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Ethics of Peaceful Co-existence: The Case of Said Nursi

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Abstract

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This research looks into the ethics of Peaceful Co-existence as defined by the late Muslim intellectual Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. It analyzes how Bediuzzaman Said Nursi described nonviolent ethics available in the Qur'an. These arguments could be useful in discovering answers to the global dilemma of extremism and violence, especially in its latest form as confronted by the world in recent times. First, it contributes to the field of Islamic morals, which is even underrepresented compared to the writings on Islamic rules. The other part concentrates on Nursi's nonviolence ethics and how they are conveyed in his writings. Nursi never supported violence and urged people to avoid it at all costs. In *Risale-i-Nur*, he always promoted peace and harmony. In *Risale-i-Nur*, he always preached peace, although he is still unknown as an Islamic scholar who supported co-existence. Due to some reactionary militant forces in the Muslim world, Islam has become a source of debate today. The relationship between violence and religion is one of the most important topics in contemporary debate.

Introduction

The issue of world peace is one of the most important issues in the present age. This has assumed great importance for all humanity as the weapons of mass destruction, which the world powers have prepared, are damaging enough to destroy the planet many times. This situation becomes especially dangerous when we see some irresponsible personalities and intellectuals of the big countries giving the ultimatum to nations and civilizations: "There is going to be a global clash of civilizations."¹

Today different parts of the world like Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Palestine are known as the troubled places where violence and extremism are associated with Islam. On the other hand, wars on terror earlier have been declared as the armed liberation struggles. On the other hand, robust multilateralism seems to be competing with unilateralism. The free market often seems to glorify more unhealthy competition. In these signs of the times, what is the strength of the associations made between Islam and violence? What are some key theological underpinnings for some of the various perspectives of war and peace in Islam, according to Said Nursi? What can *Risale-i-Nur* contribute to the tide of nonviolent peaceful co-existence?

This paper presents research in the light of these questions addressing the ethics of war and peace from Islamic perspectives as narrated in *Risale-i-Nur*. At first, the paper analyzes the theory of war and peace in Islam based on their moral anthropology and integration of Islamic principles into their comprehensive system of thinking. Secondly, it looks at the specific cases of integrating theory and practice in peace building and nonviolence.

Immediately after the migration to Madinah, the Holy Prophet, keeping in view the state of peace in Madinah, gave the first constitution of the first kingdom in which two things were prominent. One refers to domestic policy and the other to foreign policy. A model system of maintaining peaceful relations with other nations and religious identities was formulated in Madinah. It becomes evident in the charter of peace with the Jews and other tribes that outlines the policy of our international relations in the present times.²

Therefore, separate principles of international relations exist for peace and war in Islam. These principles have survived the test of time successfully.

Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani, in his two books *Al-Seer al-Saghir* and *Al-Seer al-Kabeer*, has compiled the same

commandments and rules of the Holy Prophet (saw) and explained the principles and rules of international relations to the world. That has guided and will continue to guide human beings. Many Muslim organizations in other countries, inspired by the success of Turkey's recent Islamic awakening movement, have begun to consider its methods and have started to adopt them. This success has its roots in the teachings of Said Nursi.

He is a visionary and is still cherished in modern Turkey because of his ideas and thoughts. He is considered the founder of the modern movement in Turkey, which established the relationship between Islam and science and put into practice the idea of modern Islamic society- the essence of a lifelong struggle. Thanks to his ideas and practical struggle, Said Nursi has been accepted as a unique and competent personality in today's modern world. He also took part in the Turkish War of Independence. He was considered the founder of a movement in Turkey that established the relationship between Islam and science and introduced the enlightened practical concept of a modern Islamic society in which there is not even a hint of stagnation and regression. Said Nursi has been fighting all his life to establishing a modern and prestigious Islamic University in Turkey.

In the case of Nursi's teaching circles, the main topic of discussion was how to respond to the needs of modern times in the light of Islamic teachings so that Islam could be harmonized with modern times. As the movement did not require formal membership, and admission system, or a specific building or room for meetings, it was not built on a Sufi tradition, although Rumi and other Sufis profoundly influenced Nursi. In contrast, the Jam'at consisted of people who shared common values and goals. The more a person accepted these values and the more he worked for the goals of the Jam'at, the stronger his attachment with the Jam'at grew.

