

THIRD INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI

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

**24th-26th September, 1995
Istanbul**

Translated from the Turkish
by Şükran Vahide

Copyright © 1997 by Sözler Neşriyat Ticaret ve Sanayi A.Ş.

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced by any means in whole or in part without the publisher's prior permission.

For information, address:

Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., Nuruosmaniye Cad., Sorkun Han No: 28/2,
Cağaloğlu, İstanbul, Turkey.

Tel: 0212 - 527 76 07

Fax: 0212 - 520 82 31

E Mail: sozler@ihlas.net.tr

Printed at: Sözler Ofset A.Ş., İstanbul, 1997.

The Style of Reflective Thought in the Risale-i Nur

Ümit Şimşek

What is the Risale-i Nur?

The Risale-i Nur has been defined and described in various ways, in regard both to the subjects it covers and the manner in which it deals with them. It is most frequently described as “a Qur’anic commentary” (*tefsir*), and in various places in the work itself the author uses similar expressions to describe it.¹ He also calls it “a *kalām* work,” that is, is a work of the science of *kalām* or theology.² Also, if not frequently, from time to time people have suggested that the Risale-i Nur is related to sufism, although the author made no such statements, or have wanted to drag it into political channels.

ÜMIT ŞİMŞEK (Writer, Researcher)

Ümit Şimşek was born in Istanbul 1950, and entered the world of journalism and publishing at an early age. He began work on various newspapers and magazines in 1967, working for the *Yeni Asya* and *Yeni Nesil* newspapers from their inception. He played an active role in the setting up of the Yeni Asya Research Centre in 1979, and the preparation of their ‘İlim-Teknik Serisi’ (Series on Science and Technology), which brought together religion and science. He became the General Co-ordinator of the Centre.

His published works include:

Atom; Big Bang - Kâinatın Doğuşu (The Big Bang - The Birth of the Universe); *Bir Arının Haura Defteri* (The Diary of a Bee); *Araştırma Teknikleri* (Techniques in Research); *Uzay* (Space); *Gezegener* (The Planets); *Madde ve Enerji* (Matter and Energy); *Dünya* (The World); *Kur’ânımızı Öğrenelim* (Let’s Learn the Qur’an); *Kur’ân-ı Kerim ve Açıklamalı Meâli* (The Meaning of the Qur’an, trans.) (With others); *Şeytanla Münazara* (A Dispute with the Devil); *Risale-i Nur Işığında Cevşen Meâli* (The Meaning of the *Jawshan al-Kabir* in the Light of the Risale-i Nur); *Varlıklardan Allah’a* (From Beings to God).

1. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Mektûbat*, Istanbul, Sözlür Yayınevi 1981, 343; *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Letters 1928-1932* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Istanbul, Sözlür Publications 1994, 434; *Sualar*, Istanbul, Çeltut Matbaası 1960, 65, 112, 611; *Kastamonu Lahikası*, Istanbul, Sinan Matbaası 1960, 48.

2. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Barla Lahikası*, Istanbul, Sinan Matbaası 1960, 162; *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 172; *Emirdağ Lahikası*, Istanbul, Sinan Matbaası 1959, i, 90.

When taken as a whole, it is in fact difficult to place the Risale-i Nur within a single discipline. If it is thought of as a Qur'anic commentary, with the exception of *Isharat al-I'jaz*, it has to be considered a commentary bearing its own particular characteristics, both in regard to method, and contents, and composition, and style. For example, rather than the verses being expounded in the passages which they head in the way one would expect in a commentary, a journey in knowledge and reflective thought is made in the passage, within the horizons which the verse in question has opened up. The subjects treated in these journeys are for the most part within the bounds of the science of *kalām*. Yet their composition is not that of the classic *kalām* books; a way is followed that is still particular to the Risale-i Nur. Perhaps it would be more apt to define the Risale-i Nur as bearing characteristics of both a Qur'anic commentary, and a work of *kalām*. But first of all it is necessary to consider its unique style and the principles that form the basis of its style.

