
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF
ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY
AND

Bediuzzaman
Said Nursi

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Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., Nuruosmaniye Cad., Sorkun Han No. 28/2,
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Ord. Professor ANNA MASALA

(Rome University - ITALY)

Professor Masala was born in Rome on 15th April 1934, and completed her higher studies in the Faculty of Literature in Rome University. In addition to Italian and Latin, she learnt Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, and Turkish. In 1968 she began teaching in the Oriental Studies Institute in Rome University. Paying frequent visits to Turkey, she took a close interest in Turkish culture and folklore. A great lover of Turkey, in 1972 Anna Masala was appointed professor in Rome University, and in 1942 was appointed Ordinarius Professor. Some of her numerous works in the field of oriental studies, published in Italian, are as follows:

Contemporary Turkish Poetry (1972)

Turkish 'Türkü's (1972)

Yunus Emre (1978)

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1978)

Mehter (1978)

'Türkü ve Kılıç' (Serhad Türkü's)

Selections from the Poetry of Fevzi Halıcı (1987)

Translations from the Poetry of Cahit Külebi (1986)

THE LINE FROM MEVLANA TO BEDIUZZAMAN

If you permit it, first of all I would like to greet you with the best of greetings: *As-Salâmu aleykum*.

In fact, every sort of greeting is good. "Good Morning!", "Hello!", "Good day to you!"; greeting people is good.

Unfortunately today as we approach the end of the twentieth century, on the one hand people want brotherhood, dialogue between the religions, and international peace, and on the other, religions are again fighting each other, the sounds of guns, the screams of the starving, the cries of political and psychological war rise from every part of the world. We all have need of peace and love, therefore I say "*As-Salâmu aleykum*" to you. It is both a greeting and a prayer.

Today I do not want to speak about the monotheist religions or about theology. Also, I am not here with the usual title of 'Professor'. I am here today as any servant of Almighty God's who needs brotherhood and peace.

As you know, I was born in a Christian country, even in Rome, the centre of Christianity. But as an orientalist, I had the opportunity to learn about other religions in the world. I can still remember preparing with tremendous curiosity for the Indian philosophy examinations during my university years, and the great interest with which I read the books on the classic religions. Even at that time under the direction of our respected lecturers I was searching for a bond, a spiritual bridge between the religions, and I sincerely felt the desire to find in all of them, and even the pagan religions, the traces of a single God. Because, my dear brothers, there is absolutely no doubt in this matter. In whatever tongue prayer is offered, and whatever qibla is turned towards, man's smallness has to recognize the greatness of a single God. This means translating the Muslims' blessed testimony to Divine Unity into all languages.

My greatest chance while progressing down the path of life was being confronted - to an unexpected degree - by a nation like the Turkish nation. My dear brothers! Every day, every moment, on bright days and dark days, in sorrow and joy, and particularly these days when some people are

undergoing such suffering, I find consolation with this treasury; I take eternal lessons, which are each a piece of gold, from this treasury; I obtain life's experience.

I always loved everything about Turkish culture from the ancient history of Central Asia to the acceptance of Islam and the Turkish civilization of Anatolia. I loved the popular literature, the 'divan' literature, the history of the sixteen Turkish states, the fine art of calligraphy, the profound spirit of Sufism, and classical Turkish music. I loved Yahya Kemal. I loved contemporary Turkish literature. However I love Fatih Sultan Mehmed, I sincerely love the great Turkish Republic which is today advancing with great progress.

With my spirit's eye I see your shining faces in a mirror; I see Mevlânâ and Yunus Emre, I see Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, I see the new power stations, the misty mountains of the Bosphorus and Anatolia, the domes and minarets, the towns and villages. And my love and brotherhood and desire for peace is not imagination, it is realized through what these great masters of ours have taught me, and through the love you have shown me through the years.

Struggle Against Three Enemies

As I said before, in recent years dialogue between the religions is being discussed. Forgive me, but I do not have much belief in the word 'dialogue'.

In my opinion dialogue comes onto the agenda when separation comes about. When the winds of war are blowing, then they speak of peace.

As a scholar I know that despite the cultural exchange which has influenced mankind's progress on the road of civilization, the monotheistic religions like Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have lived in separate closed citadels. Sometimes under the guise of religion, political and trade interests have separated the Christian countries from the Muslim ones for long periods of time. Particularly in the Mediterranean, after the fall of Granada, history witnessed a divide between the Christian and Muslim countries, or more correctly between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the pain of the European historian who knows the other face of the coin too, lies here. Since my youth I just could not accept the clashes of my Rome and my Istanbul for religious and many commercial purposes.

