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

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by Şükran Vahide

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Jihad in the Modern Age: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad

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Introduction

Before examining Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's interpretation of jihad, it is worth recalling one or two points about the concept generally. Firstly is the important place it holds in Islam; the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) described it as "the apex of lofty Islam."¹ And when asked if there was anything equal to "jihad in God's way," he replied: "There is nothing you can do [which is equal to it]."²

A further point worth recalling is its broad meaning. Far from being restricted to "holy war against the infidel," as is sometimes portrayed, the term jihad, which is derived from the root *jahada*, meaning to strive, strain, or exert oneself to the utmost, covers a wide range of meanings.

For example, in the work *Zâd al-Ma'âd*, jihad is described as consisting of

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1. İbn Kayyim el-Cevziyye, *Zâdu'l-Meâd* (Turkish trans. Özen and others), İstanbul, İklim Yayınları 1989, iii, 121.

2. *Kütüb-i Sitté* (Turkish trans. and commentary İbrahim Cânan), Ankara, Akçağ Yayınları 1988, v, 26.

four main "steps" or "stages:" jihad against the soul, against Satan, against unbelievers, and against dissemblers. The first of these consists of four "stages:" striving with the soul to learn the True Religion; the second, striving to act in accordance with this knowledge; the third, striving to teach it to others; and the fourth, to exercise patience and be constant in the face of the difficulties and oppression suffered in calling others to God's religion. Jihad with Satan consists of two "stages:" firstly, striving to repulse the seeds of doubt Satan sows in a person's heart concerning belief; and second, striving to renounce the corrupt desires which Satan suggests. The first of these jihads, that with the soul, gains "firm and certain belief" for a person, while the second gains them patience and persistence. As for the third and fourth main "stages," that is, jihad with unbelievers and dissemblers, these consist of four "stages:" jihad with the heart, with the tongue, with possessions, and with one's life. While jihad against unbelievers is with the sword, that is, with force, jihad against dissemblers is with the tongue; that is, through argument, proof, and persuasion.

A final "stage" is added, jihad against oppressors, innovators and wrongdoers, consisting of three further "stages:" if one has the power, by force; if one does not have the power, to strive against them verbally; and if that is not possible, to oppose them in one's heart.³

In other works, jihad has been defined as "conscious, active, and continuous endeavour to learn the injunctions of Islam, teach them to others, practise them in both personal and social life and encourage others to do so, to call others to Islam, and overcome all obstacles in the enactment of all these, that is, obstacles both on a personal level, and within the society concerned, and from outside it.⁴ And its purpose has been described as: "assisting God's religion and upholding His Word,"⁵ and "vanquishing disbelief and making right [*haqq*] prevail."⁶

Verses revealed in Mecca before the Hijra and Divine permission to meet force with force⁷ enjoined the Prophet (PBUH) as follows: "Therefore listen not to the unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness [*jihadan kabīran*], with the [Qur'an]."⁸ This illustrates on the one hand the importance of jihad with "the tongue", that is, striving to uphold Islam and God's Word through knowledge, argument and intellectual exertion, and on the other hand, that jihad has to be in conformity with conditions, and in a form that meets the requirements of the situation.

Having shown the broad meaning of jihad and its importance in Islam, this paper will discuss Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's interpretation and exemplary practice of it, rather than containing further discussions of it as defined in the various types of Islamic literature.

3. *Zâdu'l-Meâd*, iii, 24-5; 198.

4. *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*.—'Cihad' (Ahmet Özel), İstanbul, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı 1993, vii, 530-1.

5. Elmalılı M. Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, İstanbul, Zaman/Azim n.d., ii, 167; iv, 347.

6. *Hak Dini*, ii, 153.

7. Qur'an, 22:39.

8. Qur'an, 25:52.

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Interpretation of Jihad

On studying Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's interpretation of jihad, a striking point is the continuity in his ideas on the subject throughout his life, both as the Old Said and the New Said. This is striking because of the great changes both the outside world and he himself had undergone between these two major periods of his life.

The Old Said covered the period of Bediuzzaman's youth until the end of the First World War, the final decades of the Ottoman Empire, when Islam was still "the cause of life of the state, and its religion."⁹

The defeat in the war saw the collapse of the Empire, and the following years, the emergence of the New Said, who in contrast to the Old Said and his many and varied endeavours, withdrew entirely from public life of all kinds. This characteristic was reinforced when Turkey's new leaders took the path of Westernization and Bediuzzaman began his lifetime of exile. Rather than being (nominally) the basis of the state, under the cover of secularization, Islam was now to be systematically extirpated from all aspects of life. Yet despite the apparent differences in the conditions, and in Bediuzzaman's lifestyle and the nature of his striving and activities, there are numerous points of similarity and continuity in his ideas. So that, although his interpretation of jihad found its maturity and complete expression with the Risale-i Nur and the struggle of the New Said, it is of benefit to outline his view and practice of it in the former period.

The Old Said's View and Practice of Jihad

The first important factor moulding Bediuzzaman's interpretation of jihad is related to the modern age being the age of science and 'civilization.' He wrote:

"In former times, that is, when savagery prevailed, force and compulsion ruled in the world, which are the product of savagery and doomed to decline and extinction... When civilization prevails, what rules the world are science and knowledge..."¹⁰ And again:

"At the end of time, mankind will spill into science and learning. It will obtain all its strength from science. Power and rule will pass to the hand of science."¹¹

The concomitant of the domination of science and reason is that, again as Bediuzzaman points out, "Men will find their most effective weapon in eloquent expression."¹² That is, with both the advances of science and technology, and man's progress, and the resulting emergence of the age of mass communication, men will strive to make others accept their ideas through eloquence and persuasion. Thus, the mass media having come to pervade all aspects of life, the struggle between truth and falsehood, belief and unbelief, will be —or we can say

9. Bediuzzaman'nın Fihriste-i Maksadı, Volkan No. 83, in *Âsâr-ı Bedi'îye*, n.p., n.d., 375.

10. *Âsâr-ı Bedi'îye*, 351-2; *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, İstanbul, Sözlür Yayınevi 1975, 63.

11. Nursî, Bediuzzaman Said, *Sözlür*, İstanbul, Sözlür Y. 1980, 246 / *The Words* [Eng. trans.], Sözlür Publications 1993, 272.

12. Ibid.

is— for the most part a battle for hearts and minds, a battle of persuasion, of ideas and civilization. It is primarily cultural and economic war, rather than physical jihad. Though of course this continues under particular conditions and on a number of fronts.

The second factor moulding the Old Said's interpretation of jihad is related to the first in so far as the Islamic world had not kept abreast of the development of science in the West, and had therefore remained backward in respect of technology and progress. Besides opening the way to subjugation by its traditional enemy, this had also left the Qur'an and fundamentals of Islam open to attack, particularly with the rise of materialist philosophy.

Scholarly Jihad (*Jihad-i 'Ilmî*)

Thus, we see that it was the above points which exercised most influence on Bediüzzaman in his youth, causing him to prepare himself for a new form of struggle. His intention to defend the Qur'an against the threats and attacks to which it was subject was crystalized when, around the turn of the century, he learned of the explicit threats to it made by the British statesman Gladstone. This event was a sort of turning point for him, and caused him to dedicate his life and learning to its defence.¹³ He had by that time mastered most of the modern physical and mathematical sciences in addition to the traditional religious sciences. Various events such as the dream he had at the beginning of the First World War,¹⁴ strengthened his resolve to prove "the Qur'an's miraculousness," that is, its being the revealed Word of God and source of man's true progress, moral, spiritual, and material.