The Risale-i Nur's principles

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi states that the Risale-i Nur is based on four principles and he lists these as 1) impotence, 2) poverty or want, 3) compassion, and 4) reflective thought.³ Of these, impotence and poverty, that is, a person realizing his absolute impotence and poverty before the universe's Creator, are studied in the passages comprising reflective thought on man's inner self. It therefore will probably not be wrong to refer these two principles to reflective thought too. The principle of compassion produces results in a person like his making it the aim of his life to convey the truths expounded in the work, that is, the fruits of the Risale-i Nur's reflective thought, to others.⁴

Having described the first three principles thus, the fourth, that is, reflective thought, appears as the most important principle of the Risale-i Nur. This principle was at the same time, the most important factor shaping Bediuzzaman's life. The Risale-i Nur's reflective thought began to take shape in the author's mind while he was still in his youth, while it matured in his middle age and produced the profound chain of reflective thought called the *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, which contains a significant part of the Risale-i Nur in nascent form, and was written in the period that marked the transformation of the Old Said into the New Said.⁵ This reflective thought then influenced every facet of Bediuzzaman's life, and developing and broadening in the course of time, produced the Risale-i Nur Collection and its service to the Qur'an and belief.

3. Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, *Sözler*, İstanbul, Sözler Yayınevi 1980, 445 / *The Words* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], İstanbul, Sözler Publications 1992, 491.

4. Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, *Lem'alar*, İstanbul, Sözler Yayınevi 1986, 190, 191 / *The Flashes Collection* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], İstanbul, Sözler Publications 1995, 260, 261; *Barla Lahikası*, 18; *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 73.

5. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 172.

Reflective thought in the Risale-i Nur

In Bediuzzaman's eyes, the whole world of existence is a tableau to be reflected on. The purpose of the creation of conscious beings is to carry out the duty of reflective thought. Bediuzzaman saw the world in the form of two "spheres" and "tableaux," which he described as follows:

"One is a most magnificent, well-ordered sphere of dominicality, a finely fashioned, bejewelled signboard of art. The other is a most enlightened and illumined sphere of worship, a broad and comprehensive signboard of thought, reflection, admiration, thanks, and belief."⁶

The infinite art and adornment which the "art tableau," that is, the sphere of dominicality, displays demands an infinite duty of reflective thought, due to which mystery, is the creation, not only of man and the jinn, but of countless sorts of angels and spirit beings.⁷ However, in regard to his abilities, man holds a unique place among beings. For the purpose of reflective thought is to observe the marvels of the works, and to weigh them up one by one, and passing from the works to the Maker's beauty, perfection, tremendousness, glory, and other attributes, to gain knowledge of Him and feel awe and love for Him, and a longing to enter His presence and receive His favours.⁸

"It is man who will perform this duty, for although he is a dark and ignorant thing, he possesses such abilities he is worthy of being a sample and model of the world. Also, a trust has been granted to man with which he may discover secret treasures and open them. Also, man's powers have not been limited; they are absolute. In consequence he possesses a sort of universal consciousness whereby he perceives the resplendent majesty and grandeur of the Sultan of Pre-Eternity."⁹

In other places in his works, Bediuzzaman describes the "trust given to man" as his 'I' or ego, and says that it is by means of this trust that man can understand the Creator's attributes and works.¹⁰ This trust has also rendered man superior to the angels.¹¹ So too, man's soul, "which receives the bounty of the manifestations of Divine mercy"¹² is a cause of his superiority over the angels.¹³ "In particular he can understand many Divine Names through the pleasure to be found in sustenance. Whereas the angels cannot know them through that pleasure."¹⁴

Man, then, has been sent to this world decked out with abilities superior to all other creatures. Like an eminent guest invited to an exhibition of the choice works of an artist, he will travel in his mind throughout the universe, study all the works he encounters, decipher the subtleties of their art, listen to the testi-

6. *Sözler*, 216 / *The Words*, 242; *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, İstanbul, Sözler Yayınevi 1980, 28-9.

7. *Sözler*, 474 / *The Words*, 522.

8. *Sözler*, 115, 306 / *The Words*, 140, 338-9; *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 172.

9. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 172.

10. *Sözler*, 503, 641 / *The Words*, 558, 719; *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 143.

11. *Sözler*, 229 / *The Words*, 254.

12. *Şualar*, 637. For English trans., see, *On Ramadan, Thanks, and Frugality*, Sözler Publications 1994, 89.

13. *Sözler*, 331 / *The Words*, 367.

