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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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The Risale-i Nur Movement: Is it a Sufi Order, a Political Society, or a Community?

Ahmed Akgündüz

I. Introduction

With Bediuzzaman, who put his stamp on the twentieth century, and his commentary on the Qur'an's meaning entitled the Risale-i Nur Collection starting to produce the fruits he predicted seventy to eighty years ago, those sympathetic have become more curious about Bediuzzaman and the Risale-i Nur community, while those hostile have started to scrutinize them more closely. The Risale-i Nur has been translated into more than fifty languages and has been instrumental in saving the belief of hundreds of thousands of young people all over the world. And with its positive action, the Risale-i Nur movement has won a place in many hearts and has led to millions of people being bound together around the same cause without belonging to any organization, association, or sufi order. This has led everyone to ask: "What is it that attracts all these people, pulling

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them together in this way?" While those who look favourably ask themselves if it is a sufi order, or some sort of association, or a political movement, those discomforted by the spread of the movement and the high esteem it has won persistently ask the same questions in the mass media and start to question public opinion.

Those who rule the country are curious about the aims and methods of this positive movement which has spread beyond China and America. Scholars and academics too want to know what it is that attracts all peoples, Mongolian, Chinese, Indonesian, or American; they feel compelled to ask anyone and everyone, as well as those who know. The circles, too, which for nearly a century have tried to call a peacock a crow and a crow a peacock falsely describe the nature, aims, and method of the Risale-i Nur movement. Pretending not to see the truths of the Qur'an and belief in the six thousand page Risale-i Nur and the light it scatters throughout the world, they call the Risale-i Nur movement an order of crazy ecstasies and try to portray it as such. Whereas:

"It is a circle bound with a luminous chain stretching from east to west, and from north to south. Those within it number more than three hundred million at this time. The point of unity of this community and what binds it is Divine Unity. Its oath and its promise are belief in God. Its members are all believers, belonging from the time of God's covenant with man. Its register is the Preserved Tablet. Its means of communication are all Islamic books. Its daily newspapers, all religious newspapers whose aim is 'upholding the Word of God'. Its clubs and councils are the mosques, religious schools, and sufi meeting-houses. Its centre is the two sacred cities [Mecca and Medina]. Its head, the Glory of the World [the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)]. Its way is the struggle of the each person with his own soul; that is, the struggle to assume the morality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to give new vigour to his practices, and to cultivate love for others and, if it is not harmful, offer them advice. The regulations of this community are the Practices of the Prophet, and its code of laws, the injunctions and prohibitions of the Shari'a. Its swords are clear proofs, for the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not compulsion. Investigating the truth is with love, while enmity is for savagery and bigotry. Its aim and purpose is 'Upholding the Word of God.'"¹

"The Risale-i Nur is not only repairing some minor damage or some small house; it is repairing vast damage and the all-embracing citadel which contains Islam, the stones of which are the size of mountains. And it is not striving to reform only a private heart and an individual conscience; it is striving to cure with the medicines of the Qur'an and belief and the Qur'an's miraculousness the collective heart and generally-held ideas, which have been breached in awesome fashion by the tools of corruption prepared and stored up over a thousand years, and the general conscience, which is facing corruption through the destruction of the foundations, currents, and marks of Islam, which are the refuge of all and particularly the mass of believers."²

In this short paper I shall attempt to answer the three main questions asked

1. *Risale-i Nur Müellifi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, Hayatı, Mesleki, Tercüme-i Hali (Tarihçe)*, İstanbul, Sözlür Yayınevi 1991, 66-7.

2. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Şualar*, Sözlür Yayınları 1992, 151-2.

about the Risale-i Nur movement, which has been a focus of interest in Turkey for seventy to eighty years, and worldwide for the last thirty years.

- 1). Is the Risale-i Nur movement a sufi order? If it is not, is it opposed to sufism?
- 2). Is the Risale-i Nur movement a political society? Does it have any political aims?
- 3). Is the Risale-i Nur movement a community?