Said Nursi is a great scholar who has explored the concept of peace to investigate what is involved in determining peaceful co-existence. The philosophy of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, the writer of the Risale-i-Nur, will be explained in this article. Nursi creates a big difference between the present and the history. It is worth mentioning here that Nursi was fully conscious of the importance of the mimetic want and desire in Islam, as the Ummah's imitation of traditions is the essence of Islam. From the perspective of jealousy and mimetic desire, a Qur'anic narrative might be explored. Adam, according to tradition, had two sons, Habil and Qabil. They each offered a sacrifice to the Lord. Allah accepted Habil's sacrifice but rejected Qabil's sacrifice. As a result, Qabil grew envious of his

brother and killed him. ³ Qabil's enmity toward his brother drove him to use violence.

War and Peace Theories

In order to situate Islamic theories of war and peace, I want to first point to John Kelsay's argument about a "crisis in Shari'a reasoning" in contemporary Islam. By Shari'a, Kelsay attempts to justify or legitimize a plan of action in Islamic jurisprudence. The search for the appropriate way to live, which leads to solid happiness in this world and the hereafter, is essential to Shari'a reasoning. It is one of the modes, perhaps the primary mode, in which Muslims attempt to forge links between the wisdom of the past with contemporary challenges.⁴

James Turner Johnson explains the crisis as follows:

"The earlier assumptions about the parameters of Shari'ah reasoning are no longer valid: assumptions about who can properly involve in such reasoning, the people addressed and in some ways bound by it, the certainty of Islamic conquest in the world, the relative objectivity of many schools of interpretation, and so on".⁵

Kelsay says one of the critical factors of the crisis is the movement of Shari'ah reasoning beyond a small circle of educated elites to a larger circle of literate and professional Muslims. This new class of thinkers is unconvinced that contemporary dialogue between political and religious leaders leads to political justice. In turn, questions of authority, particularly legitimate authority in responding to acute conflict and declaring war, have risen to the surface.⁶

A new scapegoat was found based on Nursi's notion of Peaceful Co-existence. During the Ottoman Empire's demise and the downfall of Muslim exercise in the contemporary time, some aspects of the Islamic society used the non-Muslims as scapegoats to find reasons for the Muslim world's numerous problems. On the other hand, Nursi creates a new theory of an opponent. The rivals are no longer detectable and palpable; they are intangible and abstract. Ignorance, disbelief, hatred, and warfare are the primary foes. Nursi does not criticize individuals or factions of society even though persons or certain groups advocate these principles. Rather than focusing on the sources, his scholarly work focuses on the subject and outcomes of his ideas.

During the 19th century conflicts with Western sovereignties in the Balkans, Greece, Armenia, Anatolia, Syria, and Lebanon, the term jihad was used extensively and consistently in European reportage as a provocative element to identify obliteration, violent annexation, and various other violence attributed to Muslim activists.⁷ Nursi was well

aware of the importance of a unique concept of jihad. It is important to note that he acknowledges that the sword has usually played a vital role in the expansion of Islam. He, on the other hand, makes no apologies in this regard. Force and coercion dominated the world in the past when savagery prevailed. According to Nursi, "In older times, that is, when barbarism prevailed, power and force dominated the globe, which is the result of savagery and doomed to fall and extinction."⁸

When asked if Jews and Christians should be considered friends, he said, "Yes". This inquiry was in response to a Qur'anic scripture forbids Muslims from making friends with Jews and Christians.⁹

"A huge religious revolution occurred during the Prophet's time, and because all people's ideas revolved with religion, respect and enmity were concentrated on one point, and they loved or despised accordingly," Nursi wrote in response. As a result, love for non-Muslims implied deception. But now, in the wake of the development and the people's concerns the world over. In any case, most of them are not as devoted to their beliefs as they were. In this scenario, our friendship with them stems from our affection for and borrowing of their civilization and advancement. The prohibition in the Qur'an does not encompass such companionship.¹⁰