Bediüzzaman prepared himself for this scholarly jihad from an early age, for it states in his 'official biography' that when aged around sixteen or seventeen [that is, around 1892-4] while in Bitlis, the purpose of his intense study of the major sources of the Islamic sciences was "to answer the doubts and scepticism concerning Islam"¹⁵ [caused by attacks made in the name of Western science and philosophy, and progress]. He then in Van, uniquely for religious scholars of the Eastern Provinces at that date, studied and mastered the modern sciences, for he had "formed the opinion that this century, the old style of the science of *kalām* (scholastic theology) was insufficient to refute the doubts that had been raised about the religion of Islam." In other words, one of the aims of his scholarly jihad was the updating of *kalām*.

Bediüzzaman did not restrict these endeavours to the acquisition of knowledge, the project he most actively pursued throughout that period was the founding of his Eastern University, the *Medresetü'z-Zehrâ*, where his ideas on educational reform, and particularly the combined teaching of the traditional and modern sciences, would be put into practice.

13. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, İstanbul, Sinan Matbaası 1960, 76.

14. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Mektûbat*, İstanbul, Sözleryayinevi 1981, 343 / *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Letters 1928-1932* [Eng. trans.] Sözleryayinevi 1994, 433.

15. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, Hayatı, Mesleki, Tercüme-i Hâli* (Tarihçe), Sözleryayinevi 1976, 43.

Civilization and Jihad

Bediuzzaman's aim with these endeavours was the re-establishment of Islamic civilization, which forms the centre of his cause. For in his view, Islam was the source of true civilization, hence it was only within the framework of Islam that the Islamic world could truly progress and regain its rightful position of dominance. So too, mankind as a whole could only find salvation and peace through Islam and the establishment of Islamic civilization.

Mistakenly attributing the scientific advance from which the clear military and economic superiority of Europe had sprung to Western thought and civilization, particularly with the Tanzimat, Turkey's rulers had begun discarding Islam and adopting Western models in many areas of life; in other words, they had begun the process of Westernization. However, rather than taking "beneficial things" like science and technology from the West, which Bediuzzaman advocated, they had taken "its iniquities and evils"... "and giving religion as the bride, they had not even gained the world."¹⁶ Although the intention was undoubtedly to strengthen the Ottoman Empire and halt its decline, the results of these unfortunate moves were mostly the reverse, serving to increase the Ottoman's subjugation to Europe, not only economically and in material fields, but also intellectually. A lack of confidence in Islam was engendered among Ottomans who had been open to European influence; following Islam's enemies, they formed the opinion that Islam was opposed to science and progress, and was the reason even for the Ottoman decline.

Thus, Bediuzzaman's endeavour was to demonstrate that in reality the opposite was true; just as civilization was not "the property of Christianity,"¹⁷ so too, Islam "is the master of all attainment... and has been decked out with true civilization and positive, true sciences;"¹⁸ Islam enjoins progress and comprises all the necessities of civilization.¹⁹ It is for this reason that, as Bediuzzaman frequently pointed out citing the evidence of history, Muslims have increased in civilization and progressed to the degree they have adhered to their religion; and whenever they have become lax in religion, they have retrogressed and suffered defeat. While the opposite is true for members of other religions.²⁰

Both during the former period and under the Republic, Bediuzzaman made many comparisons between Western civilization and Islamic civilization, in order to demonstrate these points. The basic difference between the two arises from the fact that Islamic civilization is based on Divine Revelation, while Western civilization is based on the principles of Greek and Roman philosophy. Because Western civilization has drawn distant from true Christianity, the evils

16. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, İstanbul, Sinan Matbaası 1960, 31 / *Damascus Sermon* (Eng. trans.) Sözlcr Publications 1989, 26.

17. See, Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Sünûhat*, Sözlcr Yayınevi 1977, 60-1; *Mektûbat*, 445 / *Letters*, 547.

18. *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, 29 / *Damascus Sermon*, 25.

19. Bediüzzaman'ın Fihriste-i Maksadı, Volkan No. 83, in *Âsâr-ı Bedi'îye*, 373.

20. See, *Hutbe-i Şâmiye* 18-19 / *Damascus Sermon*, 14-15; Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Münâzarat*, Sözlcr Yayınevi 1977, 38; *Sünûhat*, 36.

of civilization have come to preponderate over its beneficial aspects. Dissipation and sensuality, and social and economic injustice, have come to prevail, which having led to its decline, will eventually cause its break up and make way for the establishment of Islamic civilization.²¹

It was in view of these facts that Bediuzzaman stated that this age, 'upholding—or exalting—the Word of God,' which is one of the aims of jihad and is incumbent on all believers, was "dependent on material progress;" upholding the Word of God was "possible by attaining true civilization.... In the future, the immaterial swords of true civilization, material progress and truth and justice will rout and scatter the enemy, in place of the [physical] sword."²²

Moreover, in Bediuzzaman's view, the essential enemy of the Muslims this age was not the 'outside' enemy, it was the threesome of "ignorance, poverty, and conflict"—the antithesis of Islam. It was these "pitiless" enemies and their consequences that had been the cause of the Islamic world's decline, and prevented Muslims performing the duty of upholding the Word of God.²³ A passage summarizing this is also taken from one of Bediuzzaman's newspaper articles of that time:

"All believers are charged with upholding the Word of God. At this time, the most effective means of this is material progress, for the Europeans are crushing us under their 'immaterial' tyranny with the weapons of science and industry. We therefore shall wage jihad with the same weapons against 'ignorance, poverty, and conflicting ideas,' the most fearsome enemies of upholding the Word of God. As for external jihad, that we shall refer to the decisive proofs of the Illustrious Shari'a, for the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not by force, as though they were savages who understand nothing."²⁴

External Jihad According to the Old Said

The above sentences summarize the form Bediuzzaman considered external jihad should take ideally in the modern world. Formerly, in the Middle Ages, Muslims had been compelled to wield the sword in the face of the barbarism, bigotry, and aggression of that time. But "in [this] time of civilization, Europeans are civilized and powerful... [and] from the point of view of religion, the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not by force, and by showing through complying to its commands by act and good morals, that Islam is elevated and worthy of being loved."²⁵

Thus, in addition to being an important element of progress, to adopt and practise the morality of Islam, thus showing its elevated and lovable character, was also an important element of "upholding the Word of God," and would be a means of large numbers of mankind entering Islam, so that Bediuzzaman wrote:

21. See, Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, *Muhâkemat*, Sözleryayinevi 1977, 37-8. For comparisons between the two, see, *Sünûhat*, 43-6; *Sözleryayinevi*, 119-120, 379-382, 664-6; Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, *İşârâtü'l-İ'caz*, Sözleryayinevi 1978, 47-9.

22. *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, 30 / *Damascus Sermon*, 25.

23. *Reddül-Evham*, Volkan No. 91, in *Âsâr-ı Bedi'îye*, 381; *Hutbe-i Şâmiye* 86.

24. *Hakikat*, Volkan No. 70, in *Âsâr-ı Bedi'îye*, 368; *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, 78; *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 49.

"If we were to display through our actions the perfections of the moral qualities of Islam and the truths of belief, without doubt, the followers of other religions would enter Islam in whole communities; indeed, some entire regions and states on the globe of the earth would take refuge in Islam."²⁶

The last point is of importance in connection with this ideal view of external jihad. As was mentioned above, it was Bediuzzaman's firm conviction that mankind would find salvation in the true religion of Islam and that through it universal peace would be established. He put forward many arguments to support this claim and reiterated it on numerous occasions. In short, he stated that mankind had been "awakened" this century by scientific advance on the one hand, and war and similar appalling events on the other. Having come to understand his comprehensive nature and potentialities, man could no longer live without religion; he had to find the true purpose of life.²⁷

The Old Said's Physical Jihad

It should not be thought from the above that Bediuzzaman was in any way opposed to physical jihad. When conditions demanded it, that is, in the face of external aggression, Bediuzzaman was one of the most heroic fighters in the defence of his country. Not a small part of his early life was spent on the battlefield. The great likelihood is that he fought in the Balkan War in 1913²⁸ and assisted in the preparation of the jihad *fatwa* on the outbreak of the First World War and the dangerous task of the distribution of the jihad proclamation, travelling to North Africa by submarine in the spring of 1915.²⁹ And the militia he formed in eastern Anatolia on the orders of Enver Paşa, the Felt Caps, were such valiant and effective fighters that they were terror of the Armenian *dashnak* revolutionaries and the Russians. Bediuzzaman was also awarded a War Medal for his outstanding service against the Russians.

