened the life of this world to a prison. If a prisoner was allowed to meet his child occasionally, it would not provide any comfort. Instead, it would only increase his suffering. He would suffer more to see his child in pain. But if a compassionate judge promised the same prisoner that his child would be well looked after in an unimaginably blissful place, it should bring the prisoner relief even if he would not see his child temporarily. His inmates would also advise him to accept the arrangement in hope of reuniting with his child one day. The child might even intervene with the king and beseech him to arrange for an eternal reunification with his father.

Through this analogy Nūrsī explained to the believers that they must understand that the children who died at an early age, died unblemished. They had been freed from the prison of this world before they reached maturity; therefore, they were certain to attain eternal happiness in paradise. Had they lived longer, they might have incurred sins and resultantly lost the right to God's mercy. Parents were not the true owners of their child, they were only caretakers. In return for the parents' care for the child, God filled their heart with compassion so that they might find pleasure in looking after the child. The only true owner of a child is his Creator. Therefore, when a child passed away he merely went back to his rightful place. True believers would not be discouraged for this loss. Instead, they would develop a strong longing for the place for which their dear one had departed. This understanding would strengthen their faith.¹³

Finally, Nūrsī distinguished between passionate love and compassionate love. It's the latter that he defined as a means to union with God almighty. What separated compassionate love from worldly love was a person's unshakeable belief in divine providence. Where non-believers viewed death as an eternal separation, believers considered it a temporary parting. They saw their child passing on to the eternal, pleasant world where the believers would be reunited with their dear ones.¹⁴

Guidance for the sick:

In the collection of Flashes (Third volume of Risālah), Second and Twenty-Fifth Flash (chapters) are assigned for the guidance of sick people because in Nūrsī's opinion "sick and those struck by disaster form one tenth of mankind"¹⁵. In these treatises Nūrsī "brings together much of the teachings found dispersed in the Risālah and elaborates what he has said elsewhere at greater depth."¹⁶ Second Flash is based upon the explanations

in the light of Prophet Job's (*Ayyūb* a.s) sickness whereas Twenty-Fifth Flash comprises twenty five remedies, in other words "spiritual remedies for the sickness of the soul"¹⁷. Because Nūrsī is more concerned about "spiritual sickness" of individuals than 'physical illness'.¹⁸ This helps one in providing good protection against frustration in the hard time of sickness.¹⁹ Moreover, this "illustration locates the problem of sickness firmly in the context of worship and faith"²⁰ because according to Nūrsī worship is of two types; one is positive form of worship i.e. five daily prayers, fasting, supplications etc. and the other is negative form of worship in which a believer spends his difficult phase of time with patience and without complains, such time period is also "counted as worship for the believer"²¹. Nūrsī elaborates:

It is even established by sound narrations and by those who uncover the realities of creation that one minute's illness of some who are completely patient and thankful becomes the equivalent of an hour's worship and a minute's illness of certain perfected men the equivalent of a day's worship. Thus, you should not complain about an illness which as *ayyūb* though transforms one minute of your life into a thousand minutes and gains for you long life; you should rather offer thanks.²²

Nūrsī quotes the example of Prophet Job (a.s) by calling him 'champion of patience'²³ and sees in the Prophet's story several important points which believers should bear in mind whenever they are visited with afflictions of any kind"²⁴. He begins this treatise with the following supplication of Prophet Job (a.s)

﴿وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ﴾

"When he called upon his Sustainer saying: "Verily harm has afflicted me, and You are the Most Merciful of the Merciful."²⁵

Nūrsī points out that Prophet only invoked Allah for health when the worms, generated into his wounds, were penetrated in his heart and tongue turning into a hindrance in his worship, before that he never asked for health. There is a source of inspiration for all believers too, that it was worship which was more important to him than his health. Moreover, Nūrsī draws a comparison between the ailments of Prophet Job (a.s) and spiritual ailments of believer and comments how sin which is like a spiritual worm penetrates into heart of a believer and wipes out the light of belief gradually.²⁶ Moreover, in Nūrsī's opinion when someone suffers a painful time, there is surely a divine wisdom behind that suffering. And once this illness has performed its duty, health has been bestowed and

restored by God Almighty. Nürsī illustrates his experience to elaborate his point further:

For the past eight or nine years, a number of young people have come to me in connection with illness, seeking my prayers. I have noticed that each of those ill youths had begun to think of the Hereafter to a greater degree than other young people. They lack the drunkenness of youth and have renounced to an extent animal desires and heedlessness. So I consider them and then remind them that their illnesses are a Divine bounty within bearable limits. I tell them: “Brother I am not opposed to this illness of yours. I don’t feel sorry for you because of it that I should pray for you. Try to be patient until the illness awakens you completely, and once it has performed its duty, the Compassionate Creator will restore you to health, God willing.”²⁷

Another significant argument Nürsī makes is that believers have no right to complain in case of any loss due to certain reasons:

“[Firstly] God Most High has made the garment of the body with which He has clothed man a manifestation of His art. He has made man to be a model on which He cuts, trims, alters and changes the garment of the body, thus displaying the manifestation of various of His Names. Just as the Name of Healer makes it necessary that illness should exist, so too the Name of Provider requires that hunger should exist. And so on...” [Secondly] “it is by means of disasters and sicknesses that life is refined, perfected, strengthened and advanced; that it yields results, attains perfection and fulfils its own purpose.”²⁸

Then in another argument he says: “just as gratitude increases Divine bounty, so too complaint increases misfortune, and removes all occasions of compassion.”²⁹ Therefore “illness and disaster cannot be the grounds for complaint because they do not happen unless they are decreed to happen” and when they happen there is verily a purpose behind, which should be recognised. Illness, like health has equally important role for man’s progress “without the former, the latter would be unrecognisable”. The significant feature of illness is to stimulate one in his spiritual progress. Moreover, calamities and sicknesses help one not to forget his impotence and innate weakness, which ultimately leads one “to take refuge in God by meditating upon His perfections.”³⁰

Nürsī also gives a detailed explanation of misfortune and their divine purpose. In his view harmful misfortune is only that one, which

affects religion of an individual, whereas which do not affect religion are not misfortunes indeed. Some of them are divine warnings which are purposely designed to “dissolve man’s state of neglect and to remind him of his human helplessness and weakness.”³¹ Some misfortunes particularly illnesses also contain divine purpose and are means of purification from sins. Nūrsī again gives example of Prophet Job (a.s) to explain his point. The Prophet did not pray to God for relief from the physical pain. He only prayed for his health when the disease was affecting his worship of God with his tongue and heart. Nūrsī advises “we too should make our primary intent, when making that supplication, the healing of the inward and spiritual wounds that arise from sinning.”³²

Advice for prisoners:

As mentioned above Nūrsī suffered exile, arrest and imprisonment at the hands of authorities on many occasions in his life. He looks at his sufferings optimistically. From the vantage point of his work and learning opportunities, the imprisonment proved a blessing in disguise. Considering it God’s will he set about turning the apparent affliction into an auspicious opportunity. He termed prison ‘Josephite school’ (*madrassah-i Yūsufiyya*)³³ in remembrance of the Prophet Joseph (*Yūsuf* a.s). Following the practice of Joseph (a.s) who delivered God’s message in prison, he set himself to enlighten his inmates through *Risālah*. Through his preaching work he managed to change the lives of not only imprison staff but also those of the most hardened of miscreants.³⁴ He comments:

“If the prisoner has been sentenced unjustly, on condition he performs the obligatory prayers, each hour will be the equivalent of a day’s worship, and the prison will be like a recluse’s cell. He will be counted among the pious hermits of olden times who retired to caves in order to devote themselves to worship. If he is poor, aged, and ill, and desirous of the truths of belief, on condition he performs the obligatory prayers and repents, each hour will become the equivalent of twenty hours’ worship, and prison will become like a rest-house for him, and because of his friends there who regard him with affection, a place of love, training, and education. He will probably be happier staying in prison than being free, for outside he is confused and subject to the assaults of sins from all sides. He may receive a complete education from prison. On being released, it will not be as a murderer, or thirsting for revenge, but as someone penitent, proven by trial, well-behaved, and beneficial for his nation. In

fact, the *Denizlī* prisoners became so extraordinarily well-behaved after studying the *Risālah-i Nūr* for only a short time that some of those concerned said: “Studying the *Risālah-i Nūr* for fifteen weeks is more effective at reforming them than putting them in prison for fifteen years.”³⁵

Nürsī seems to be suggesting that his imprisonment was part of divine plan in order to make it possible for the message of *Risālah* to reach those whom it might not have reached otherwise. The false charges that authorities levelled against him paved the way for his message to spread. If it was not for the horrors of *Eskisehir*, *Denizlī* and *Afyūn*³⁶, the beauties of *madrassah-i Yūsufiyya* might not have transpired. He wished to teach himself and the ones who suffered like him the lesson that such sufferings were actually rewarding for them from the perspective of their mission.³⁷