14. *Lem'alar*, 335 / *The Flashes Collection*, 456.

mony of all beings, both singly and in unison, understand their worship and glorifications, and just like a commander who makes the finishes touches in the name of his unit, he will present in their name to the Divine Court the worship and benedictions of the beings subjugated to him. All this can only be achieved through constant and intense practice of reflective thought.¹⁵

It is stated in a Qur'anic verse that men and jinn were created only that they should worship God.¹⁶ But such worship is not a soulless, formal ceremony; the verse demands recognition of the One Who is worshipped, belief in Him, knowledge of Him and the boundless love within that knowledge, and sets this before us as the highest aim of creation.¹⁷

The Risale-i Nur wants to achieve this result by means of reflective thought, its chief principle. The result of this reflection is not merely theoretical knowledge which admits God's existence and unity; it has as its aim a "sense of presence" which permeates every aspect of man's life; that is, finding, knowing, and feeling everywhere, in everything, in every event, the Divine existence and unity, and living in awareness of these:

"Dismissing beings from working on their own account and employing them on account of the All-Glorious Creator, and in the duty of manifesting the Most Beautiful Names and being mirrors to them, [The Risale-i Nur's way of reflective thought] considers them from the point of view of signifying something other than themselves; and being saved from absolute heedlessness, [one who follows it] enters the Divine presence permanently; he finds a way leading to Almighty God in everything."¹⁸

In another place, Bediuzzaman states that a sense of the Divine presence such as this may be gained through the strength of certain, verified belief (*tahkiki iman*) and through the reflective thought on creatures which leads to knowledge of the Maker.¹⁹

The sorts of reflective thought

The Risale-i Nur offers us a very rich repertoire when it comes to the methods followed in reflective thought. For the universe was written as a vast book and set out as a magnificent exhibition of art, and there are numerous ways of reading the book and perusing the works in the exhibition. However, since this subject demands detailed study, here I shall suffice with mentioning briefly a classification which will hold up a light to the Risale-i Nur's style of reflective thought.

The Risale-i Nur's reflective thought proceeds on two principles: (1) the outer world (2) man's inner self. In the former, summary exposition has been taken as basic, and in the latter, detailed exposition.²⁰

15. *Sözler*, 111-5, 306 / *The Words*, 136-40, 338-9; *Şualar*, 77-8.

16. Qur'an, 51:56.

17. *Mektûbat*, 204 / *Letters*, 264-5; *Şualar*, 84.

18. *Sözler*, 448 / *The Words*, 494.

19. *Lem'alar*, 157 / *The Flashes Collection*, 217.

20. *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 133.

Reflection on the outer world

The Supreme Sign (*Âyetü'l-Kübra*), which consists of the observations of a traveller questioning the universe about his Maker, is rich in examples of the Risale-i Nur's reflective thought on the outer world.²¹ In this treatise, the universe is studied together with all its beings and its visible and invisible worlds, and its testimony to its Creator is described on thirty-three different levels or degrees. In the first chapter, the main subject is the necessary existence of God and proofs of it, and Divine unity is secondary, while in Chapter Two the universe as a whole is discussed from various angles and the question of Divine unity is stressed. The method which is followed on a broad scale in The Supreme Sign represents the Risale-i Nur's general approach. We may summarize this method as "considering aspects of a being or event together with others resembling it in the universe and approaching them with a view as wide as the universe." This is probably what is meant by the "summary" reflection on the outer world. This way prevents thought being scattered in the realms of multiplicity; all the beings or events we observe in the universe become proofs of knowledge of God as powerful as the universe or means to the sense of His presence.

Bediuzzaman expresses this truth at the beginning of the Second Ray as "Divine beauty and dominical perfection become apparent in Divine unity and the affirmation of it," and he sets out examples of it. For example, if considered on its own, a sick person being healed may be attributed to various causes such as medicine. But if all the sick in the world are thought of who are recovering at that same time, and even all those of the past and future, the face of the earth takes on the form of a hospital, and the existence and compassion of a Healer who restores to health all those suffering ills both physical and spiritual, will be felt in powerful fashion.²²

In the Fourth Ray, Bediuzzaman follows the same method, and sets out the face of the earth before the imagination just as though it was a small garden. The imagination then gazes on the beauty of Divine compassion in all the young in the garden being fed on their mother's milk; and the beauty of Divine mercy in all living beings being given their sustenance; and the beauty of Divine wisdom in all beings being created purposefully and with wisdom; and the beauty of Divine justice in the harmony and proportion in the creation of all things; and the beauty of Divine preservation in all things beings created with faculties and members that will preserve and perpetuate their lives; and the beauty of Divine munificence in the bestowal on all living beings of bounties appropriate to them.²³ These are what appear to "the eye of the imagination," but they are not imagination, they are reality. For what is described is what is happening all around us all the time, whether we see it or not. But since our physical eyes are incapable of seeing it, the rest of the picture can be completed only with the help of the power of imagination and by means of reflective thought.

21. *Sualar*, 88-148.

22. *Sualar*, 7.

23. *Sualar*, 62-3.