War and Jihad, or Militant Islam

In this thinking area that relies on a supposed inclination in Islam to resolve conflict with violence, the person is still understood to have dignity, which is his natural right. According to Sayyid Qutb, the children of Adam are honored for simply being human.¹¹ However, according to medieval juristic literature, war was considered a universal aspect of human existence.¹²

In turn, the person belonged to either the *dar al- Islam (land of Islam)* or the *Dar al-harb (land of war)*.¹³ However, Sachedina points out that this division of spheres was political-legal terminology developed by the Muslim jurists, which did not correspond to the implicit (spiritual-moral) division of the Qur'an into Dar-al-imaan (field of belief) and Dar al-kufar (field of unbelief). The jurist's division was spatial-temporal in order to legitimize jihad for 'calling' persons to Islam and thus seen as a holy war that would support territorial expansion for the Muslim rulers promising Islamic law.¹⁴ In Islamic history, after the establishment of Muslim political power, the earlier respect for Jewish and Christian communities as divinely guided and blessed Abrahamic faiths gave way to the impulse for Islam to rule over and supersede all other communities.¹⁵ John Esposito highlights the principles of *hijra and jihad*. These are based on the Prophet's move (hijra) from Mecca to Medina to spread and defend Allah's Word and rule (Jihad).¹⁶

Nursi also acknowledges that some individuals' thirst for violence (kuvte-i gadabiya) can be harmful: "a human being would prefer to ruin what he can, even the entire world, if it were to stand in the way of his desire and avarice."¹⁷

According to Nursi, tyrants such as Pharaoh, Nimrod, and Shaddad emerged in history due to fulfilling this desire.¹⁸ One may also include Adolf Hitler in this group. According to Nursi, Islam transforms this damaging habit into tenderness. "Yes, the Arabs whose hardness of heart forced them to bury their female offspring alive, their feelings were purified and groomed to the level that they became so sensitive toward things that it prohibited them from even stepping on ants," he mentions, citing an example from Arab civilization.¹⁹

As seen by his assertion that the globe has become like a little town, Nursi was fully aware of the world's increasing globalization.²⁰

Said Nursi's Conceptualization of Morals of Nonviolence

Nursi's modern conception of jihad defines innovative aspects as scapegoats, effectively deflecting from the concept of Westerners or non-Muslims as rivals. Persons and groups should not be perceived as overriding dangers; instead, Nursi calls notice to international foes that affect every group and individual. As the present review will show, his concept of jihad is based on more profound underlying important Qur'anic ideas. Though Nursi does not directly declare how or on what basis he created his notion of jihad, his ideology, specifically during the New Said period, is mainly based on the Bible. He claims that the Qur'an is his only source of knowledge.²¹

Said Nursi claimed that he wished to be free of aggressors' attacks, but not by using the same means as the offenders. To put it another way, he opposed the habit of opposing force with force. Religion tells people to pursue truth and uprightness rather than using force to achieve their goals. As a result, he believed that the Risale-i Nur students would be better served by reading the Qur'an than by serving in the military. Later in life, he was asked if freely giving up one's rights just for peace could be regarded as a type of reconciliation with wrongdoing. He said, "Again, reflecting on my time in prison, "A person who is in the right is fair. He will give up his one Dirham of justice for the sake of the better purpose which would be worth a hundred".²²

He concluded that, in the long run, worrying about current events and worldwide catastrophes is less important than seeking the personal, inward transition of peace from studying Scripture. "For a whole period of two years in Kastamonu and seven years in other places, I knew nothing about the global struggles and wars, whether peace had been declared, or who

else was engaged in combat," Said Nursi recalls. "I was not interested and did not inquire, and I did not listen to the radio playing nearby for nearly three years. However, with the *Risale-i Nur*, I triumphed against total skepticism, which extinguishes eternal life and turns this world's life into compounded sorrow and misery".²³