A point that should be noted, however, is that Bediuzzaman did not lay aside his pen when fighting this jihad against the Russian invasion. Not disdaining to enter the trenches even under the heavy Russian shelling, he continued to expound the mysteries of the Qur'an's word-order, dictating to a scribe while on horseback. More than anything, this demonstrates how urgent he considered his scholarly jihad to be, as he himself states in his preface to the work, which he called *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*.³⁰

26. *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, 20 / *Damascus Sermon*, 16.

27. See, *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, 20-8; 32-7; *Münâzarat*, 37-8.

28. See, Şükran Vahide, *The Author of the Risale-i Nur*, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, İstanbul, Sözler Publications 1992, 111-3; 115 fn 23.

29. See, Şahiner, N., *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla Bediüzzaman Said Nursî*, İstanbul, Yeni Asya Yayınları, 5th edn. 1976, 148-53; *Nurs Yolu*, Yeni Asya Yayınları 1977, 137-40, quoted from Cemal Kutay.

30. *İşârâtü'l-I'jâz*, 7-8.

Two Important Points — Concerning Political Struggle and Public Order

It was Bediuzzaman's fate to be accused of the reverse of his actions, both in the period of the Old Said and under the Republic as the New Said. Although in the early period, he was 'a public figure' and participated actively in those areas of public life he believed would serve the cause of Islam and the Ottoman Empire, he avoided direct involvement in politics. He did not consider political struggle to be an appropriate form of jihad either at that time, or subsequently. Any involvement he had with politics was for the purpose of making politics serve religion, to point out Islamic principles to those in power, or to seek ways of directing the trend of events into Islamic channels. This question is dealt with in greater length below. Even in respect of Islamic Unity, a cause he actively pursued throughout the early period of his life and again spoke of in his last ten years, when speaking in 1911 of the federation of the Islamic states he foresaw and the forthcoming domination of Islam, he immediately added:

"Beware, my brothers! Do not fancy or imagine that I am urging you with these words to busy yourselves with politics. God forbid! The truth of Islam is above all politics. All politics may serve it, but no politics can make Islam a tool for itself!"³¹

Although writing in the name of the *İttihad-ı Muhammedî Cemiyeti*, the Society For Muslim Unity, we may take the following as describing his own view:

"Our way is concerned only with morality and religion... The way of our society is love for love among Muslims, and enmity towards enmity among them; its path is to be moulded by the moral qualities of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and to revive his practices (*Sunna*); its guide is the Illustrious Shari'a; its sword, decisive logical proofs; and its aim, to uphold the Word of God."³²

"The Society's way is to wage the greater jihad (*jihad-i akbar*) with one's own [instinctual] soul, and to guide others. Ninety-nine percent of [its] aspiration is directed, not to politics, but to licit aims that are the opposite of politics like fine morals and right conduct, and such like..."³³

A second point concerning which Bediuzzaman was falsely accused by Courts both in the Constitutional Period and under the Republic —and a matter central to his understanding of jihad— was the question of the maintenance of internal order and public security. This question is also discussed in greater detail below. Here we shall only mention that although Bediuzzaman was arrested following the 31st March Incident on the pretext of involvement in the *İttihad-ı Muhammedî Cemiyeti*, which was accused of inciting the revolt, he had in fact through newspaper articles and personal addresses persuaded no less than eight battalions of mutinying soldiers to obey their officers and return to barracks, thus helping to quell the revolt.³⁴ Moreover, using his influence and reputation and employing his gift of powerful oratory, because of the great impor-

31. *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, 49-50 / *Damascus Sermon*, 43.

32. Bediüzzaman'ın *Fihriste-i Maksadî*, Volkan No. 84, in *Âsâr-ı Bedî'îye*, 386.

33. *Reddül-Evham*, Volkan No. 90, in *Âsâr-ı Bedî'îye*, 381; *Hutbe-i Şâmiye*, 85.

34. See, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 22-5.

tance he attached to this matter, Bediuzzaman calmed many volatile situations in that troubled period. Examples are the meeting of Kurdish porters during the boycott of Austrian goods, the disorder during Mizancı Murad Bey's lecture in the Ferah Theatre in Şehzadebaşı, and the meeting of medrese students in Beyazıt in February 1909.³⁵

A Summary

Thus, if we attempt a summary of Bediuzzaman's ideas on jihad in this first period of his life, we can say that although he participated in a number of 'physical jihads' in exemplary fashion, in his view the basic and most essential struggle in the modern age—together with the revival of the Prophet's (PBUH) *Sunna* and Islamic morality—was one of science, progress, and civilization. The question of importance was the waging of jihad on "ignorance, poverty, and internal conflict," which were the essential cause of the Islamic world's backwardness relative to the West. Thus, a greater part of Bediuzzaman's endeavour was concerned with education and educational reform, at the heart of which lay the bringing together and reconciliation of the religious and modern sciences.

Bediuzzaman insisted that contrary to the accusations of its enemies, Islam was "the master and guide of the sciences, and chief and father of all true knowledge,"³⁶ and source of true civilization. Whereas, since it is founded on corrupt philosophical principles rather than Divine Revelation, Western civilization would eventually "break up" despite its present superior scientific knowledge, industry and technology, and mankind would enter Islam in large numbers.

Since Islam enjoins progress and comprises all the essentials of civilization, and with its superior science and technology the West was holding the Islamic world under subjection, the prime duty of Muslims was to work for progress and material development. In the present age, "upholding the Word of God" takes this form.

The bringing together of the Islamic and modern sciences was also to make possible the reformulation of the Islamic sciences in the light of modern advances in knowledge. Some of the fruits of Bediuzzaman's endeavours in this last field have been preserved in his original works of *Muhâkemat*, which in his words, he wrote to establish the principles of Qur'anic exegesis,³⁷ and *Ishârât al-I'jâz*, mentioned above, which in addition to expounding the miraculousness of the Qur'an's word-order, to an extent brings together Islamic and modern knowledge.

However, despite all his endeavours and striving, scholarly and otherwise, during the period of the Old Said, Bediuzzaman stated that in fact—with the exception of *Ishârât al-I'jâz*—"due to the many deceiving obstacles" of that time, he did not in fact "take up the duty" of taking the Qur'an's miraculousness as his "guide" and using his knowledge "to prove [its] truths," which he had

35. *The Author of the Risale-i Nur*, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 68-71.

36. *Muhâkemat*, 8.

37. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Sualar*, İstanbul, Çeltüt Matbaası 1960, 152; *Muhâkemat*, 153.

resolved to do at the turn of the century on learning of the threats facing the Qur'an and Islamic world.³⁸ It was as the New Said that he assumed the duty.

Thus, in the period of the Ottoman Empire, when Islam was dominant, Bediuzzaman performed his "scholarly jihad" with the aim of hastening material progress and cultural and economic development. But after the founding of the Republic and a policy of secularization and Westernization was adopted, he concentrated entirely on saving and strengthening the religious belief of the Muslim people of Turkey, which was then under direct attack. Despite the apparent differences in Bediuzzaman's endeavours in these two periods, there are many points of continuity, and these became clear as Bediuzzaman's jihad unfolded over the thirty-five years of the second period of his life, as we shall attempt to point out.