Once this way of looking at things is grasped, all works are seen in one work, all acts in one act, and all Names in one Name. Observing the manifestation of one Name in a being, the thought is transferred to the One signified by all the Names manifested in the universe.²⁴ After this a single being, or even a single particle, may perform the function of all the universe. For a single minute particle proves Almighty God together with His essence and attributes, and makes Him known.²⁵

When the universe together with all its beings becomes the means to knowledge of God, no need arises to abandon the realms of multiplicity in order to find Divine unity and gain a sense of the Divine presence. On the contrary, the opportunity lost by abandoning multiplicity performs an important function in the Risale-i Nur's reflective thought:

"[The Risale-i Nur] shows in such a way that from top to bottom the universe reflects the manifestations of the Divine Names like mirrors, that no possibility remains for heedlessness. Nothing becomes an obstacle to the Divine presence. I saw that unlike the sufis and people of reality who in order to gain permanent access to the Divine presence, banish or forget or do not recall the universe, it gains a sense of the Divine presence as extensive as the universe, and opens up a sphere of worship as broad and universal and permanent as the universe..."²⁶

Reflective thought on man's inner self

The same may be applied to reflective thought on man's inner self. Factors which are generally considered to be obstacles to spiritual development like egoism and the soul, are seen in the Risale-i Nur to be important means to knowledge of God. For one thing, nothing can take the place of egoism and the function it performs. For the Creator's attributes, which it is our duty to know, are absolute, and without limit or like. If it was not for the analogies the ego makes, starting off with "However I make this house, that is how God made the universe," and continuing successively to the highest levels of abstract thought, it would not have been possible to reflect on the attributes, works, or manifestations of a Creator Whose power embraces all things and does as He wishes.²⁷ Both the Qur'an and Hadith teach the attributes and acts of the universe's Creator in this way. For example, God's not permitting the associating of partners with Him is illustrated with the comparisons "giving an example from among yourselves," and "would you consent to your slaves sharing your property and being equal to you?"²⁸ Here, the fact that rulership does not permit rivals is illustrated by the example of man's apparent and relative ownership and rulership. And in a Hadith, the joy God feels at a sinner's repentance is illustrated by the joy of someone who has lost all his possessions in the desert and given up all hope of life, sleeping and when he awakens finding his camel and everything beside him.²⁹

24. *Mektûbat*, 309-10 / *Letters*, 392-3.

25. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 68.

26. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 174-5.

27. *Sözler*, 502 ff. / *The Words*, 557 ff.

28. Qur'an, 30:28.

29. *Bukhârî*, Da'awât, 3; *Mustim*, Tawba, 3; *Tirmidhi*, Da'awât, 98.

Like egoism, man's instinctual soul is an important means to knowledge of God. As we saw above, due to the manifestations it receives, it is even the cause of his superiority to the angels. In this matter, Bediuzzaman took the Companions as an example, and rather than killing the soul or rendering it ineffective, he preferred the way of employing it as a soldier under the command of the heart and driving to perform the worship particular to it.³⁰

With adding the two facts that like other beings, man is a mirror to the Divine Names, and that with his 'deficient' attributes, he acts as a mirror to the Creator's perfect attributes, the three fronts of reflective thought on man's inner self become clear.³¹ In fact, as deficient attributes, the principles of impotence and poverty form the basis of the Risale-i Nur's reflective thought. These principles also act as a sort of insurance against the potential dangers of egotism and the instinctual soul:

"Yes, this path is shorter, because it consists of four steps. When impotence removes its hand from the soul, it gives it directly to the All-Powerful One of Glory... Also this path is much safer, because the ravings and high-flown claims of the soul are not present on it. For apart from impotence, poverty, and defect, the soul possesses nothing so that it oversteps its mark."³²

Just as Bediuzzaman favours detailed thought in internal reflection, so is he of the opinion that it is a swifter and more direct way than reflection on the outer world. Even, although he describes the certainty resulting from reflection on the outer world as "knowledge of certainty," he speaks of "absolute certainty" in connection with reflection on man's inner world. This is understood from his later adding a section entitled "the testimony of man's essential nature" to the *Hülâsatü'l-Hülâsa*, an Arabic summary of The Supreme Sign, which forms the peak of reflection on the outer world. He explained the reason for this addition as follows in one of his Emirdağ letters:

"Yes, when I read the *Hülâsatü'l-Hülâsa*, I see the vast universe as a circle for the remembrance of God. But since the tongue of each realm of beings is very extensive, the intellect has to work excessively to comprehend the Divine Names and attributes by way of reflective thought at the degree of 'the knowledge of certainty'. Only then does it see it completely. But when it considers the human reality, it confirms those Names and attributes in that comprehensive measure, that tiny map, that tiny true sample, that tiny sensitive balance, and in that sensitive egoism with a conscience, assurance and belief which are utterly certain, direct, and assented to mentally."