Guidance for elderly:

Twenty-Sixth Flash (Third volume ‘The Flashes’), treatise for the elderly, is basically a “collection of counsels to Nürsī’s ageing peers”. The treatise is comprised of “various ‘hopes’ that he has discovered in his old age, and which may serve as consolation for the distress and discomfort that growing old can bring.”³⁸ He explains how belief in God and trust in His mercy, following the path of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and belief in hereafter helps elderly people to give them satisfaction at their old age and increase their faith.³⁹ Nürsī proves that impotence and weakness of old age are the means of attracting divine mercy.⁴⁰ As Impotence and weakness, mentions Nürsī, are the most acceptable intercessor at Almighty God’s court and old age is precisely the time of impotence and weakness. So one should not feel resentful at old age, which is thus an acceptable intercessor at a court, but love it.⁴¹ Nürsī also guides his peers in the light of his personal painful experience in old age, which he experienced at the death of his beloved nephew who was also his adopted son and closest student. Nürsī faced this loss in his old age and was unable to come out of its effect even after five years because according to him, half of his private world died with his nephew’s death.⁴² But it was consolation proceeding from the Quran’s light that supported him. In the light of his personal painful experience in old age, Nürsī guides his aged fellows that the remedy of such pain can only be found in Quran:

And so my elderly brothers and sisters who like me have lost at the time of their old age a child or relative they love dearly, and who have to bear the searing sorrows of separation together with the burdens of old age! You have understood from my situation

that while being much harsher than yours, it was cured and healed by a verse of the Qur'an. This being so, there are remedies to heal all your difficulties in the sacred pharmacy of the All-Wise Qur'an. If you have recourse to it through belief and make use of those remedies through worship, the heavy burdens of your old age and your sorrows will be lightened considerably.⁴³

This is the best example of Nürsî's way of guiding the aged at such a stage of life when they already have become weak and helpless. And in this stage if they are afflicted with such a dreadful experience, how they can endure it. Furthermore, Nürsî regards the people of advanced years as blessed and advises the elderly to cultivate optimism, so that they could enjoy eternal youth and bliss in the life hereafter:

"It is only in belief in the hereafter that the elderly, who form another quarter of mankind, can find consolation, in the face of the close extinction of their lives and their entering the soil, and their fine and loveable worlds coming to an end. Those kindly, venerable fathers and devoted, tender mothers would otherwise feel such a disturbance of the spirit and tumult of the heart that the world would become a despairing prison for them and life, a ghastly torture. But then belief in the hereafter says to them: "Don't worry! You have an immortal youth; a shining, endless life awaits you. You will be joyfully reunited with the children and relatives you have lost. All your good deeds have been preserved and you will receive your reward."⁴⁴

Facing natural disasters:

Sa'îd Nürsî's perspective on the occurrence of natural calamities and how he reconciled it with God's will together with His justice and compassion has been a subject of Addendum of Fourteenth Word in first volume of Risālah⁴⁵. He explicated in detail the rationale behind such disasters dispelling the doubts that these calamities were in any way opposed to God's attributes of mercy and justice. There is a full length passage in Risālah that specifically addresses these questions. Nürsî had received many questions in the aftermath of a disastrous earthquake that claimed upwards of thirty thousand lives on December 19, 1939 in the Turkish province of Erzincan.⁴⁶ There were questions from different sections of society inquiring about the wisdom of the divine providence in afflicting the populace with such suffering. Some of the critical questions people asked him ranged from questioning the justice of the Almighty to taking God out of the equation and deeming the disasters to be a mere

result of malfunctioning of the forces of nature. The questions inquired if such disasters were a punishment from God why innocent people were also a victim of them and how such mass destruction could be compatible with God's justice and mercy, particularly, when He did have the power to individually punish the sinners. Further, if it was all in His power to stop such calamities, they asked, why He chose to let them happen. There were many modern thinkers who claimed that these calamities could be better explained purely through natural causes without ascribing them to any divine intervention. For example, they explained earthquake as the result of the shifting of rock strata. If the universe comprised only matter, they claimed, calamities were just a result of unusual behaviour of natural forces.