The New Said

With the establishment of the Republic in 1923, elements opposed to Islam gained dominance, who used the power of the state to progressively impose an alien 'non-Islamic' system on Turkey's Muslim society. Adopting branches of government and administration from various Western countries, and a base of positivist philosophy, the aim was the creation of "modern" Western-style "secular" state. Just as Western culture and manners were to become the mode of life in Turkey, so were the principles of Western materialist philosophy to be made the basis of life. In short, materialist philosophy was to take the place of the Islamic religion.

In this way, Turkey became as though at the forefront of the battle against unbelief and materialism, in the form this struggle has taken in the contemporary world. Just as it had been the centre of the Caliphate for four hundred years, "carrying the banner of the Islamic world" and leading it physical jihad. So that Bediuzzaman himself stated on a number of occasions that if he had been in Mecca even, he would have come to Turkey to "carry out this service of the Qur'an, to save belief..."³⁹

In examining Bediuzzaman's response to these developments, there are two points worth mentioning which will assist in illuminating it. Firstly is that with his transformation into the New Said, he had taken the Qur'an as his "sole guide;" all his subsequent work and thought were inspired directly by it.

In addition, from the outset, Bediuzzaman had understood the path Turkey's new leaders were going to take, and that they were not to be combatted in the realm of politics. According to his 'official' biography, he realized that it was only with "the sword of the Qur'an's miraculousness" that the irreligion they represented would be defeated.⁴⁰ Thus, he withdrew entirely from social and political life, and when sent into exile in 1925, began to write treatises proving

38. *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, 76.

39. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, İstanbul, Sinan Matbaası 1959, i, 191.

40. *Tarihçe*, 131.

the fundamentals of belief which were inspired directly by the Qur'an. In other words, the state of decline which had allowed for a regime opposed to Islam to be established in what had been the centre of the Caliphate, pointing to the seriousness of the Islamic world's ailments, called for repair, renewal, and reconstruction of the most basic nature.

"Mânevî Jihad"

Bediuzzaman called the struggle he initiated "mânevî jihad" and "positive action;" which may be translated as "non-physical jihad," "jihad of the word," or "moral jihad." The appropriateness of this jihad is indicated by the fact that not only did the movement for the renewal of belief that Bediuzzaman started continuously spread and gain in strength from its inception, but also, after some twenty years of struggle in the late 1940's, he was able to claim that the Risale-i Nur had "broken the back of unbelief" and "routed atheism."⁴¹ Moreover, it was undoubtedly the Risale-i Nur movement and its successful method of "positive action" which laid the basis of the resurgence of Islam that has been observed in Turkey in recent years, and made it possible.

A key passage describing the concept of 'mânevî jihad' Bediuzzaman included at the end of the Eleventh Ray (*Meyve Risalesi*), as a 'Supplement' to the 'Addendum' to the Eleventh Topic. Part of the passage is as follows:

"The verse, *There is no compulsion in religion* (2:256), points through *abjad* and *jafr* reckoning to the date 1350 [if Rumi, 1934, or if Hijri, 1931-2], and through its allusive meaning, says: By [the matters of] religion being separated from [those of] this world on that date, freedom of conscience, which is opposed to force and compulsion in religion, and to religious struggle and armed jihad for religion, [was accepted as] a fundamental rule and political principle by governments, and [this] state became a 'secular republic.' In view of this, [jihad] will be a non-physical religious jihad with the sword of certain, verified belief (*iman-ı tahkiki*—Arabic transliteration, *taḥqīqī*). Because it shows a flash of miraculousness indicating that a light will emerge from the Qur'an which will make known and set forth clearly proofs so powerful they will demonstrate almost visibly the guidance and truths of religion.

"Furthermore, as far as the word *khālidūn* (2:257), by repeating the contrast between light and darkness, and belief and darkness—the source and origin of all the comparisons in the Risale-i Nur and just like them—is a concealed sign that a great hero in the contest of the 'mânevî jihad' at that date is the Risale-i Nur, which bears the name of light. For its immaterial sword has solved hundreds of the mysteries of religion, leaving no need for physical swords.

"... It is due to this mighty mystery that Risale-i Nur students do not interfere in the politics and political currents of the world and their material struggles, nor attach importance to them, nor condescend to [any involvement with] them.... They feel not anger at their enemies, but pity and compassion. They try to reform them, in the hope they shall be saved."⁴²

41. For example, *Emirdağ Lahikası* i, 66, 123, 151.

42. *Sualar*, 229.

Thus, here we see that Bediuzzaman indirectly restates the views he expressed in the early years of the century, that the age of "force and compulsion" is past and that the struggle in the present age is essentially one of knowledge, science and persuasion. Here, however, he relates the struggle to certain principles which are the product of this development, and in addition states that the Qur'an itself alludes to it. That is to say, Bediuzzaman sees such principles as "freedom of conscience" to be necessary results of the age of science—the modern age—and states that religious jihad should be in a form suitable to this. And just as the Qur'an points to this, so also it provided the means to pursue such a jihad. Moreover, in order to preserve the purity of such a jihad, those who pursue it have to remain aloof from political or "material" struggle. It is ironical that someone who thus recognized the universal acceptance of such principles as "freedom of conscience," which is opposed to coercion in matters of religion, and was even opposed to political struggle in the cause of religion, should for thirty-five years have suffered exile and imprisonment on the pretext of infringing the principle of secularism—of which freedom of conscience is a basic constituent.

In order to understand better the concept of 'mânevî jihad', we shall examine first its two main "weapons", mentioned above, "certain, verified belief" (*iman-ı tahkikî*) and the "immaterial sword" of the Risale-i Nur, which had "solved hundreds of mysteries of religion, leaving no need for physical swords." Secondly we shall examine in greater detail the question of Bediuzzaman's attitude towards politics, and the reasons he and the Risale-i Nur students avoided any involvement with them.

The Sword of "Iman-ı Tahkikî"

We may first of all recall that according to the classification of jihad mentioned at the beginning of this paper, only two of its thirteen "stages" comprise physical jihad in the sense of the use of force. The main purpose of jihad is to "vanquish disbelief and make right prevail" and "assist God's religion and uphold His Word." Thus, as a present-day scholar of religion has stated, in accordance with the Hadith, "Wage jihad against the polytheists verbally,"⁴³ an important form of jihad is combatting unbelief by employing any form of proof, argument, debate, propaganda, and their written or verbal communication by any means, as demanded by time and place.⁴⁴

Even a cursory look at the Risale-i Nur, the collective name of the treatises Bediuzzaman began to write on being sent into exile, shows that it possesses characteristics which uniquely qualify it to pursue such a "verbal" jihad against the irreligion, innovation, and materialist philosophy that were being forcibly imposed in Turkey. And that these characteristics led its readers to obtain "certain, verified belief" has been testified to by many of them.⁴⁵

43. *Abū Dā'ūd*, Jihād, 18 (2504); *Nasā'ī*, Jihād, 1 (6,7), as quoted in *Kütüb-i Sitt*e, v, 67.

44. See, *Kütüb-i Sitt*e, v, 67.

45. For example, Bediuzzaman Said Nursî, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, İstanbul, Sinan Matbaası 1960, 84.

The most outstanding of these characteristics are that it deals almost exclusively with the truths of belief and related subjects. These are proved and demonstrated by means of logic and reasoned argument to be rational and necessary. It employs comparison and allegory in a way that makes clear even the most obscure questions. A large part is based on extensive comparisons between the Qur'an and its wisdom and civilization, and Western philosophy and its "results" and Western civilization; refuting the latter and its attacks, and demonstrating that it is only the Qur'an that can provide mankind's true happiness and progress. It also brings together the truths of religion and the modern physical sciences in so far as many of those truths are demonstrated in the light of science. This point is related to the Risale-i Nur's expounding "the face of the Qur'an that looks to the modern age," for inspired by the Qur'an's method of directing man to ponder over the Divine works manifested in the functioning of the universe, by means of reflective thought on the universe and the manifestations of the Divine Names within it, with the Risale-i Nur, Bediuzzaman opened up a new and "direct way to reality." At the same time, it answers and refutes materialist philosophy, disproving in the clearest manner 'Nature' and 'causality,' the concepts on which it is based.

