

**THIRD INTERNATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM ON
BEDIUZZAMAN
SAID NURSI**

**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC
THOUGHT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
AND BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI**

**24th-26th September, 1995
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Translated from the Turkish
by Şükran Vahide

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A Treasury Yet To Be Discovered: Said Nursi

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As is well-known, the Islamic world possesses a rich history of thought. This thought resembles an undiscovered treasure. Unlike some Westerners have claimed, Islamic thought never came to a standstill. From the early period of Islam to the present, great scholars, philosophers, theologians, sufis, and experts in the law have produced works which have enriched world culture. Without doubt, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, whom we lost thirty-five years ago, formed an important link in this rich intellectual tradition. But although he was a son of this land and gave it many works, it is a sad fact that the people here have not benefited from him as they should.

Bediuzzaman came into a world in which was upsidedown. Our world was in a state of total decline. The military defeats that had started previously were continuing, the centre of the Caliphate was being shaken to its roots, the greater part of the Islamic world was occupied by colonialists. It was a critical, unhappy period, when the military and political defeat of the Islamic world was almost total. If we consider the intellectual life of the Islamic world at that time, we see that the greater part of the intellectuals had been drawn into the gravitational field of the West. The intellectuals and political elite had lost their confidence in their own history and religion, and their true values, which had raised them to heights in the past. The leadership of society had passed from the hands of the Islamic leaders to those of a Westernized elite.

Within the Islamic world, ethnic and nationalist clashes had reached a peak; it was being split up. The agents of the West were acting as they pleased in every part of the Islamic lands, causing dissension and corruption among the Muslims. The whole Islamic world and Ottoman Empire were sunk in poverty, deprivation, and hopelessness.

Said Nursi was the suffering son of those unhappy times. He was moreover, someone who lived through the Constitutional Period, the single party period of the Republic, and the multi-party period. All these bitter yet varied experiences gave him a mature outlook and constantly drove him to search for something new and different.

We know that in the early period, Said Nursi's hopes were tied for the most part to active politics, taking him on occasion to the Court, the Sultan, and the rulers. He was received by the Sultan and presented projects for the revitalization of the Ottomans. But he later realized that the decline had penetrated further and he directed his activities into other fields. Bediuzzaman realized clearly this fact that the Ottoman intellectuals and elite class had lost their belief and had been overcome with admiration for the forces that had defeated them; they thought that the best way out was to imitate them.

This accurate diagnosis of Bediuzzaman drove him to turn to 'belief' as the prescription for salvation. In some ways, he redefined belief, saying that it was the major source of energy and strength of the Islamic world. If Muslims and the Islamic world were to be saved, this would only be possible by their spirits being reinfused with the transformative power of belief.

The idea that Said Nursi belittled politics and even considered it to be harmful is not true. He rightly saw that the Islamic world was in need of a new leap forward and that it would gain this energy from belief, thought, and knowledge. Furthermore, he looked at the political life of that time, which followed no moral values whatsoever and had degenerated into demogogy and opportunism, and said that it was not fitting for Muslims to engage in it, and no one could object to that.

There is another characteristic of Said Nursi which should be mentioned, and that was the consistency of his ideas throughout his life. He truly lived as he thought and believed. He never bowed to tyranny, never compromised his beliefs, and never feared. He passed his life in prison and in exile. He many times returned from the threshold of death, but he was absolutely undefeated. Doubtless, Said Nursi is an example to everyone in this matter.

I mentioned at the start of my speech that like many thinkers and men of learning, Said Nursi is a treasury waiting to be discovered.

And indeed, the Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman held between 24th and 26th September contributed significantly in the discovery of this treasure and has drawn the attention of many people towards it.