The Sacred Nature of Human Beings and War and Peace

Various positions are taken in this arena of thought. For instance, the fundamental nature of persons is that we are morally innocent-free from sin- and with knowledge of Allah's commandments. Our nature is to live on earth in a state of harmony and peace, including eliminating the grounds for conflict. However, we are corrupted by our encounters with society. In turn, some will always choose to violate our nature and Allah's commandments, and thus, from Adam's first act of disobedience, we live on earth as "enemies to each other" (Q 2.36).²⁴ We are neither absolutely good nor absolutely bad.²⁵

Although our dignity deserves protection and respect, if one commits a crime, they remove any cover of protection or immunity arising from this dignity.²⁶ In turn, we are caught in a continuing moral struggle of inevitable wars and evils. Allah responds by offering prophets to remind us of the laws imprinted on human consciousness. However, as we form social units, we are more prone to disobey Allah and amplify individual drives, and thus the human desire for self-aggrandizement results in violence and oppression. Hence, we can only attain peace if we surrender to Allah's will and laws. Since this surrender will probably always fall short in individuals and societies, a state is necessary to enforce the law, and Muslims must be prepared to fight to preserve the integrity of the faith.²⁷

Nursi's foundational philosophy is that every individual was created by Allah and hence has the utmost importance and should be appreciated. Everyone is holy because they signify Allah's most precious names and traits (*al-asm'a ul-husna*). The Qur'an uses this expression numerous times, and practically every verse, no matter what is being discussed, refers back to Allah by naming a pair of divine characteristics. The doctrine of the Divine names is a critical issue in the Qur'anic world. In this regard, everyone is a reflection of Allah's virtues and a unique combination of these heavenly qualities. Nursi explains that everyone wants to see, demonstrate, and appreciate his or her abilities. At the same time, Allah wishes to see the beauty of His attributes in His creations, as he concludes in his analogy.²⁸

Every individual is a reflection of these qualities and thus sacrosanct. According to Nursi, there are two perspectives on Allah's creatures. The

first is (ma'na-i ismi), which means "self-referential." From this vantage point, the animals are seen as indicators of their existence. Their divine origins are unknown. "Other-indicative" (ma'na-i harfi) is the second. According to this viewpoint, all beings have various indicators pointing to their Creator. Because of their Creator, Nursi strongly encourages people to look at the creatures from the latter perspective, the 'other indicative' on account of their Maker.²⁹

The Qur'anic Prohibition of "No soul shall bear the burden of another soul"

His interpretation of the following Qur'anic passage is also important in his nonviolence advocacy: "No soul shall bear the burden of another soul."³⁰

In his books, Nursi mentions this verse more than a dozen times. No one, he claims, has the right to pass judgment on another person because of his flaws. But, on the other hand, another person cannot take up a person's flaws or shortcomings. As a result, no one can be made a scapegoat for the crimes of others. Instead, Nursi refers to this principle by illustrating it with a ship. So, if there are nine passengers on it, who have committed terrible crimes and one innocent person, burning or sinking the ship is not justified. The purpose does not justify the use of an innocent person to achieve it.³¹

In this regard, it is worth noting that Nursi constantly tries to apply his "absolute justice" ('adalet-i-mahza) ideal rather than "relative justice" ('adalet-i-izafiya).³²

No innocent individual can be chosen as a scapegoat in a society which upholds absolute justice system. Nursi seals the doors, especially for self-proclaimed extremist jihadies who perform violent acts against innocent civilians in this context. Close Neighbors, family, and companions, in general, cannot be held accountable for another person's bad conduct. According to this Qur'anic sanction, it is necessary to evaluate the uniqueness of each crime.³³

As a result, collective punishment is not a possibility. Nursi does not label any specific individuals as foes. Rather, the opponents he defines share a common trait. Nursi tries to bring together disparate elements of society and asks for a unified front to combat threats collectively. Nursi recognizes the mimetic urge in humankind and proposes a new definition of enemy as a result. Non-Muslims are not scapegoats; ignorance, strife, poverty, and unbelief are the constant adversaries.