This unique and dynamic way of reflective thought, in Bediuzzaman's words, "demonstrates the lights of Divine Unity" in the places that Naturalism and other materialist philosophies take as the basis of their false ideas, thus "rending the veils behind which they want to hide."⁴⁶

In addition, through the method outlined above, the Risale-i Nur proves so that they are readily acceptable questions of belief before which even the greatest previous scholars had confessed their impotence, such as bodily resurrection, and Divine Determining and man's will; and many other mysteries, such as the constant change in the universe, man's ego, and the motion of particles.⁴⁷

In short, we can say that the Risale-i Nur provides an explanation of religion that is relevant to 20th century man, addressing both his reason and other subtle inner faculties, and answering his needs at this time. Belief (*īmān*) for those who follow the method of the Risale-i Nur becomes a vital, ongoing process, progressing through its innumerable degrees of certainty.⁴⁸

Bediuzzaman called such belief "*īmān-ı tahkikî*," which may be translated as 'verified' or 'confirmatory' belief; or belief 'ascertained through enquiry' or 'resulting from investigation.' It is the opposite of "*taqlîdî imān*," or belief through blind imitation or habit.

Present-day scholars thus state that Bediuzzaman succeeded with the Risale-i Nur in updating the science of *kalām*, making it relevant to contemporary needs. Prof. Muhsin 'Abd al-Ḥamīd of the University of Baghdad has written in this connection:

"... In this way, Ustad Nursi created a Qur'anic '*ilm al-kalām* in Turkey...

46. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 174-5.

47. See, *Mektûbat*, 347 / *Letters*, 438-9.

48. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 102-3.

[He] succeeded in transforming the science of *Tawhîd* (Divine Unity) and abstract intellectual theories which only a number of elite scholars could understand... into a living way of life. The reason, heart, and spirit are all affected by such belief and brought into action. Such belief becomes an essential part of daily life.... In other words, because *'ilm al-kalâm* was clearly influenced by dry philosophical schools, it never became effective as a means of educating society at large. It was because of this that in recent centuries Muslims' belief in God in the absolute sense could not prevent them from growing away from their religion in respect of morality and everyday life.... Nursi successfully diagnosed the dangerous illness that was insidiously afflicting the *Umma*, and then treated it with a pure Qur'anic method. Thus, he transformed belief in Divine Unity into a way of life decked out with sincerity, right conduct, self-sacrifice, and fine morality...."⁴⁹

The Practical Struggle

The corollary of this dynamic intellectual struggle against the unbelief that was being imposed, was the practical struggle of writing out and disseminating the treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* in the hostile and impoverished conditions of the 1920's, '30's, and '40's. For the greater part of these years, the writing and publishing of religious material was forbidden, in fact if not by law. The *Risale-i Nur* was therefore written in the mountains and countryside, Bediuzzaman dictating to a scribe. There being no printing-presses after the abolition and prohibition of the Arabic script, all copies had to be written out by hand. An enterprise requiring courage, for those of Bediuzzaman's students who did this were subject to arrest, imprisonment, and persecution by the authorities. It also demanded considerable self-sacrifice, since such commodities as paper and ink not easy to obtain, and the students, most of whom were not wealthy, had to neglect their own livelihoods. Bediuzzaman continuously encouraged his students in this "striving (*mujâhada*) to publish the lights of belief," sometimes quoting the Hadith "At the Last Judgement, the ink spent by scholars of religion will weigh equally to the blood of the martyrs,"⁵⁰ stressing its supreme importance. He impressed upon them that their work was "more important than even the greatest of other matters."⁵¹

A distinguishing characteristic which Bediuzzaman endeavoured to gain for the movement as it slowly grew was the formation of a "collective personality" (*şahs-ı mânevî*) among the *Risale-i Nur* students—one of whom he counted himself. He therefore laid great stress on the students acquiring sincerity (*ikhhlâş*) and sacrificing their individual egos or 'I's' for the 'we's' of the collective personality. In his view, conditions in the modern age—the age of the ego—

49. Muhsin Abdülhamid, *Tefsir, Kelâm ve Fıkıh Açısından Bediüzzaman Said Nursî ve Risale-i Nur* (Turkish trans. Abdulaziz Hatip) İstanbul, Yeni Asya Gazetesi Neşriyat 1993, 82-3.

50. *Emirdağ Lahikası* i, 81; Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem'alar*, Sözlere Yayinevi 1986, 161 / *The Flashes Collection* (Eng. trans.), Sözlere Publications 1995, 222; *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 184. Hadith: Ghazzâlî, *Ihyâ' Ulûm al-Dîn*, i, 6; al-Munâwî, *Fayz al-Qadîr*, vi, 466; al-'Ajlûnî, *Kashf al-Khafâ* ii, 561; Suyûtî, *Jâmi' al-Şağhîr*, no: 10026.

51. Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Hizmet Rehberi*, Sözlere Yayinevi 1991, 170-2.

demand this form of struggle with the soul (*jihad-i akbar*), for it is only a collective personality of this kind that can successfully combat the collective personalities of the forces of misguidance and unbelief.⁵²

'Mânevî Jihād' and Bediuzzaman's attitude towards politics

The basis of Bediuzzaman's 'mânevî jihād', and its goal, was thus renewal and reconstruction at the most fundamental level —that of belief. He always insisted that this surpassed all other matters in importance. He placed this "duty" in the context of the end of time, and said that even if the Mahdi was to come at this time, he would make this same matter the basis of his mission, rather than more extensive matters like the Caliphate or Shari'a. This is despite the fact that the latter two are more pressing in the popular view.⁵³ In the face of the assaults of the present time, all other matters are of secondary importance and subordinate to the saving and renewal of belief.

Since, as described above, the "non-physical swords" of the Risale-i Nur had emerged from the Qur'an to perform this 'mânevî jihād', no need remained for "material" struggle.

Because of the importance of this question, since Bediuzzaman's complete indifference towards and non-involvement in politics —even when it might conceivably have assisted their cause and alleviated conditions for them— was the object of considerable curiosity, we shall examine briefly the reasons for Bediuzzaman's attitude from the replies he wrote to questions concerning it.

Firstly, people had to be persuaded and 'won over' or 'won back' to the truth; for the most part, politics has a negative affect:

"The greatest danger facing the people of Islam at this time is their hearts being corrupted and belief harmed through the misguidance that arises from science and philosophy. The sole solution for this is light; it is to show light so that their hearts can be reformed and their belief, saved. If one acts with the club of politics and prevails over them, the unbelievers descend to the degree of dissemblers. And dissemblers are worse than unbelievers. That is to say, the club cannot heal the heart at this time, for then unbelief enters the heart and is concealed, and is transformed into dissembling. At this time, a powerless person like myself cannot employ both of them—the club and the light. For this reason I am compelled to embrace the light with all my strength, and cannot consider the club of politics whatever form it is in."⁵⁴

Secondly, the 'truths of belief' could be neither exploited nor degraded. In Bediuzzaman's view, the truths of belief and the service of them were above everything in this world. He himself scrupulously avoided any activity that might have led to the exploitation of those religious truths.⁵⁵ They could be made the tool of nothing, and degraded —particularly of political currents and

52. See, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 102, 135; *Lem'alar*, 146 / *The Flashes*, 203.

53. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 259-61; *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 57, 104.

54. *Lem'alar*, 99 / *The Flashes*, 143-4. See also, *Mektûbat*, 45-6 / *Letters*, 68-70.

55. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 266; *Şu'alar*, 281.

forces. For this reason, "service of the All-Wise Qur'an" had "categorically prohibited" Risale-i Nur students from any involvement in politics.⁵⁶

The third and most important of Bediuzzaman's reasons for avoiding politics was sincerity (*ikhhlās*), "the greatest strength" of the way of the Risale-i Nur,⁵⁷ and its "basis." Sincerity demanded that the Risale-i Nur students carry out their "duties" of serving the Qur'an and belief "not interfering in God's concerns," which is a fine point when it comes to politics, and means not being precipitate and acting on the expectation of immediate results. Bediuzzaman wrote:

"The most important condition of 'mānevî jihad' is not to interfere in God's concerns. [It is to say:] 'Our duty is to work and serve; the results pertain to God. We are [merely] charged and compelled to carry out our duty.'"⁵⁸

Fourthly was the question of partisanship and sincerity. Bediuzzaman also wrote:

"Sincerity, the basis of our way, prevents us [from any involvement in politics]. Because at this time of heedlessness, a person with partisan ideals exploits everything for his own way; —even his religion and his actions which look to the hereafter he makes a tool of for that worldly way. Whereas the truths of belief and sacred service of the Risale-i Nur can be the tool of nothing in the universe. They can have no aim other than God's pleasure. But to preserve this mystery of sincerity and not exploit religion for worldly ends has become increasingly difficult at this time of partisan clashes between the various [political] currents. The best solution is to rely on Divine grace and assistance in place of the power of those currents."⁵⁹

Fifthly, besides leading people to exploit religion, partisanship had other negative results, one of which was discord and destroying the unity between Muslims.⁶⁰

Sixthly, another result, and a major reason why he himself and the Risale-i Nur students had to strenuously avoid involvement, was that due to it the innocent suffer harm. According to Bediuzzaman, for the innocent to suffer harm because of others that are guilty is totally opposed to Islamic justice. Quoting the verse, *No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another* (6:164, etc.), he cites it as a principle in various contexts, but particularly when making comparisons between Islamic and modern civilization. For it is a principle that has been consistently violated by that 'civilization.' In the continuation of the following letter, he extends the argument to jihad, pointing out that for this reason, the use of force or violence even if in the name of religion is not lawful within "the realm of Islam." Note that he uses this last phrase (*islām daire-sinde*) rather than *Dār al-Islām*, probably because of the latter's political connotations.

"One of the many other reasons for our avoidance [of political involvement] is

56. See, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 96, 105.

57. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 107.

58. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 213-4.

59. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 38.

60. See, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 84.

one of the four principles of the Risale-i Nur, 'to be compassionate, and not to act tyrannically nor cause harm.' Because.... due to the feeling of partisanship, because of one person's crime, others are hostile towards not only his relations but all those who support him. If they can, they ill-treat them. If they have the power, they bomb a village because of one man's mistake. However, the rights of one innocent person may not be sacrificed because of a hundred criminals; he may not be ill-treated because of them. Present-day conditions cause a hundred innocents to be harmed due to a handful of criminals... Because of partisan currents among Muslims, innocents such as that cannot be saved from oppression. Especially situations which give rise to revolution, they altogether expand and make widespread the wrongdoing.

"In jihad —even if it is in the name of religion— the position of [non-Muslim] women and children is the same. They may be considered as booty, and Muslims may include them in their property. But within 'the realm of Islam,' even if a person is irreligious, his family cannot be claimed as property; their rights cannot be infringed. For due to the ties of Islam, they are bound not to their irreligious father, but to Islam and the Islamic community. However, unbelievers' children are among those who will be saved, but according to the law, those innocents may be made prisoner and taken into possession at the blow of jihad, since they are dependents of and bound to their fathers, so long as they are alive."⁶¹

'Mânevî Jihad' and 'Positive Action'

Stressing the centrality of the concept of 'mânevî jihad' to the way of the Risale-i Nur, in the final '*ders*' (instruction) Bediuzzaman gave his students before his death,⁶² he repeated the above point, that the innocent cannot be made to suffer because of a few criminals. For this reason the use of force within 'the realm of Islam' is not permissible. "Force may be used only against external aggression, because the families and possessions of the enemy are like booty." Again quoting the verse *No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another* [6:164; 17:15 etc.], he stated that at this time there is a great difference between external jihad and internal jihad. Action within the country, that is, within 'the sphere of Islam,' has to be "positive action." Since the destruction is not physical or material, but moral and spiritual (*mânevî*), the struggle against it has to be of the same nature.

"Our duty is 'positive action,' not 'negative action.' It is solely to serve belief [in the truths of religion] in accordance with divine pleasure, and not to interfere in God's concerns... the positive service to belief, which results in the preservation of public order and security..."⁶³

Indeed, Bediuzzaman described the Risale-i Nur students as "the preservers of public peace." Because, "by instructing in the truths of belief, they place in everyone's head 'a prohibiter' [from wrong action], so preserving public order and security."⁶⁴

61. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 38-9.

62. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 213-9.

63. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 213-4.

64. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 128.

The reason Bediuzzaman attached such importance to this function of the Risale-i Nur he described in a letter written in the mid 1940's. He said that, since the Risale-i Nur was "a sort of saviour of this blessed country," he reckoned it was the time to come into prominence through the world of publishing in order "to repel the two awesome calamities" with which they were faced, and the anarchy and corruption they aimed to cause.⁶⁵

One of these two "calamities" or "currents" was communism, which was not only threatening Turkey from the North, but also had gained a foothold inside the country. The second comprised the organizations "whose roots were abroad," whose aim it was to spread atheism and dissension and corrupt the Muslim peoples (*ifsad komiteleri*). These two currents represented absolute unbelief. The ultimate aim of the latter was the destruction of the Islamic world, and by means of propaganda to sever whatever ties remained between it and this former centre of Islam. Having been both broken off from this natural support, and from Islam, the source of its strength, the Turkish nation would be unable to withstand the corruption of the two irreligious currents, and would fall prey to the anarchy resulting from their moral destruction.⁶⁶ For in Bediuzzaman's words, "A nation without religion cannot continue in existence."⁶⁷ The Risale-i Nur was "a Qur'anic barrier" against the flood of communism from the North and "the moral and spiritual destruction" of its covert supporters within the country. It was "a repairer of the strength of an atom-bomb," to heal the corruption caused by those currents.

In a letter marked "extremely important," Bediuzzaman described the most important duty of the Risale-i Nur students at this time as "taking *taqwa* — ["abstaining from sin and what is prohibited and acting within the bounds of good works"]— as the basis of their actions against the [moral] destruction... Wherever the Risale-i Nur enters opposing this awesome destruction, it resists it and repairs it. Like the corruption Gog and Magog caused in the world through destroying the Barrier of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, a dark anarchy and irreligion more fearful than Gog and Magog has begun to corrupt life and morality with the shaking of the barrier of the Qur'an [and] the Shari'a of Muḥammad (PBUH). God willing, the "non-material striving" (*mânevî mucâhedeler*) of the Risale-i Nur students in the midst of events such as these may gain them great reward with few actions like in the time of the Companions [of the Prophet]."⁶⁸

Bediuzzaman ascribed the fact that although the forces whose aim it was to corrupt and destabilize had been more active in Turkey than in other countries such as Iran, Egypt, and the Maghrib, they had been unsuccessful, to the six hundred thousand copies of the Risale-i Nur and to the five hundred thousand Risale-i Nur students, who had supported the authorities in holding out against those attempts.⁶⁹

65. *Emirdağ Lahikası* i, 101.

66. *Emirdağ Lahikası* i, 214-6; ii, 177-8.

67. *Emirdağ Lahikası* ii, 216.

68. *Kastamonu Lahikası* 106-7.

69. *Emirdağ Lahikası* ii, 77.

