

**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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Bediuzzaman's Call to Brotherhood and Unity

Prof. Dr. Nevzat Yalçınas

My Dear Brothers and Esteemed Guests!

I greet you all most cordially. May God's mercy and blessings be upon you. Welcome to this fine city and auspicious meeting. I hope that those who have come from abroad will depart from this magnificent city with positive feelings and good impressions. Together with other Islamic cities, Istanbul has been a centre of Islam and Islamic culture and civilization. For four centuries it held in its heart the Islamic Caliphate and was the symbol of the Muslims' unity throughout the world. Today too, with its more than 10 million Muslim people, its more than a thousand mosques and their minarets pointing to the skies like raised fingers testifying to God's Unity, and its hundreds of educational institutions, libraries, and museums, and thousands of Islamic works, Istanbul continues to develop its identity as a great city of Islam of which Muslims everywhere may feel proud.

I beseech Almighty God that this Symposium will be successful. The success of the previous two International Symposia on Bediuzzaman, and their being met enthusiastically by academics and others who participated or were concerned, was a source of encouragement to organize this present Symposium. In this Symposium, many papers will be read and discussions will be held centering on the theme 'The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman,' and much effort will be expended to reach useful conclusions. It is my conviction that the results will be very positive and beneficial.

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was an exceptional religious scholar who held up a light both to the period in which he lived, and to today, and to the future, as is to be clearly observed. His works and exemplary life stand before us today in all their freshness and vitality. The period he lived coincided with a time of deep

crisis, not only for the Ottoman Empire and for Turkey, but for the whole Islamic world. The 19th century was a period of darkness for the Muslim countries and peoples, a time of division, decline, and breaking up, one result of which was the active domination of Europe. With the exception of Turkey and a small number of other Muslim countries which could be counted on the fingers of one hand, by the first quarter of the 20th century all the Islamic lands and peoples from west to east as far as the Pacific Ocean had become the colonies and captives of the imperialist powers.

The religious scholars of Islam are like stars which shine in the skies of the darkest nights, showing the direction to be followed; they are full moons lighting up the world. Said Nursi too dedicated his whole life till his very last breath to teaching, explaining, and spreading the truths of our faith at a time when the Muslims had lost their confidence in themselves, their belief had become weak, and the clouds of despair enveloped everywhere. He was a true Islamic scholar who always taught the truths of Islam and strove to plant the banner of faith on the highest peaks. In the same way that true scholars of religion and science throughout history have suffered hardship and even oppression because they spoken out their ideas and the truth, so Bediuzzaman passed such a life. And so too until recently, did his students.

Bediuzzaman endeavoured to explain and spread the truths of belief, which are like lights illuminating the darkness, yet at the same time, he felt an infinite sorrow and pain at the situation of the Islamic world, with its division and disunity and having fallen captive to others. He expended a supreme effort to make known the ways for it to be delivered from its abasement. Doubtless, the chief of his solutions was the opposite of the division and disunity: unity, togetherness, and accord.

If the chief subject in all Bediuzzaman's works, and the key idea, is "belief," "unity" follows close behind it. The idea of unity and Islamic Unity in particular is worked with great clarity in many of his works. He attached such importance to the unity of Muslims that in the newspaper article he published on 27th March 1909 entitled *Sada-yi Haqiqat*, he expressed this same idea as follows:

"...There is no hypocrisy in performing the obligatory practices of Islam. The greatest obligatory duty at this time is Islamic Unity."

What Bediuzzaman meant by the goal and concept of "Islamic Unity" is defined as follows in his work *Rumûz*:

"What is Islamic Unity? Islamic Unity is a luminous gathering which stretches from East to West and from South to North... We have joined this assembly through the pre-eternal contract and through belief, which is our oath and promise. We are people who profess Divine unity, we are charged with unity."

It is seen here that in this approach unity and wholeness is tied to the soundest principle and established on the firmest ground. Before everything it is a unity of spirits, of hearts, belief, and ideas. What is meant primarily by the "luminous assembly" is just such an accord of hearts and minds. Similarly, in his Damascus Sermon, Bediuzzaman showed clearly by his words: "the aim and goal of unity

is upholding the Word of God," that is, holding the truth to be superior to everything, the elevated idea and understanding on which Islamic Unity was based. He said too that "consultation" was an indispensable component of Islamic Unity, and that unity of that sort was possible only through knowledge and the reconciliation of ideas. He said in his work *Münâzarat*:

"But unity is not possible through ignorance; unity is the coming together of minds and mingling of ideas."

Besides demonstrating that consultation and the reconciliation of ideas are the chief factors for securing unity, by rejecting every sort of compulsion in religion and advocating love and persuasion, Bediuzzaman pointed out the firmest ground for uniting Muslims. This is where freedom and democracy are to be found. Thus, he points out the aim to be unity, achieved through belief and knowledge, and wants this to be realized through a method that might be called democracy.

The treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* recommend unity and togetherness and insistently advise against ignorance, dissension, division, and anarchy. Said Nursi pointed to Islamic Unity as the goal, and did not stop at saying "The way of Unity is love" in speeches and writings, he himself strove to bring back to the straight path those who had deviated into division. We can say this easily if we consider the main characteristics of the conflict, a result of which are the savage crimes and destruction to be witnessed today in our country. The *Risale-i Nur* is the most effective way to save those unfortunate youths who have caught the sickness of racialism and got stuck in the bog of division and terror. It is a great pity that those heedless people who cannot see this clear fact, those who themselves have taken the way of anarchy and division, for long years battled against the *Risale-i Nur*. They lost their own way and caused harm to this country.

The Islamic Unity that Bediuzzaman envisaged was not restricted to an abstract belief or idea, he formulated it as a concrete fact. This was his goal of 'Jamahir-i Muttafiqah-i Islamiya,' or 'United Islamic States.' At the present time as we approach the 21st. century, various large regional unification projects are being realized: NAFTA, which includes almost all North America; EU, which unites Europe; BDT, which will unite the republics of the former Soviet Union; and APEC in the Far East.

The Islamic world stands divided before the large areas covered by the uniting countries. While in this state, it is like the soft underbelly and weak point of the world, open to intervention and attack of every sort. The official organizations of the Islamic world like the Islamic Conference, Economic Co-operation Organization, Gulf Co-operation Council, and the Maghrib Union have not been able to achieve the desired results.

The Islamic Conference has been ineffective in solving armed clashes between Muslims, and has been discredited to a large extent. But it has finally made its existence felt as part of the 'Contact Group' by ensuring the security of Bosnian Muslims and protecting their rights.

Why is it that these organizations set up among the Islamic countries with the aim of establishing unity between Muslims and co-operation in the most important and urgent questions have been unable to achieve these desired results? One may search for the answers to this question, but it may be said that the basic reason is their failure to unite in their hearts, minds, and ideas, despite all their organizing and coming together. It is essentially a struggle of belief, knowledge and learning, a question of uniting the sources of strength; only then will united will achieve true unity.

The "luminous gathering" held here today with so many Muslims coming together from far and wide is an eloquent sign of this, and bodes well for the future. There is greater need today for Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's message than at any other time. We are obliged to understand it and relate it to others in greater depth and with greater consciousness. I hope and pray that the Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman will bring us closer to this aim.

I offer my sincere respects, and again welcome you all here.

May our Symposium have every success!

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