II. Is the Risale-i Nur Movement a Sufi Order?

1. The Sufi Path, Sufi Orders, and the Risale-i Nur Movement

It is necessary before answering this question to define briefly the words sufi path (*tariq*) and, sufi order (*tariqat*). *Tariq* is Arabic for 'way,' while *tariqat* has the meaning of 'a way that should be followed for growing closer to God and obtaining His pleasure.'³ The meanings of these two words should be examined in two parts.

The First: In general 'tariqat' means a way leading to God. All religions are ways leading to God, and of course in the particular meaning that will be mentioned in the second meaning, the sufi orders are included in this. This is expressed by the saying "The ways leading to God are as numerous as the breaths of creatures," which some scholars have said is an Hadith. Bediuzzaman, too, has mentioned this, in summary form:

"The ways leading to Almighty God are truly numerous. While all true ways are taken from the Qur'an, some are shorter, safer, and more general than others. Of these ways taken from the Qur'an is that of **impotence, poverty, compassion, and reflection**, from which, with my defective understanding, I have benefited... This path consists not of ten steps like the 'ten subtle faculties'⁴ of some of the sufi orders (*tariqat*) employing silent recollection, nor of seven stages like the 'seven souls' of those practising public recitation, but of Four Steps. It is reality [*haqiqat*], rather than a *tariqat*. It is Shari'a."⁵

Thus, Bediuzzaman defines the paths leading to God as being four:

1.) Firstly is the way of the sufis, which is founded on purification and illumination. Purification is to cleanse the heart through worship and the recitation of certain formulas, to purify the mind of things other than God, and to work to attain to knowledge of God. Illumination is the endeavour, through inspiration and 'uncovering,' to find ways that take man to God. In both the way to knowledge of God is traversed with "the feet of the heart." The key to and means of this spiritual journeying is remembrance of God (*dhikr-i Ilahi*) and reflective thought. In the words of Imam-i Rabbani (Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi) "the final point of all the sufi paths is the clarification and unfolding of the truths of

3. Eraydin, Selçuk, *Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar*, İstanbul 1981, 172 ff.

4. 'Ten subtle faculties' (*Leta'if-i âşere*): the ten fundamentals of the Naqshbandi Order.

5. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Sözler*, İstanbul, Sözler Yayınevi 1993, 462 / *The Words* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözler Publications 1992, 491.

belief.”⁶ Again according to Imam-i Rabbani’s classification, the sufi path is the “lesser sainthood” (*walayat-i sughra*).⁷ The spiritual chiefs of this way are the Imam-i Rabbani’s, the ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani’s, and the Bayezid al-Bistami’s.

2.) The way of the scholars of *kalām*, which is the science formed to preserve and defend the basic tenets of Islam. Their two principle means of making known and proving God are the proofs known as contingency and createdness. Among the spiritual leaders of this way are the Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s, the Taftazani’s, and the Imam Ghazzali’s.

Although these two ways were inspired by the Qur’an and became widespread, since human thought poured them into other moulds, they became lengthy, difficult, and were unable to save themselves from certain delusions and dangers. We may see some of excesses and negligences in the books of the *kalam* scholars; so too we may read of some of the dangers of sufism in Bediüzzaman’s treatise, *Telvisat-ı Tis’a* (The Nine Allusions).

3.) Thirdly is the way of the Islamic philosophers, which is beset with doubts and leaves those who follow in uncertainty. Some of those who took this way were the Ibn Sina’s, Farabi’s, and Kindi’s, who took reason as basic; those who called themselves the Peripatetics or followers of Aristotle; and the Illuminists like the Suhrawardi’s and Ibn Tufayl’s, who took inspiration and intuition of the heart as basic. Because some of the basic principles of philosophy were “rotten” and it produced certain undesirable results for those that followed them, genuises like the Islamic philosophers Ibn Sina and Farabi could reach the level only of ordinary believers. While *Hujjat al-Islam* Ghazzali did not accord them that level even.⁸

4.) The way of the Qur’an, which is essentially that of the Risale-i Nur.⁹ But it should not be understood from this that the other ways are outside the Qur’an. If you want to know what it means, you may listen to these words of Bediüzzaman:

“The Risale-i Nur does not teach only with the feet and eye of the reason like the works of other scholars, nor does it only move with the illuminations and inspirations of the heart like the saints, it rather flies to the loftiest peaks by progressing with the feet of the uniting and combining of the reason and heart, and assistance of the spirit and other subtle faculties. It rises to places that not the feet, but the eye of aggressive philosophy cannot reach, and demonstrates the truths of belief to eyes that are blind even.”¹⁰

While describing his transformation into the New Said, during which period he wrote the Risale-i Nur, he explains that after Imam-i Rabbani’s instruction to “Make your *qibla* one; follow only one master!”, the following occurred to his heart:

6. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Mektûbat*, Sözlür Yayinevi 1993, 22 / Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Letters 1928-1932* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], 40.

7. Imam Rabbani (Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi), *Mektûbat* (Turkish trans.), ii, 363 ff.; Nursî, B. S., *Mektûbat*, 22.

8. *Sözlür*, 543 / *The Words*, 565.

9. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, Sözlür Yayinevi 1980, 229; *Muhâkemât*, in *Âsâr-ı Bedi’iyye*, 252.

10. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, Sinan Matbaası 1960, 152.

"Saying, 'the true master is the Qur'an; making [my] *qibla* one will be by means of this master,' both his heart and his spirit began to journey spiritually in truly strange fashion through the guidance of that sacred master. And his evil-commanding soul began an intellectual and spiritual struggle with him through doubts and scepticism. He journeyed not with the eyes closed, but with the eyes of the heart, spirit, and mind open, like Imam Ghazzali, Mawlana Jalal al-Din, and Imam-i Rabbani. Endless thanks be to Almighty God, through the instruction and guidance of the Qur'an, he found a way to reality, and entered upon it. So too he demonstrated it through the Risale-i Nur, which manifests the truth of 'And in everything are signs indicating that He is One.'"¹¹

The Second: This is the specific meaning of 'sufi order' (*tariqat*) and this what comes to mind today on hearing the word. The word *tariqat* became the symbol of the organizations which, after the systemization of sufism, were distinguished by their own particular dress, recitations, and way of looking at things.¹² Some legal specialists have even discussed whether or not the sufi orders, which are social collectivities, should be afforded separate rights, and have wanted to conclude accordingly whether or not they are legal bodies.¹³ Bediuzzaman defines the sufi orders in this meaning as follows:

"Underlying the terms 'sufism,' 'path,' 'sainthood,' and 'spiritual journeying,' is an agreeable, luminous, joyful, and spiritual sacred truth... The aim and goal of the sufi path is —knowledge of God and the unfolding of the truths of belief— through a spiritual journeying with the feet of the heart under the shadow of the Ascension of Muhammad (PBUH), to manifest the truths of belief and the Qur'an through illumination and certain states, and to a degree by 'witnessing;' it is an elevated human mystery and human perfection which is called 'the sufi path' or 'sufism.'"¹⁴

It is quite clear that the Risale-i Nur movement is not a sufi order (*tariqat*) in the above sense, but since it has as its basis the principles of **impotence, poverty, compassion, and reflection**, the word 'way' (*tariq*), in the sense of way leading to God, may be used in reference to it, as in the first and general meaning above.

It should therefore first be stated that rather than being a sufi order, the Risale-i Nur movement is 'reality' (*haqiqat*). However, it is not opposed to sufi orders in the second sense. Those interested may refer to the parts of the Twenty-Ninth Letter, from *Mektûbat* (Letters), an important part of the Risale-i Nur, which defend the sufi orders —one of the three citadels protecting the Islamic Ottoman Empire. This letter was written at a time the orders were proscribed, and were subject to attack.¹⁵

Again Bediuzzaman himself describes why, while there were sufi orders, there was necessity for the Risale-i Nur movement this century:

"Since the fact is thus, my conjecture is that if figures like Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir Geylani and Shah Naqshband and Imam-i Rabbani were living at this time, they would expend all their endeavours on strengthening the truths of belief and tenets

11. *Mesnevi-yi Nâriye*, 7-8.