Further Aspects of 'Positive Action'

The way of the Risale-i Nur required 'positive action' towards followers of other ways within Islam, and even towards followers of deviant sects within Islam and Christians. This was true even if they were aggressive or hostile. Believers in God had to maintain a united front in the face of the forces of irreligion and not fall into dispute:

"Do not encourage such people to argue and dispute. Even if they are aggressive, do not retaliate... since they believe, they are brothers in that regard... we cannot retaliate according to our way, because there are enemies... more terrible than that.

".... both these extraordinary times, and our way, and our sacred service necessitate that we do not concern ourselves with those who believe, even if they hold deviant ideas, or argue over points of dispute with Christians even who recognize God and believe in the hereafter..."⁷⁰

"Our way is act positively. It does not permit us to think about other [believers] let alone dispute with them."⁷¹

A further aspect of 'positive action' was patience and forbearance in the face of oppression; this demanded self-sacrifice of the highest order:

"Our duty is to act positively; it is not to act negatively. It is solely to serve [the cause of] [religious] belief in accordance with Divine pleasure, and not to interfere in God's concerns. We are charged with [responding with] patience and thanks in the face of every difficulty [we encounter] in our positive service of [religious] belief..."

Bediuzzaman then gave himself as an example, who "in order to act positively and not negatively" had "responded with patience and resignation to all the ill-treatment he had received over 30 years..."⁷²

While the reason he gave for not responding with "force" or "negatively" in the face of "the severe tyranny of the secret enemies of this country and religion" was again so that harm should not come to the innocent majority because of the "10% of irreligious atheists," and in order to preserve public order.⁷³

The Third Said

As mentioned above, it is my view that Bediuzzaman Said Nursi formulated the general principles to which jihad 'in the way of God' and 'upholding the Word of God' should be bound in the present age in his youth, as the Old Said in the first decades of this century. And these principles he adhered to throughout his life. Nevertheless it was as the New Said, who was characterized by his taking the Qur'an as his "sole guide" and relying on it alone, that he developed the principles of 'mānevî jihad' and 'positive action' in their entirety. Bediuzzaman never set out these principles in any sort of manifesto, he rather explained them as circumstance demanded to his students. Thus we see that as conditions

70. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 186-7.

71. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 183. See also, 20th Flash.

72. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 213.

73. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 136-7.

changed and eased over the thirty-five years of Bediuzzaman's exile and captivity, this jihad gradually unfolded. In my view, it was more a case of, having foreseen the path events would take, his having specified the form and method of this jihad and then explained it and guided his students and others accordingly as events unfolded, rather than his adjusting his ideas to suit changing events. And more than that, we can say that since he formulated 'manevi jihad' and 'positive action' seeing the trend of events and looking to and foreseeing the future, he was also laying down the guidelines for the continuation of this jihad after his death. The extraordinary growth of the Risale-i Nur movement and its successes worldwide in the thirty-five years since then testify that this is indeed the case.

In addition to the continuity in his ideas indicated above in the section on the New Said, the strongest evidence that Bediuzzaman's 'manevî jihad' unfolded as he had foreseen is that in the final ten years of his life, the period known as the Third Said, he re-stated a number of ideas he had expressed in the early years of the century as the Old Said. That is to say, with the defeat of the Republican People's Party and coming to power of the Democrat Party under Adnan Menderes in May 1950, who had a positive attitude towards Islam and intended to reverse the anti-Islamic measures of the RPP, conditions eased to an extent for Bediuzzaman and his students, and permitted him to expand his jihad. This expansion reflected many ideas of the Old Said, again showing the continuity in his ideas. So too was he laying the foundations for the continuation of this jihad after he would be no longer there to direct it.

The main ways in which Bediuzzaman widened the scope of his jihad were as follows:

1. Offering support and guidance to Menderes and the Democrat Party

Because of their firm stand against communism and the measures they took favouring Islam and religion, thus reversing some of the damage (*mânevî tahribat*) caused by twenty-five years of RPP rule, Bediuzzaman supported Menderes and the Democrats throughout the 1950's. This was on the one hand to prevent the RPP returning to power—because of the danger to the country posed by communists who were using this party as a cover, as indeed was demonstrated within a few years of Bediuzzaman's death. And on the other, because he considered that the Democrats "assisted the Risale-i Nur students" in their efforts to form "a barrier" against the moral destruction.⁷⁴

This support was in no way active involvement in politics, it rather took the form of offering advice and guidance concerning the above points, and to further the cause of Islam and the Risale-i Nur. As Bediuzzaman wrote to Celâl Bayar, after he had been appointed President in 1950:

"In the face of those who have oppressed us making politics the tool of irreligion in fanatical manner, we work for the happiness of this country and nation by making politics the tool and friend of religion."⁷⁵

74. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 52, 177-8.

75. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 17.

For Bediuzzaman the only means of salvation and happiness in this world as well as the next was Islam. The moral destruction caused by materialism and irreligion would result in anarchy and decline, and eventually destroy the country and nation. It was only a small minority who represented the forces working for that destruction, and it was they who exploited politics for irreligion and had been the cause of all the persecution and injustice suffered by Bediuzzaman and his students. It was against the corruption of this "5%" and its inauspicious aims that Bediuzzaman had been struggling for twenty-five years.

Thus Bediuzzaman's advice to Menderes and the Democrats most often took the form of illuminating them about the various atheistic currents and warning them of the possible future results of their destruction. So too he put forward a number of Qur'anic principles which would halt and repair it. Although generally obscured, the point he wanted to impress on them was that essentially, this was a battle between belief and unbelief, religion and materialist philosophy. There was nothing between belief and unbelief; no third way.⁷⁶ The Western philosophical principles adopted in the process of Westernization were fundamentally unjust and had led to such things as extreme partisanship, exploitative and despotic officialdom, racialism, and hatred and division within society. Destroying public order and the unity and harmony of society, they had caused appalling corruption, disorder and injustice. The sole solution in the face of these dangers were certain Islamic principles, which led to brotherhood, a sense of Islamic 'nationhood', public order, true justice, solidarity, and so on.⁷⁷

Futhermore, Bediuzzaman pointed out that it was not "physical forces or international treaties" that would halt irreligion and its destruction, but "the truths of belief and the Qur'an, and the religious feeling of the heart (*mâneviyat-ı kalbiye*)." He therefore applauded government moves to reintroduce compulsory religious education in schools.⁷⁸

Recalling those who had worked for similar ends in the former period, and in order to encourage them in that direction, Bediuzzaman called the Democrats "Ahrarlar," those who worked for *Hürriyet-i Şeri'îye*, the Freedom which is in accordance with the Shari'a.⁷⁹

2. Expanded Publication

In view of the proven effectiveness of the *Risale-i Nur* in repairing the moral and spiritual destruction, Bediuzzaman tried to get official support and backing for it. He also petitioned the Government on several occasions to print and publish it.⁸⁰ It was only after such attempts failed in 1956 when it was finally 'cleared' by Afyon Court that Bediuzzaman permitted his students to have it printed in the Latin alphabet on modern presses.

From 1950 onwards, a number of Bediuzzaman's students were based in

76. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 60-1.

77. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 142-5.

78. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 60.

79. For example, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 20, 25.

80. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 10-11, 151, 178.

Ankara, carrying out work of this kind, meeting with Deputies in the National Assembly, and actively furthering the cause of the Risale-i Nur. It also became a centre of publication after 1956, so that Bediuzzaman described his students there as "on the front" (*mucâhede cephesinde*).⁸¹

It should also be noted that the Risale-i Nur students had the first copy to be printed bound in green cloth, —green being the colour of Islam— to present to Bediuzzaman, who was then in Isparta. Bediuzzaman however had the fine binding removed and replaced by a local book-binder in a red cover —red being the colour of jihad— and this distinctive colour has been retained ever since.