Nürsī took on these questions and answered them elaborately furnishing a detailed commentary on them. He attributed discomfort on the loss of innocent lives in natural calamities to misunderstanding the divine wisdom. To enlarge upon his counsel Nürsī quoted a verse of the Quran:

﴿وَاتَّقُوا فِتْنَةً لَا تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً ۖ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾

“Fear tumult or oppression, which affects not only those of you who do wrong.”⁴⁷

He likened this world to an examination hall in which the performance of every individual was being tested. He maintained that sparing the guiltless in this world and afflicting the wrongdoers only runs counter to the creation plan of God. Such an arrangement would provide a chance to the self-serving evildoers to shun the evil purely for selfish reasons i.e. they won't avoid evils for spiritual reasons but only to save their skin from the suffering. Similarly, sparing the innocent altogether would deprive them of opportunities to strengthen their God-fearing and pious behaviour. Furthermore, explained Nürsī, God does not abandon his obedient servants. He reduces their pain even in suffering and exalts them to the status of martyrdom. He considered suffering and disasters a means to purify the soul. He advised people against objecting to God's will and counselled them to surrender to His omniscience.⁴⁸

In response to the inquiry that why God didn't punish the people individually or interfered to stop natural disasters from happening, Nürsī argued that nature had its own way of balancing things up. Natural disasters had yielded positive results along with the suffering. Undoing such disasters would eradicate not only the damages they caused but also

the good hidden in them. Since God is all good, such an intervention would not be in accordance with this attribute of His. He explained that earthquakes caused suffering to human beings still, they also served as a warning to the evildoers and provided the pious ones with an opportunity to strengthen their faith in such testing times.

Finally, in reply to those who insisted natural disasters had nothing to do with either divine will or intervention, rather they were merely a result of unfortunate inconsistency in the functioning of the forces of nature, Nūrsī held that the very design and systematic working of the universe left no doubt that everything in the cosmos complied with The Creator's will. Nothing in nature could bring any benefit or cause any harm to human beings. It was He who commanded the underground strata to shift at a fault line which in turn caused the earthquake.⁴⁹

Conclusion:

The study was undertaken to understand pastoral theology within the context of the Muslim tradition. The objective was to analyse whether this concept was compatible with the teachings of Islam or not. In order to achieve the objective of the study, only authentic sources were consulted for data collection and analysis. For this purpose, Nūrsī's key work *Risālah-i Nūr* was consulted. The researcher also listened to the scholarly lectures on this subject and treatises. The research has debunked the commonly held belief that pastoral training is exclusively based on Christian theological teachings. This is not backed by evidence. On the contrary, it is evident from both Muslim scriptural teachings and historical accounts that the spiritual training inherent in pastoral theology has been as much emphasized in Islam as in Christianity. It is a common feature in Islam and Christianity. In both the religions such virtues as purification of the soul, helping the distressed, compassion and patience in trials and tribulations are considered a sign of strong faith.

Secondly, the study has also revealed that Nūrsī was one of the most prominent Muslim figures to have described loss through accidents, disease and calamities as a means to test and strengthen an individual's faith. His magnum opus *Risālah-i Nūr* is a seminal work in the Muslim tradition to understand pastoral training within the framework of Muslim teachings. Thirdly, the essence of pastoral theology goes as far back in the Muslim

tradition as the Prophet's (PBUH) era, as has been indicated above. This means that there is a great need to further the prolific work accomplished by Nūrsī in this area. Admittedly, some Muslim scholars have begun to contribute to this area through both research work and practical training of the individuals.⁵⁰ However, still a great deal needs to be done to dispel the misunderstanding that pastoral theology is exclusively a Christian or Jewish domain. The fact that it has not been a separate discipline in Islam does not imply that its positive aspects are not found in the Muslim tradition. Islam lays great stress on the purification of soul, compassion for humans, and acceptance of suffering as divine wisdom as is evident in the Muslims' Holy Scriptures and the life account of the Prophet (PBUH) of Islam. To sum up, one believes this study will motivate the future researchers to explore other areas related to this field of study, which the present study could not accomplish due to the constraints of time and scope.

References

- 1 For details see Ibrahim J. Long and Bilal Ansari, "Islamic Pastoral Care and the Development of Muslim Chaplaincy," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 12, no. 1 (2018), accessed July 30, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.10381607.0012.105>.
- 2 See Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in systematic theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 1, accessed July 30, 2020, <http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-2/PDF%20Books/00045%20Thiessen%20Lectures%20in%20Systematic%20Theology.pdf>.
- 3 Elaine Graham, "Pastoral Theology in an age of uncertainty." *HTS: theological studies* 62, no. 3 (2006): 845, accessed July 30, 2020, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/392/296>.
- 4 See Elymas Davidson Newell, "Pastoral Theology in the Study of Religions" (PhD diss., Atlantic International University, 2013), accessed July 30, 2020, <https://www.aiu.edu/applications/DocumentLibraryManager/upload/newel1%20thesis.pdf>.