Later in the same passage, Bediuzzaman states that reflective thought on man's inner self is the means to attaining belief which is at the degree of 'absolute certainty' and free of every sort of doubt and hesitation.³³

30. *Sözler*, 464 / *The Words*, 511.

31. *Sözler*, 640-2 / *The Words*, 718-20; *Lem'alar*, 336-7 / *The Flashes Collection*, 457-9.

32. *Sözler*, 448 / *The Words*, 493-4.

33. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 143.

The source of reflective thought

If one has to place the reflective thought of the Risale-i Nur within Islamic thought, a number of currents resembling it may be found in the Islamic world. It is possible to find the traces of sufism, the method of *kalām*, and even philosophy in certain aspects of it. If it is borne in mind that Bediuzzaman engaged in intensive study from a very early age, it will be clear that someone with his brilliant intelligence and high culture could not fail to be influenced by the works he studied and thought he encountered. Nevertheless it is understood from his earliest extant works that none of these ways satisfied Bediuzzaman completely, and that setting his sights on higher ground, he began to search for a different way. For example, in *Muhâkemat*, one of his earliest works, he defines the ways leading to knowledge of God as follows, setting forth his preference:

"The first is the way of the sufi scholars, which is based on purification and illumination.

"The second is the way of the scholars of *kalām*, which is based on contingency and createdness. For sure these two ways have branched out from the Qur'an, but since human thought has put them in a different mould, they have become lengthy and difficult.

"The third is the way of the philosophers.

"These three are not free of the assaults of doubts.

"As for the fourth, it is the Qur'anic ascent, which proclaims the lofty rank of the Qur'an's eloquence, and is the shortest and most direct, and in respect of clarity is the most comprehensive, embracing all mankind. We too have chosen this [way]."³⁴

Bediuzzaman remained faithful to this claim throughout his life, and stated in numerous places in his works that the Risale-i Nur was based on the Qur'an alone and had taken its inspiration from it. When we study the Risale-i Nur in the light of this, we see that in fact it does reflect a number of characteristics of the Qur'an's style, the most important of which may be listed as follows:

1. The evidences the Qur'an puts forward while proving foremost the necessary existence and unity of God and all the truths of belief, are taken from the world around us and the life we live: birds, sheep, clouds, mountains, the seas, grapes, dates, olives, the bee, the fly, the moon, the sun, fish, rotted bones, fruit ripe and unripe, eyes, ears, mounts ridden on journeys, and so on. These are all things which the peoples of all ages are familiar, and the Qur'an uses them all as evidences making known God. The things the Risale-i Nur employs in its reflective thought are nothing other than these.

2. The Risale-i Nur adopts exactly the method of the Qur'an, which from beginning to end calls on the reason to testify to what it asserts, invites man to reflect, shows imitative belief to be the basis of associating partners with God, and eradicates it. Bediuzzaman states that the logical proofs and scholarly

33. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 143.

34. Nursî, Bediuzzaman Said, *Muhâkemat*, Istanbul, Sözleryayinevi 1977, 107.

arguments of the Risale-i Nur have taken the place of the spiritual journeying and recitations of sufism.³⁵

3. The Qur'an addresses everyone. Bediuzzaman also chose this way, particularly in the Risale-i Nur, which he began to write while he was in Barla, and addresses not an elite group, but every class of mankind. The role a person's degree of knowledge and understanding play in their profiting from the works is another subject, exactly the same as their profiting from the Qur'an.

4. A characteristic mentioned in the second matter above, that although it shares a basic characteristic with the science of *kalām*, it departs from it in the matter of style, where it takes the Qur'an as its direct example. For example, it is not possible to encounter in a work of *kalām* the style he uses in the Risale-i Nur, a method which consists of studying side by side the manifestation in a particular being or event and universal beings and events:

"Thus, by analogy with these examples, each of the Divine Names has a sacred beauty particular to it, a single manifestation of which makes beautiful the vast world and innumerable species of beings. You may see the manifestation of a Name's beauty in a single flower; the spring is also a flower; Paradise is a flower yet unseen. If you can visualize the whole of spring and see Paradise with the eye of belief, you may understand the utter majesty of everlasting Beauty. If you respond to that Beauty with the beauty of belief and worship, you will be a most beautiful creature. While if you meet it with the boundless ugliness of misguidance and loathsomeness of rebellion, you will be both a most ugly creature and will in effect be loathed by all beautiful creatures."³⁶