I say, at the end of the twentieth century, the meanings of the following words should be forgotten: war, religious intolerance, racialism, hunger, ignorance. Yes, I am a student of Turkish tolerance. Therefore, I love a sentence, a command of Said Nursi's. He said:

"Our enemies are ignorance, poverty, and conflict. We shall wage Holy War against these three enemies with the weapons of industry,

learning, and unity."

In my youth, at the time I first came to Turkey with my family, on my asking Turks thousands of questions about religion, no one asked me: "Are you a Christian, or a Muslim?" They asked me whether or not I loved Turkey, whether or not I had read the verses of Mevlânâ and Yunus Emre, whether or not I had heard the music of İtrî, whether or not I had been happy when I looked at Istanbul from the Baghdad 'Köşk', from Çamlıca, Rumeli Hisarı, and the Galata Bridge. Then there would be conversation about religion, and I saw that many Muslims knew sayings from the Bible and Torah, as well as the Qur'an. Whereas among us were very few Christians who knew the Qur'an. That was an important lesson for me.

I want to recall a beautiful memory of mine to you: in one of the conversations, which continued from sunset to dawn, some of my religious Muslim friends recited without error passages from the Gospels. I have to confess that in order to prepare for a further discussion on religion, the next day I searched the whole city for a Bible.

I have always thirsted for tolerance. And I have found this tolerance in Turkish Islamic history. I saw the tolerance of the Ottoman Empire, which made it possible for all denominations and non-Muslims (*millet*) to preserve their languages, customs, and particularly their religions. It does not concern me what some lying historians have said.. for example, I know very well that thanks to the tolerance of the Muslim Turks, parts of the Greek, Armenian, Assyrian, and Balkan nations are still Christian, and can still speak their native tongues.

But I learnt the best side of religious tolerance from the great masters of Anatolia. From Mevlânâ, who has called out to the whole world throughout the centuries, saying: "Come, come, whoever you are, come!" And Yunus Emre, who says: "I call on You, my Lord, with the mountains, with the stones!" And Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, who says in the same spirit of Sufism: "Love is spring of the universe", and, "Our way is love."

The subject of this scholarly International Symposium is 'The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.' Bediuzzaman's life is extremely interesting and his books most profound. Unfortunately, due to the brief time, this talk of mine is not a lengthy, scholarly exposition, merely a greeting. Also, I believe that you know this important subject better than I do. This poor one came here not to instruct you, but to learn. As I said before, the greater part of what I know I have learnt from you and from your masters. In Turkey, the meaning of everything is deep, and the deeply meaningful jokes of the Nasreddin Hoca stories and their making the people laugh is another symbol of Turkish tolerance. Insha'llah, in the future I shall prepare a more informative paper on

this important subject and present it to you.

"Since he has belief, in that respect he is our brother."

On dark days, when people's hearts are wounded with the news from other countries, on my hearing of a dialogue being started up between Muslims and Christians, and on the other hand, on my learning of people being killed in another part of the world, I feel the need for a drop of honey. And I have found this honey. Recently, while speaking of the works of Feyzi Halilî and Said Nursi Hazretleri, this sentence came to mind:

"Whoever it is, since he has belief, in that regard he is our brother."

In this beautiful drop of honey we can find Mevlânâ's philosophy exactly. In my view, this truth is belief, tolerance. True dialogue is not on the tongue, it is in the heart.

This September, in Brussels, an international conference was held between the representatives of twelve religions. According to what I learnt from the radio, the same congress will be held next year in Milan. My hope is that these men of religion will secure peace and reconciliation between religions. But I am sad, for sometimes dialogue of this type between religions address scholars, and not the people.

While preparing this short talk, an example of brotherhood between Muslims and Christians occurred to me. I want it to remain in your hearts, and for Christians to know of it as well. Look, this is a Muslim tesbih and this is a Christian rosary. At this moment in the world numerous people are saying one of these two, and attached to different religions, they recite the name of a single God in different tongues. How right are the sacred words: "There is no god but God!"

My dear friends! From beautiful Istanbul I greet my country Italy, and I hope that each day it will be closer to Turkey. And finally I greet the land of Turkey, which we all love so much.

If you agree, I want to repeat something I always say: it is easy for you to love Turkey. You were born in Turkey, and since your childhood you have learnt to love Turkish culture, the Turkish Republic, and your glorious beautiful flag. I have learnt the things you love by working for long years, and reading and talking. Turkish history has worked in my brain. And now the name of Turkey is in my heart.

I pray for you, and greetings!