Jihad against Unbelief and Conflict and the importance of Positive Action

Nursi's fight also includes combating violent atheism and agnosticism. He does not, however, support the use of violence in order to attain this purpose. Nursi promotes a gentle manner of confronting unbelief as Vahide correctly points out:

"In the fight against militant atheism and irreligion, the Risale-i Nur followed a peaceful jihad or 'jihad of the word' (ma'nevî jihad). It was to work solely for the spread and reinforcing of belief but also for the restoration of internal order, peace, and stability in society, in the face of communism's moral and spiritual destruction as well as forces of irreligion aiming to destabilize society to create anarchy, and to form "a barrier" against them".³⁴

Nursi placed nonviolent struggle at the center of his works by rejecting sword jihad or armed jihad. He consistently urged his students to work for societal peace and harmony. "Our obligation is 'positive action,' not 'negative action,'" Nursi said, referring to this as positive action (musbet hareket).³⁵

Nursi says in another letter to his students, "The most important obligation of the Risale-i Nur scholars at this period is adopting taqwa as the foundation of their efforts against the moral destruction."³⁶

Nursi developed such theories about Islam in modern times that emphasize the need for an important role of Islam in the development of scientific and technological development in public life. Nursi's writings are interpreted in the light of the Qur'an, science, and logic. His teachings laid a foundation for his movement. The major objectives of his movement included striving for a positive association of science and Islam, considering democracy as the best system of government within the framework of law, finding out the connection between reason and revelation, and emerging successful within the realm of halal trade and spiritual education.

Nursi does not allow for conflict since conflict can lead to disorder, chaos, and anarchy, directly opposing Allah's order and oneness. It is worth looking into a specific scene in Nursi's life to understand his idea of positive action better. Nursi returned to Van various years after World War I ended. When he resumed his madrasa, he discovered that, like the rest of the city's structures, it had been demolished by the Armenians during the Russian occupation. He recalled his acquaintances, brothers, and close classmates from his madrasa. Most of them had died in the war, which made Nursi shed tears as he recalled past tragedies.

He wrote his feelings like this:

"Then I realized that I could not tolerate this exile in my native land. I figured out I would have to join them in the afterlife or abandon them in a mountain cave and wait for my death there."³⁷

"Whatever is in the skies and on the planet, let it sing the praises and glory of Allah because He is exalted in Might, the Wise," he says, reflecting on one of the verses of the Holy Qur'an. "He has dominion over the heavens and the earth: He is the one who provides life and death, and He is the one who has power over everything."³⁸

Nursi discovered a way out of such hopeless circumstances due to this verse. He noticed the fruit on the tops of the fruit trees smiling and saying, "Take note of us as well." Do not just look at the wreckage." The poems' depiction of reality prompted him to consider the following:

This sensitive time in Nursi's life demonstrates how truly he took the concept of positive activity in his private life. Nursi refuses to hunt for a scapegoat or place blame on others no matter how bad or dismal the situation is. Even amid complete despair and sorrow, he clung to positive action. While analyzing Nursi's position on positive action, consider his response to why the Islamic world confronted so many tragedies, including the loss in World War One. He claimed that Allah ordered worshippers to spend one hour per day in prayers, but they were overpowered by sloths and failed to do so.

On the other hand, Allah pushed them to pray through military exercises and suffering. Allah commanded the faithful to keep fast for one month each year, but the instruction was disobeyed. People disobeyed Allah's command to pay the required alms-tax (zakat). As a result, Allah took all of the charitable contributions that the worshippers were meant to make.³⁹

Even while facing loss in one of the most catastrophic battles, Nursi was not inclined to criticize anyone or attribute responsibility to particular groups, as becomes obvious. The people who vanquished the Muslims, in his opinion, were not the problem's scapegoats. Rather, the Muslims were to blame for all the setbacks and disasters.