The fact that these phrases have a power which "surpass the mere words of the book" and when read, arouse some of man's inner faculties, is easily understood both from the phrases themselves, and from the effect they have on those who read them. Islamic scholars who have chosen a similar style are not few in number; it is clear that like them, the Qur'an is the source of this original style of the Risale-i Nur. The effect of this style on the conscience is nothing other than proof of the Qur'an's miraculousness, which transcends the centuries and continents.³⁷

5. Just as the Qur'an addresses all the classes of mankind at once, so it addresses man himself as a totality. It is not only the intellect or the heart that receive effulgence from its address, but all man's being and all his senses. The Risale-i Nur adopted this style also. In Bediuzzaman's words:

35. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 90.

36. *Şualar*, 63.

37. We should not continue without touching on a question which arises here: why is it that the Qur'an, a mere flash of which in works written by man has such an effect over the mass of people, does not *itself* have a similar effect on our lives? In my opinion, the answer to this question is that we have pushed the Qur'an out of our lives. If, as Mehmed Akif complained, we had not sufficed with reading it in graveyards and for the dead and had read it a bit for ourselves too, we would not have neglected to live that clear miracle's works. Bediuzzaman suffers the same anguish as Mehmed Akif, and complains that "it has remained as something holy which is recited for its blessings." (*Sünûhat*, 34). It probably would not be inaccurate to classify the Risale-i Nur as the fruit of that anguish.

"Both the mind, and the heart, and the spirit, and the soul, and the emotions may receive their share of the Risale-i Nur's truths, which are like basic sustenance."³⁸

"The Words and those lights, which proceed from the Qur'an, are not only scholarly matters pertaining to the intellect, they are rather matters of belief which pertain to the heart, the spirit, and spiritual states. They resemble most elevated and valuable knowledge of God."³⁹

"The Risale-i Nur does not teach only with the feet and reasoning of the intellect like the works of other religious scholars, and it does not proceed only with the illuminations and visions of the heart like the saints; it proceeds with the feet of the uniting and combining of the heart and intellect, and of the co-operation of the spirit and other subtle faculties, and flies to the highest summits."⁴⁰

The author also attributes to the Qur'an the fact that the reflective passages in the Risale-i Nur cause no boredom even when read over and over again.⁴¹

6. On its very first page, the Qur'an, which was revealed as a mercy to believers,⁴² to a Messenger who was sent as a mercy to all the worlds⁴³ and who is most compassionate and kind towards the believers,⁴⁴ describes the Sustainer of All the Worlds with the Names of *Merciful and Compassionate*. In describing God to the people of today, who although they are more in need of Divine mercy than at any time, tend to think of God as wrathful and chastising as a result of what they hear from their environment, the Risale-i Nur for the most part employs the same style. It imparts hope rather than despair, encourages rather than frightens, even likening fear of God to a child seeking refuge in his mothers tender breast.⁴⁵ This characteristic undoubtedly comes from the Qur'an and demonstrates that the Risale-i Nur is a reflection of the Divine Names of *Merciful (Rahman)*,⁴⁶ *Compassionate (Rahim)*,⁴⁷ and *Clement (Raûf)*.⁴⁸

What is the Risale-i Nur?

Having explained the above, if we return to the question posed at the beginning, we may be faced with the need to attach a new name to the reflective thought of the Risale-i Nur. If you look from one angle, characteristics of this reflective thought resembling sufism are apparent, and if you look from another, those resembling *kalâm* appear to one. As was mentioned above, his being influenced to a greater or lesser degree by both these may be seen as a natural consequence of both his humanity and his broad culture. On the other hand, the author's own statements on this matter sometimes hint of contradiction. For

38. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 64.

39. *Mektûbat*, 331 / *Letters*, 419.

40. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 10.

41. *Lem'alar*, 272 / *The Flashes Collection*, 380-1.

42. Qur'an, 21:107.

43. Qur'an, 9:128.

44. Qur'an, 6:157; 7:52, 203; 10:57; 12:111; 16:89; 17:82; 28:86; 29:51; 31:3; 45:20.

45. *Sözler*, 29, 332 / *The Words*, 43, 368; *Mesnevi-yi Nûriye*, 196.

46. *Şualar*, 601.

47. *Mektûbat*, 18 / *Letters*, 37; *Şualar*, 147, 598, 601; *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 41; *Lem'alar* (Ott. ed.), Istanbul, Sözler Yayınevi 1995, 517 fn.; *Sirâcü'n-Nûr*, Istanbul, Tenvir Neşriyat 1988, 177.