12. Eraydın, *Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar*, 172.

13. Hatemi, Hüseyin, *Medeni Hukuk Tüzeltişiler*, İstanbul 1979, 45-52.

14. *Mektûbat*, 415 / *Letters*, 518.

15. *Mektûbat*, 415-28 / *Letters*, 518-535.

of Islam. For they are the means to eternal happiness. If there is any deficiency in them, it causes eternal misery. Paradise cannot be entered without belief, but there are many who enter it without sufism. Man cannot live without bread, but he can live without fruit. Sufism is the fruit, the truths of belief, basic sustenance. Formerly some of the truths of belief could be attained only through a spiritual journeying which lasted from forty days to forty years. Now, if, through the mercy of Almighty God, there is a way by which those truths may be reached in forty minutes, to remain indifferent to it is surely not sensible.”¹⁶

That way, then, is the Risale-i Nur.

2. Claims that the Risale-i Nur is a Sufi Order

There are two different groups who claim that the Risale-i Nur is a sufi order.

The First comprises the state intelligence services and certain departments which are the microphone of the official ideology; they include the Risale-i Nur movement among the sufi orders and accuse it of opposing the ‘principles and reforms’ of the Republic in order to punish both Bediuzzaman and his students, and disconcert them. Bediuzzaman himself gave the best answer to such accusations. The main charge against Bediuzzaman in the Eskişehir trials, in 1935 and during the presidency of Mustafa Kemal, was that of forming a sufi order. Doubtless a scholar such as Bediuzzaman, who told those who accused him of wanting the Shari‘a that indeed he did want it and that if he had heads to the number of hairs on his head, he was ready to sacrifice all of them for the Shari‘a, such a person would surely not hesitated to proclaim that he was a follower of the sufi orders if indeed he had been. Instead, he gave the following reply to such accusations:

“Good sirs! I am not a shaykh, I am a *hoja* (teacher). The evidence is this: I have been here four years and if I had taught a single person the sufi way, you would have had the right to be suspicious. But I have told everyone who has come to me: Belief is necessary, Islam is necessary; this is not the age of sufism.”¹⁷

The following sentences, which Bediuzzaman wrote in connection with the Afyon trials, corroborate the above:

“The basis and aim of the Risale-i Nur are certain, verified belief and the reality of the Qur’an, which is why three courts [Eskişehir, Denizli, and Afyon] have acquitted it as regards being a sufi order. These last twenty years not one person has said: ‘Said gave me instruction in sufism.’ Also, a way to which the majority of the forefathers of this nation have be bound may not be made something for which the nation is answerable. Also, secret dissemblers attach the name of sufi order to the reality of Islam; those who might well reply successfully to their attacks on this nation’s religion may not be accused of belonging to sufi orders.”¹⁸

The Second are the claims of the person known as Şeyh Müslüm, who styles himself the leader of the Aczmendi sufi order. For the last year attempts have been made to present him to public opinion, colouring his claims with various

16. *Mektûbat*, 20-1 / *Letters*, 41.

17. *Mektûbat*, 59 / *Letters*, 85.

18. *Şualar*, 325.

accusations. The interest shown by even the official television channels is nothing other than a repetition of what the official ideology has done for the past seventy to eighty years. I want to emphasise that it is stated nowhere in the Risale-i Nur that it is a sufi order; on the contrary, in many places it is stressed that it is not. The claims of the above group, however, and those of its leader are misrepresentations of the Bediuzzaman's explanations of the Risale-i Nur's way leading to God, that of impotence, poverty, compassion, and reflection. The following are an example of these:

"This saying concerning the Naqshbandi Order suddenly occurred to me: 'On the Naqshbandi way, one must abandon four things: the world, the hereafter, existence, and abandoning itself.' It gave rise to the following thought: 'On the way of impotence four things are necessary: absolute poverty, absolute impotence, absolute thanks, and absolute ardour, my friend.'"¹⁹

As the above states, the Naqshbandi Order is one of the ways leading to God in the general sense (*tariq*) (but in the particular meaning is a *tariqat*), while the Risale-i Nur is a way leading to God only in the general sense, the basic principles of which are **impotence, poverty, thanks, and ardour**. Just as the lines above also say, that "four things are necessary on the way of the Risale-i Nur: absolute poverty, absolute impotence, absolute thanks, and absolute ardour." It is therefore either simple-mindedness or betrayal to take this sentence without thinking of the true meaning of the word *tariq*, and despite all Bediuzzaman's numerous statements to the contrary, to call the Risale-i Nur movement a sufi order. Furthermore, Bediuzzaman's eloquent replies to official accusations of sufism form the most powerful answers to simpleminded assertions such as these.