In the 1950's Bediuzzaman also had republished the major works of the Old Said, such as *Münâzarat* and *İki Mekteb-i Musibetin Şehadetnâmesi veya Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, which include discussions of many of the topics discussed above. He himself translated into Turkish his celebrated *Hutbe-i Şâmiye* (Damascus Sermon), from the original Arabic, publishing it with certain additions.

3. Expansion of the Risale-i Nur movement

The large scale publication of the Risale-i Nur in the new script led to a great expansion in the readership of the Risale-i Nur and in the movement. As a result, 'dershaneler' (Risale-i Nur study centres) were opened all over the country.⁸²

4. Islamic Unity (*İttihad-i İslam*)

A further question which may be included within the scope of the Third Said's expanded 'mânevî jihad', which he had also worked for in his youth, is Islamic Unity.

This included both his urging Menderes to re-establish relations with the Islamic world, which had been virtually non-existent since the founding of the Republic, and his efforts to have the Risale-i Nur translated into Arabic and disseminated throughout the Islamic world.

In his letters to Menderes and the government, this matter is given the greatest importance. Besides warning him about the "current" whose aim it was to create distrust and hostility towards Turkey in the Islamic world by spreading irreligion, Bediuzzaman urged the Democrats to embrace the Qur'an, for in this way they would find 400 million brothers, and have behind them "the reserve force of the Islamic world."⁸³

Bediuzzaman even described the Risale-i Nur students as members and successors of the *İttihad-ı Muhammedî* (the Society for Muslim Unity), which had been active in early 1909, because of their importance in combatting the above current and working for Islamic Unity.⁸⁴

At this time, the late 1940's and 1950's when various Muslim countries in Asia and Africa were gaining their independence from the colonial powers and setting up "Islamic states," Bediuzzaman again starts to speak hopefully of the future supremacy of Islam, which he was so certain of in the early years of the

81. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 57.

82. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 101, 105, 203.

83. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 56, 178.

84. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 24-5, 34.

century.⁸⁵ He also cites signs of the acceptance of Islam in the West to support his claim.

Bediuzzaman even sees the Islamic states as a federation based on the brotherhood of belief, writing, probably in the early 1950's:

"We cordially congratulate you on the occasion of this holy festival ('id). God willing, you will live to see a great festival of the Islamic world. There are numerous signs that the Qur'an, the source of the laws of the 'United Islamic States,' will completely prevail over the future, bringing a true festival for mankind."⁸⁶

5. The Medresetü'z-Zehrâ

Bediuzzaman's equating the university the Democrat government planned to build in eastern Turkey with his Medresetü'z-Zehrâ, and his urging them to give it a religious base⁸⁷ should also be seen in connection with the important role he considered such an institution would play in countering divisive racialism and securing peace and unity among the Muslim peoples of the eastern Islamic world. His letter of support for the setting up of CENTO, which includes the discussion on the Eastern University, should be seen in the same light.

6. Attitude towards the West

As described in the section above "External jihad according to the Old Said," Bediuzzaman stated that in the modern age Europeans should be shown the elevated nature of Islam, for if this was to be done, they would enter Islam in large numbers, "because the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion." Following the Second World War in particular, Bediuzzaman detected further signs of the future acceptance of Islam in the West, which he described in a number of letters.⁸⁸

In addition, since he considered the anarchy resulting from communism and irreligion to be one of the greatest dangers facing mankind, subsequently to the Second World War, Bediuzzaman favoured political alliance with the West against this threat. It was his view that the European powers which had formerly opposed Islamic Unity, no longer opposed it, indeed they were now in need of it.⁸⁹ Hence his support for the Baghdad Pact. He also considered America to be a country that "worked seriously for religion," and that on this basis sincerely friendly terms could be established with it.⁹⁰

In fact, it is understood from his letter to the President and Prime Minister on the setting up of CENTO that Bediuzzaman considered that peace and reconciliation should be worked for on the basis of religion, knowledge, and learning, not only between the Muslim peoples, but also between the West and Islam.⁹¹

85. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 100.

86. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 76.

87. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 195-7.

88. See, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 237, 244-5, 262-3.

89. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 24.

90. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 178.

91. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 195-6.

Conclusion

Bediuzzaman's intention in formulating jihad in terms of 'mânevî jihad' and 'positive action' was in order to combat what he considered to pose the greatest threat to Islam and indeed to humanity this century, materialist Western philosophy, and by renewing belief and making the religion of Islam relevant and meaningful to the mass of believers, and particularly those who had been exposed to 'philosophy,' to lay the foundations for a genuine renewal and reconstruction of the Islamic world and the re-establishment of Islamic civilization. Besides saving the belief of Muslims, such a jihad would attract large numbers of people in the West to the true religion of Islam.

The struggle between truth and falsehood in the modern age being an ideological and cultural struggle rather than one of force, "the weapons" of Bediuzzaman's 'mânevî jihad' were logical proofs of the truths of belief, reasoned argument and persuasion, which on the one hand "executed with the sword of the Qur'an, nature and causality [the bases of materialist philosophy]" and dispelled the doubts they caused, and on the other, gained for a person "certain, verified belief." Directly inspired by the Qur'an and reflecting its effulgence, this way of reality (*haqîqa*) answers the needs of man, who has been awakened this century by scientific advance in particular, and provides the base to develop true *taqwâ* and Islamic morality.

Such belief is also the basis of the second component of Bediuzzaman's jihad, 'positive action,' the most important aspect of which is combatting the moral and spiritual corruption (*mânevî tahribat*) of the various offshoots of materialist philosophy, such as communism and other international atheistic organizations. Just as such movements or "currents" conduct ideological warfare, so too their aim is to corrupt, divide, and produce anarchy, so ultimately to destabilize and destroy the Muslim countries. Bediuzzaman therefore considered the prime duty of the Risale-i Nur students to be the maintenance of public order and security, even in the face of the deliberate and severe provocations, oppression and injustice they themselves suffered, and to work for the unity and solidarity of society.

Even in the harshest days of RPP rule, Bediuzzaman held only 5 or 10% responsible for the destructive anti-Islamic measures that were being carried out. It was these covert supporters of communism and other "currents" that on the one hand were trying to eliminate himself and his students, and on the other that he was doing battle against—as he himself told the courts. In the face of their designs that he understood only too well, Bediuzzaman did not oppose the government or the system it had introduced; in the cause of maintaining public security and foiling their plans, despite his extremely disadvantageous position within it and the thirty-five years of injustice he had suffered in the name of secularism and that system, he conducted his jihad within the system, even utilizing it to his own advantage.

This patient struggle brought Bediuzzaman and his students victory over their enemies. Besides being left free to publish the Risale-i Nur by Menderes and the

Democrats, Bediuzzaman was able to extend the scope of his jihad after they came to power in 1950, as was described above.

It was Bediuzzaman's conviction that the Qur'an and Islamic civilization would rule the future and that the Word of God would prevail. Inspired by the Qur'an, Bediuzzaman realized that this would be achieved only by renewal, repair and reconstruction at the most basic level, which necessitated gradual change which embraced the whole of society. This formed the main difference with the Old Said, who had emphasized material progress.

Although Bediuzzaman developed the principles of 'mânevî jihad' and 'positive action' under the constraining conditions of the early decades of the Turkish Republic, by on the one hand making clear the basic nature of the struggle between truth and falsehood in the modern age and explaining it in terms of the Qur'an and 'philosophy,' as well as providing a relevant means of defending the former and combatting the latter; and on the other hand, by insisting on the positive 'repairing' of the corruption in society caused by the forces representing that 'philosophy,' he was laying the foundations of a jihad the need for which extended far beyond that time and place. Indeed, it was Bediuzzaman's hope that this positive method of renewal would be adopted throughout the Islamic world, providing a firm base for its future unity.

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