48. *Lem'alar* (Ott. ed.), 517 fn.

example, there is his well-known saying: "This is not the time of the sufi *tariqat*, it is the time of 'reality' (*haqiqat*),"⁴⁹ and his numerous clear statements to the effect that the Risale-i Nur was not a sufi path, leaving no room for doubt on the question,⁵⁰ but then the question is expressed rather differently in one of his Emirdağ letters:

"Up to now I have thought only of the reality of belief and said 'This is not the time of the sufi *tariqat*; innovations do not permit it.' But now it is necessary and essential that all the followers of the *tariqats* who are within the bounds of the Prophet's *Sunna* should regard the circle of the Risale-i Nur, which is the summary of all the twelve major *tariqats* and is their largest circle, as their own *tariqat* circle, and enter it. The present time has shown this."⁵¹

Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that to conclude from the above that the Risale-i Nur is another large *tariqat* which embraces all the others is not correct. It is probably more accurate to understand this as meaning that (1) the Risale-i Nur produces more directly, by way of 'the greater sainthood (*velâyet-i kübra*)' and 'the legacy of prophethood (*veraset-i nübüvvet*)', the results sought from the sufi path,⁵² and that the Risale-i Nur does not form a separate movement like the sufi orders and other communities, and is a work which is common property, which everyone may identify with and from which everyone may profit to whatever *tariqat*, group, or school they belong.⁵³

Certainly, we see that like the followers of the sufi path, supplications, litanies and recitations of the Divine Names held an important place in the life of the author of the Risale-i Nur, but besides these all having the purpose of reflective thought and assisting in the unfolding of numerous of the truths of the Risale-i Nur, it is a fact that the Risale-i Nur students were not left under any obligation to perform these litanies and recitations. The "recitations" of the Risale-i Nur, which is based on the principles of impotence, poverty, compassion and reflection, are (1) following the practices of the Prophet (PBUH), (2) carrying out all the religious obligations, (3) avoiding serious sins, (4) performing the obligatory five daily prayers exactly as they should be performed, and (5) reciting the *tesbihat* after the five daily prayers. Here we see no obligation to recite any recitations or supplications other than the *tesbihat*.⁵⁴

Another characteristic distinguishing the Risale-i Nur from the sufi *tariqats* was Bediüzzaman's explicitly rejecting "intermediaries" (*vesile*)⁵⁵ and "excessively good opinions" of spiritual guides,⁵⁶ which is favoured by the followers of the sufi way.

49. Emirdağ Lahikası, i, 66.

50. Lem'alar, 156-7 / *The Flashes Collection*, 220; *Lâtif Nükteler*, Sözlür Yayinevi, 21-2, 26-7 / *The Flashes Collection*, 355-6, 360-1; *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 52, 174; *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 62, 85, 238; ii, 162; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, Hayatı, Mesleki, Tercüme-i Hâli*, İstanbul, Sözlür Yayinevi 1976, 199.

51. Emirdağ Lahikası, ii, 55-6.

52. *Lâtif Nükteler*, 21-7 / *The Flashes Collection*, 355-61; *Barla Lahikası*, 139.

53. *Lâtif Nükteler*, 21-2 / *The Flashes Collection*, 355-6; *Barla Lahikası*, 7-8; *Emirdağ Lahikası*, ii, 55-6.

54. *Sözlür*, 445 / *The Words*, 491; *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 68-9.

55. *Sünâhat*, İstanbul, Sözlür Yayinevi 1977, 26.

56. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 56.

Nevertheless, even if only to a certain extent, 'wonder-working' (*keramet*) and signs from the realms beyond man's normal perceptions (*gayb*) are to be seen in the Risale-i Nur. There are even treatises confined to this matter, such as the First and Eighth Rays. And the 'wonders' attributed to Bediuzzaman himself both in the writings of his students and in his official biography, are not few in number. The most important reason these were given importance by the Risale-i Nur students despite the author himself attaching no importance to wonder-working and insistently correcting his students' excessively good opinion of himself and clearly stating that the way of the Risale-i Nur is that of 'reality,' was probably the need of the Risale-i Nur students for moral support at that time of severe oppression. At the same time, the excessive fondness of society for 'extra-ordinary' occurrences like illuminations and wonder-working should not be ignored. This tendency would certainly be reflected in a movement like the Risale-i Nur, which embraces all sectors of society. The temperaments of a number of prominent Risale-i Nur students with leanings towards sufism, both in the author's time, and in our time, have played a significant role in this matter, and continue to do so.