We may conclude the question of sufi orders by quoting one of these replies, which was part of his defence in Eskişehir Court:

"*Firstly*, all my books which you have in your possession testify that I am occupied with the truths of belief. I have, moreover, written in numerous of my treatises that it is not the time of sufism, but the time to save belief. There are many who will go to Paradise without joining a sufi order, but none who will go there without belief. It is therefore necessary to work for belief.

"*Secondly*, I have been in the province of Isparta for ten years. Let anyone come forward and say I have given them instruction in sufism. I have certainly given instruction to some of my special brothers in the sciences of belief and other elevated truths, since I am a teacher. But this was not instruction in the sufi way, it was instruction in reality.

"*Thirdly*, as for the claim that the sufi orders are praised in the Twenty-Ninth Letter, known as *Telvihat-ı Tis'a* (The Nine Allusions), the treatise is a scholarly discussion of the reality of sufism and the sufi orders. The prohibition cannot apply to this. Also, how can my explanations of the sufi orders as a sort of social benefit which are free of innovations and are the essence of *taqwa*, have for a thousand years illuminated the spirit of this nation, and to which half its forefathers lying in the graveyards were bound — how can my explaining this be used against me?"²⁰

19. That is, four things have to be given up on the Naqshbandi way: giving up both this world, and the next world, and 'being,' and giving up itself.

20. *Mektûbat*, 18 / *Letters*, 38.

III. Is the Risale-i Nur Movement a Political Movement?

Another accusation of those who want to axe the Risale-i Nur movement is that it is a political movement opposed to secularism, established with the aim of making the system of government, in either the social, economic, or legal fields, conform to religious principles and beliefs — if only in part. This they have asserted for seventy to eighty years and tried, by means of the microphones of the official ideology, to make the innocent public believe this lie. The above sentence is a paraphrase of the abrogated Article 163 of the Criminal Code, and now forms the final part of Article 24 of the Constitution. Before replying to these assertions, it is necessary to define the word 'society' (*cemiyet*).

In private law, a society is a 'legal person.' As a legal concept, it may be defined as an organized human collectivity.²¹ There are legal societies, and illegal ones. What the Risale-i Nur movement was accused of, was being a society as defined by the abrogated Article 163. This accusation was made by the public prosecutor in the Eskişehir trials, which began in 1935, and was repeatedly made against Bediuzzaman throughout his life in all the court cases that were opened against him. It is also to be regretted that despite all the acquittals, the same accusations continued to be made after Bediuzzaman's death in 1960 against those who read these books and were called Risale-i Nur students.

It should be stressed that the Risale-i Nur movement is not a society in the legal sense, despite being accused of being such from its beginnings up to the present. So too it is not in any way a society as described and defined by Article 163. In Bediuzzaman's own words, "If it is a society, it is a brotherhood of the hereafter in respect of Islamic brotherhood. It is not a political society, as three courts have judged and have acquitted it of being such."²²

Still relevant today are Bediuzzaman's replies to Eskişehir Court in 1935 and his accusers, who, as though the Risale-i Nur movement was a secret society, went so far as to ask where the money came from:

"Firstly: Are there any documents related to such a political society, or our founding it; are there any signs of it? What evidence and what proof have they found that we have set up an organization with the money they so persistently ask about?

"Secondly: Our business is belief. Through the brotherhood of belief we are the brothers of ninety per cent of the people of this country. Whereas a society is the alliance of a minority within the majority. Ninety-nine people cannot be a society in the face of one man. Unless some completely unfair irreligious person supposes —God forbid— everyone to be like himself, and spreads such gossip with the intention of insulting this blessed religious nation.