Finally, I would like to point out that forgiving and peacemaking, according to Said Nursi, should not be confined to Risale-i Nur students or, more broadly, to fellow Muslims. He claims that followers of the People of the Book- Jews and Christians should be permitted to make peace if they desire so. "*A Christian may,*" he states, "*accept some sacred matters and may believe in some of the prophets, and may assent to Almighty Allah in some respects.*"⁴⁰

The power of Badi-ul-Zaman Nursi is based on the fact that he understood his difficulties and compulsions and made a realistic assessment of the conditions in which Muslims are suffering. Unlike other Muslim leaders in the revival of Islam, they did not devise brilliant plans for Islam's global political, economic, and social system, which are unlikely to be implemented soon. Moreover, until the current social ills, including the foreign education system and other media, are eradicated, it is not even possible for parents to save their innocent offspring and new generations from their detrimental effects. Badi-ul-Zaman's visionary approach had well understood that participating in practical politics in such an environment would be futile and fruitless. He knew that gaining political power alone could not revive Islam. He believed that political revolution was not the way to an Islamic revolution because a counter-revolution could thwart such an Islamic revolution.

The result of this conflict will be more violence and oppression. Therefore, they acted prudently to avoid forming a rigid, inflexible organization because such an organization could quickly be banned by a dictator imprisoning its leaders and possibly hanging its workers. The offices of such an organization could be sealed, and its literature could be banned. Said Nursi, on the other hand, strengthened the roots of faith in the hearts of thousands of Turks through his preaching and his books. It was a movement that could not be banned, and even the most oppressive tyranny could not stop the spread of his teachings.

There is no exaggeration in the claim that there is a revival of Islam in Turkey today. Badi-ul-Zaman Nursi is the result of the tireless and unselfish struggle of Said Nursi, who realized that the greatest need of modern man is to create moral and spiritual awareness. Furthermore, young people need more than anything else to shift their thinking from materialism to spirituality. The Risale-i Nur is dedicated to this purpose compared to other Islamic movements, either suppressed by the people in power or became inactive and ineffective. Nursi's movement has achieved astonishing success with the help of Allah Almighty.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to examine Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's perspective on nonviolence ethics. Nursi believed that human nature is predisposed to violence and that imitation is essential in perpetuating that violence. Nursi also acknowledges that Muslims have historically employed violence, i.e., the sword, to achieve their objectives. Non-Muslims were considered a threat during the Islamic world's downfall, and they became scapegoats. As previously indicated, Nursi is not remorseful in this regard. The

physical battle was not unique to Islamic communities but was common in other societies as violence had always been a component of human lives.

As a result, the context must be taken into account. Nursi considers that humanity has progressed to a new epoch of civilization and knowledge. The use of violence to preach Islam is no longer an option. As a result, he changes the target of the scapegoat mechanism. Belief is the most effective approach to engaging with non-Muslims in the age of civilization. They have the potential to be allies of the Muslims in the strife for world peace and justice as well as in the struggle against disbelief. Ignorance, strife, disbelief, and hostility are the new targets of the scapegoat mechanism.

Nursi's writings have been compiled in 6,000 pages under the title of "Risale-e-Noor". This collection is the most important intellectual and spiritual asset of the twentieth century. Nursi has labelled this literature as the modern understanding of the Qur'an. Today, Nursi's mission revolves around the same writings. Many universities worldwide are writing Ph.D. dissertations on Nursi's thoughts and personality.

Nursi's most outstanding achievement is that Nursi did not only oppose Kamal Ataturk's actions in Turkey during his regime when his efforts were being made to eradicate Islamic identity in the name of reforms, but also he became a strong wall against it. It should be noted that Said Nursi is recognized as a popular figure in all Islamic countries, including Turkey. His services extend to Islamic studies, sociology, science, and modern education.

World peace is direly needed today because it is the age of development of science and technology. Scientific inventions have diminished distances worldwide and turned it into a global village. Today, the news of the West travels much faster to the East, and the news of the East reaches speedily to the West. Even so, the critical events can be watched live on the internet. The West is being affected by the developments in the East and vice versa. Therefore, peace is essential for the modern world to thrive and move forward.

Nursi also suggests a modern concept in which he evaluates a person's qualities by being unbiased of his or her religious affiliations. By contrasting and comparing Nursi's approach to violence with that of other scholars, it will become clear how distinct Nursi's method is and how firmly Nursi's knowledge encourages co-existence and harmony among various segments of the world.

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