However, Bediuzzaman's own statements are the last word on this matter and state the Risale-i Nur's position clearly:

"This result, which, through the service of the Risale-i Nur, has ensured for thousands of believers in Isparta and its environs an extraordinary strength of belief, is sufficient for our extraordinary service. Even if someone was to appear of the loftiness of ten spiritual poles and raise a thousand people to the level of sainthood, he still could not lower this degree [of the Risale-i Nur's achievement]. The true students of the Risale-i Nur content themselves with results like this... What they call in logic '*qaziye-i makkule*,' that is, accepting without proof the words of the great, does not express certainty and surety in logic; it is only a prevailing assumption. The certain proofs of logic do not look to good opinions of people and people who are generally accepted, they look to irrefutable evidence; all the proofs of the Risale-i Nur are of this incontrovertible type. For exactly like the realities and truths of belief which the saints (*ehl-i velâyet*) experience through their pious acts and worship and asceticism, and on their spiritual journeyings, and which they observe behind veils, the Risale-i Nur has opened a way to reality in knowledge in place of worship; it has opened up a way leading to the essence of reality within logical proofs and scholarly arguments in place of spiritual journeyings and recitations; it has opened up a way of 'the greater sainthood' directly within the science of *kalâm*, the science of the tenets of belief, and the science of the principles of religion, in place of the science of sufism and the *tariqat*."⁵⁷

Nevertheless, we are confronted with a number of differences between the science of *kalâm* and the Risale-i Nur. Before everything, the author was of the opinion that the way followed by the scholars of *kalâm* was lengthy and far from answering the needs of the time, and did not go beyond addressing the intellect alone.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the facts that (1) the subjects the Risale-i Nur mostly deals with, and (2) it follows the method of proving the truths of belief with evidence,

57. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 90.

bring it closer to *kalām*. It should be stated clearly here that the points the Risale-i Nur shares with *kalām* are more numerous and more fundamental than those it shares with sufism. It is exaggeration to say that the difference between the Risale-i Nur and the scholars of *kalām* is merely one of style, for Bediüzzaman's own statements place the Risale-i Nur within that science:

"You wanted instruction in the science of *kalām* from me. You anyway receive such instruction, for all the Words that you write [out by hand] are lessons in the luminous, true science of *kalām*."⁵⁹

"Since early times in most places the scholars of the religious schools (*medrese*) bowed to the people of the sufi convents (*tekke*), that is, they submitted to them and applied to them for the fruits of sainthood (*velâyet*). They sought the illuminations of belief and the lights of reality in their shops. A prominent *medrese* scholar even, would kiss the hand of a minor shaykh of the *tekkes*, and follow him. They sought the spring of that water of life in the *tekke*. Nevertheless in the *medrese* was a more direct path leading to the lights of reality, and in the sciences of belief a purer and clearer spring of the water of life, and in [intellectual] knowledge (*'ilm*) and the truths of belief and the science of *kalam* of the Sunnis a way of sainthood higher, sweeter, and more powerful than laudable acts, worship and the sufi way; thus, the Risale-i Nur has opened up as a miracle of the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition, and has demonstrated, and it is there for all to see."⁶⁰

"The Risale-i Nur has opened ... a way of 'the greater sainthood' directly within the science of *kalām*, the science of the tenets of belief, and the science of the principles of religion, in place of the science of sufism and the *tariqat*."⁶¹

If we leave aside as the subjects for another discussion, "the greater sainthood" and "legacy of Prophethood," the Risale-i Nur confronts us with its own particular style of reflective thought as a different, original, and brand-new work of *kalām*.

It is a work which in the words of Mehmed Akif, receives inspiration directly from the Qur'an; reads the books of the macrocosm and microcosm within the broad horizons the Qur'an has revealed; addresses simultaneously the intellect and the heart; and by stirring into action with this style of address the potential energy in man, makes Islam liveable in all areas of his life; and has proved its originality and effectiveness over the mass of people.

Having opened up a new path in the history of the science of *kalām* with the horizon of reflective thought that it has laid out before twentieth—and probably twenty-first—century man, the Risale-i Nur is certainly worthy of being thought of as unique. For once it has been discovered, the style of Qur'anic *kalām* that it introduced will acquaint people directly with the Qur'an, and concealed in the Qur'an is the potential to ensure they will find much more in the Qur'an than the Risale-i Nur can explain.

* * *

58. *Mektûbat*, 306 / *Letters*, 388; *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 10; *Muhâkemat*, 107.

59. *Barla Lahikası*, 162.

60. *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 172.

61. *Emirdağ Lahikası*, i, 90.