"Thirdly: Is there any harm if in ten years, not twenty or thirty, but perhaps a hundred or a thousand, students are bound to someone like me who earnestly loves the Turkish nation; who sincerely admires it since it is praised by the Qur'an; who supports it wholeheartedly since for six hundred years it withstood the whole world

21. *Lem'alar* (Ott. ed.), 747.

22. Köprülü, Bülent, *Medeni Hukuk*, Istanbul 1984, 426.

and was the Qur'an's standard-bearer; who according to the testimony of a thousand Turks, has served the Turkish nation as much as a thousand nationalist Tur-kists; who since he prefers thirty to forty valuable Turkish youths to thirty thousand of his fellow countrymen who do not pray, has chosen this exile; who by being a teacher has preserved the dignity of his learning and teaches the truths of belief quite openly — if his students are bound to him and devoted to him in regard only to belief and reality and the hereafter, and are his brothers of the hereafter, are they very numerous and is there any harm in it? Could any fair person of conscience criticize this and look on them as a political society?"²³

Thus, just as the Risale-i Nur movement is not a political society, neither is it a secret society. If the word is considered according to its literal meaning, it means a collectivity, and a collectivity of people who come together through the ties of the brotherhood of the hereafter in respect of Islamic brotherhood may be called a society. There is no harm in calling the Risale-i Nur students a society in this sense, but again we should listen to Bediuzzaman to learn how 'society' should be understood:

"Yes, we are a society and we are a society that every century it has three hundred and fifty million [now one and a half thousand million] members. Every day through the five obligatory prayers, they demonstrate with complete veneration their attachment to the principles of that sacred society. Through the sacred programme of *Indeed the believers are brothers*,²⁴ they hasten to assist one another with their prayers and spiritual gains. We are members of that sacred, vast society, and our particular duty is to teach the believers in certain, verified fashion the Qur'anic truths of belief, and save them and ourselves from eternal extinction and everlasting solitary confinement in the Intermediate Realm. We have absolutely no connection with any worldly, political, or intriguing society or clandestine group, or the baseless, meaningless secret societies concerning which we have been charged; we do not condescend to such things."²⁵

In any event, as a result of thousands of cases opened against them, there are now definite court rulings that accusations of this sort are not true.²⁶ But despite all this, Bediuzzaman and his students have always been accused of founding a secret political society.

VI. The Risale-i Nur Movement is a Community

The Risale-i Nur movement is not a sufi order, it is not a political society, and it is not a political party; so what is it? Bediuzzaman's answer to this question was "We are a community (*cema'at*)."²⁷ So what is a 'community'?

Derived from the Arabic meaning 'gather together, collect, or bring together,' in this context it means a group of Muslims who come together on the basis of religious brotherhood.²⁷ At the same time it is a term used for the Companions of

23. *Şualar*, 325.

24. *Lem'alar* (Ott. ed.), 773 ff.

25. *Tarihçe*, Envâr Neşriyat 1991, 400-1.

26. See, *Şualar*, 317 ff.

27. *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı 1993, vii, 287-8.

the Prophet (PBUH), the great *mujtahids* or interpreters of the law, the great majority of Muslims in every age, and mostly in Islamic sources, for the Sunnis.

It should be stressed that the Risale-i Nur Collection with its one hundred and thirty parts, which form the source of the Risale-i Nur movement, is available for all to see. Bediuzzaman's ninety year life is also there for all to study. The hundreds of legal investigations over seventy to eighty years, and more than a thousand courts, have confirmed through the acquittals they have granted that the millions of Risale-i Nur students have no worldly aim and goal other than the truth. In which case, the Risale-i Nur movement is not in any respect a political society. If the associations of university students and tradesmen are called societies, then the name may be applied to the Risale-i Nur movement. But if what is meant by 'society' is an association related to belief and the hereafter, then it is called a 'community.' In Bediuzzaman's words:

"Yes, we are a community. Our aim and programme is to save first ourselves, then our nation, from eternal extinction and permanent solitary confinement in the Intermediate Realm; to guard our fellow citizens against anarchy and aimlessness; and to protect ourselves with the steel-like truths of the Risale-i Nur against atheism, which destroys our lives in this world and the next."²⁸