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- 5 Turner explains “*The Revival of the Sciences of Religion (Ih. yā ‘ulūm al-dīn)* is regarded by many Muslims as arguably the greatest readily accessible work of Muslim spirituality, and one which has, for centuries, been the most read work after the Quran in the Muslim world. The *Ih. yā* is divided into four parts or ‘quarters’, each containing ten chapters. The first part deals with knowledge and the practical requirements of religion, such as ritual purity, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage, recitation of the Quran and so on.; the second concentrates mostly on man and society, covering issues such as etiquette relating to eating, marriage, earning a living, friendship and the like.; and parts three and four are dedicated to the inner life of the soul and discuss first the vices that man must battle against in himself and then the virtues that he must strive to achieve.” See Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Sa'īd Nūrsī's Epistles of Light* (Germany: Gerlach press, 2013), 466.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 For details see Sukran Vahide, "The Life and Times of *Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī*," *The Muslim World* 89(1999); Sukran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012); Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc, *Makers of Islamic Civilization: Sa'īd Nūrsī* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2009).
- 8 For details see Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 190-91; Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst and company, 1998), 464-66; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 266-74; Serif Mardin, "Religion and Secularism in Turkey," in *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*, ed. Albert Hourani, Philips S. Khouri, and Mary C. Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 364-65.
- 9 For further details see Thomas Michel, *Insights from the Risāle-i Nūr* (USA: Tughra Books, 2013), 112-15.
- 10 Turner, *The Quran Revealed*, 466.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 *Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī, The Letters*, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler, 2006), 97.
- 13 See for details Nūrsī, *The Letters*, 97-99.
- 14 Ibid., 99; For further explanations see Turner, *The Quran Revealed*, 500-504.
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- 15 *Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī, The Flashes*, trans. Sukran Vahide(Istanbul: Sozler, 2010), 265.
- 16 Michel, *Insights*, 117.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., 109.
- 19 Thomas Michel (a Catholic Christian Priest) shared his experience how he was introduced with Risālah -i Nūr. After having a bypass surgery he was getting recovered when encouraged by the sympathy of various Risālah readers who also shared with him some of the insights which they discovered in the writings of Nūrsī. Thomas relates that this pushed him to study Risālah more deeply in order to understand what Nūrsī approach to sickness and human infirmity might disclose about his Quranic spirituality. See Michel, *Insights*, 108-09.
- 20 Ian S. Markham, *Engaging with Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī: A Model of Interfaith Dialogue*(England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009), 18.
- 21 Nūrsī, *The Flashes*, 266; for explanation of these points see Michel, *Insights*, 118; Bilal Kuspinar, "The Chief Characteristics of Spirituality in Sa'īd Nūrsī 's Religious Thought," in *Spiritual Dimensions of Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī 's Risāle-i Nūr*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi(Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 141.
- 22 Nūrsī, *The Flashes*, 266.
- 23 Ibid., 21.
- 24 Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 490.
- 25 Qur'an 21:83.
- 26 See Nūrsī, *The Flashes*, 22-23; for explanation Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 490.
- 27 Nūrsī, *The Flashes*, 268.
- 28 Ibid., 23.
- 29 Ibid., 25.
- 30 Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 491.
- 31 Nūrsī, *The Flashes*, 26.
- 32 Ibid., 27.
- 33 Cited in Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 217.
- 34 See Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 496-97.
- 35 Nūrsī, *The Words*, 162.
- 36 Names of places where Nūrsī was imprisoned.
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- 37 See Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 500.
38 Ibid., 471.
39 For details see Nūrsī, *The Flashes*, 286-94.
40 Ibid., 300.
41 Ibid., 292.
42 Ibid., 310.
43 Ibid., 312-13.
44 *Bedi'uzzamān Sa'īd Nūrsī, The Rays*, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler, 2006), 244; also see Nūrsī, *The Words*, 110.
45 Nūrsī, *The Words*, 185-190.
46 Michel, *Insights*, 98.
47 Qur'an 8:25.
48 Nūrsī, *The Words*, 186.
49 Ibid., 187; for further explanation see Michel, *Insights*, 97-106.
50 See for example Long and Ansari, "Islamic Pastoral Care," 3-4.