The following passage describes the nature of the Risale-i Nur community and its members:

"I put forward as witnesses all the Risale-i Nur students here, those who meet with me, and those who read and write. Ask them. I have said to not one of them that we are going to set up a political society or a Naqshbandi society. What I have always said to them is this: We shall endeavour to save belief. There is no tie between us other than the sacred community of Islam, which includes all believers and has more than three hundred million [the population of the Islamic world at that time] members."²⁹

When describing those who visited him, Bediuzzaman made a threefold classification of the members of the Risale-i Nur community, which was defined above as including "all believers and has more than three hundred million (the population of the Islamic world at that time, now approaching one and a half thousand million) members."

Firstly are friends: they have to earnestly support our work and service connected with the Words and lights of the Qur'an. They should not support in heartfelt fashion injustice, innovations, or misguidance, nor try to profit by them.

Secondly are brothers: together with truly and earnestly working to disseminate the Words, they are to perform the five obligatory prayers and not to commit the seven grievous sins.

Thirdly are students: to feel as though the Words are their own property written by themselves, and to know their vital duty, their life's work, to be the service and dissemination of them.³⁰

28. *Şualar*, 317-8.

29. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Sirâcü'n-Nûr* (Ott. ed.), 354; Badıllı, Abdülkadir, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, Mufasssal Tarihçe-i Hayat*, ii, 1056.

30. *Mektûbat*, 329-30 / *Letters*, 417-8.

V. Conclusion

The Risale-i Nur Movement is not a sufi order, it is reality and Shari'a. The Risale-i Nur's author, Bediuzzaman, made his spiritual journeys with the eyes of the heart, spirit, and mind open, like Imam Ghazzali, Mawlana Jalal al-Din, and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi. He found a way to reality through the guidance and instruction of the Qur'an. Indeed, he demonstrated it with the Risale-i Nur, which manifests the truth of "In everything are signs indicating that He is One." Nevertheless, the Risale-i Nur movement has never been opposed to sufism and never been inimical towards it. But it is neither a branch of the Naqshbandi Order nor an independent order.

There is absolutely no connection between the Risale-i Nur movement and the 'Aczmendi Tariqat,' which has appeared in recent years and some people claim Bediuzzaman founded.

The Risale-i Nur Movement is also not a secret society of the sort described in the abrogated Article 163 of the Criminal Code and Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution. It is not even a society among legal persons as described in the Civil Code.

The service performed by the Risale-i Nur is a community.

"It is a circle bound with a luminous chain stretching from east to west, and from north to south. Those within it number more than three hundred million at this time. The point of unity of this community and what binds it is Divine Unity. Its oath and its promise are belief in God. Its members are all believers, belonging from the time of God's covenant with man. Its register is the Preserved Tablet. The community's means of communication are all Islamic books. Its daily newspapers, all religious newspapers whose aim is 'upholding the Word of God.' Its clubs and councils are the mosques, religious schools, and sufi meeting-places. Its centre is the two sacred cities. Its head, the Glory of the World (PBUH). Its way is the struggle of the each person with his own soul; that is, to assume the morality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to give new vigour to his practices, and to cultivate love for others and, if it is not harmful, offer them advice. The regulations of this community are the Practices of the Prophet, and its code of laws, the injunctions and prohibitions of the Shari'a. Its swords are clear proofs, for the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not compulsion. Investigating the truth is with love, while enmity is for savagery and bigotry. Its aim and purpose is 'Upholding the Word of God.'"³¹

That is to say, the Risale-i Nur movement is the community of the *Ahl al-Sunna* or Sunnis; it is service the aim of which is to establish in this age the Islam of the Age of the Prophet (PBUH). If they say the Risale-i Nur community is a society, we repeat this answer of Bediuzzaman:

"Yes, we are a society and we are a society that every century has three hundred and fifty million [now one and a half thousand million] members. Every day through the five obligatory prayers, they demonstrate with complete veneration their attachment to the principles of that sacred society."

31. *Tarihçe*, Sözlür Yayinevi 1991, 66-7.