

New Muslim Discourses on Pluralism in the Post-Modern Age: Nursi on Religious Pluralism and Tolerance

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Abstract

The subject of religious pluralism can provoke a great deal of controversy. One could take the view that all religious knowledge is relative and that no one can claim absolute truth for his or her religion. Alternatively one can claim that his religion or understanding is the only truth. Religious pluralism is the theory that all religions constitute varying conceptions of, and responses to, one ultimate, mysterious divine reality. It concerns the legitimacy of religious diversity and the idea that no single religion has a monopoly on religious truth. Some may argue that linking religion with pluralism presents a potential threat to their religion.

This paper presents Said Nursi's philosophy on religious pluralism and tolerance by illustrating, analyzing, and interrelating his reflections contained especially in the *Risale-i Nur* (The Epistle of Light) *Collection*.¹ The following questions will be considered: How does Nursi view others who believe and worship differently? Can believers coexist in peace in the same societal structure? Is there any way to share the world with those who have different religious practices and beliefs? Is a person of another faith saved? How should unbelievers be treated?

The first section briefly describes modern man's search for true religion and the significance of belief, according to Nursi. At this point, one must try to comprehend the tolerance for both religious and national/ eth-

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nic differences in Nursi's strictly belief-based discourse. The second section surveys in great detail Nursi's concepts concerning religious pluralism and tolerance from the perspective of socio-theological discourse. The final section discusses practical aspects of Nursi's approach concerning "the others," and their different doctrines, ideologies, and religions in order to promote different views of life and the universe.

Preliminary Approaches for Nursi's Understanding of Religious Pluralism

Religion is still the most heated subject in contemporary Turkey. Nurculuk, one of the best-known twentieth-century Islamic religious movements, especially in Turkey, is now becoming a subject for academics who are trying to produce pictures of what is truly religious in Nurculuk and what attracts people to the movement.²

Its founder, Said Nursi, was born in 1876 in eastern Turkey and died in 1960 in Urfa, Turkey. He is also known as Bediüzzaman (the regenerator or *non-pareil* of the time).³ Nursi studied Islam with the conceptions of the present age, and was highly successful in explaining the creation of all beings in the universe by blending Islamic theology and the physical sciences. His collected works, *The Risale-i Nur* (The Epistle of Light), is a 6,000-page commentary on the Qur'an that reflects this bringing together of religion and science. Nursi believed that "the conscience is illuminated by the religious sciences, and the mind is illuminated by the sciences of civilization."⁴

The Nur movement, which became known as Nurculuk, seeks to raise religious consciousness in a society based on individualism through education, civilization, and reason based on Nursi's ideas. Said Nursi concentrated first on proving the pillars of Islamic belief and then on the necessity of belief and worship, morality and good conduct, and finally on the scientific and socioeconomic issues facing Muslims in this age.

During the time in which he lived, materialism and communism were at their peak, and the world's psycho-sociological condition was disturbing, viz. the world was in great crisis. On the other hand, there were enormous advances in the field of the modern sciences. These improvements in science were used as a tool for irreligion; to create doubt about religion in the minds of Muslims, as well as in the minds of Jews and Christians.

Ashur states: “Even the sciences, which are reconciled with Islam, were deliberately being used against it. They were endeavouring to show that Islam, the religion of civilisation, was opposed to progress and technology.”⁵ Society embraced either atheism or existentialism. Ubayd states:

And certainly many philosophers have worshipped gods in some form. Rijson saw life itself as a god, while Darwin deified evolution. Hegel thought the absolute spirit was god, while Marx recognized dialectic materialism as god. Others are society, which Durkheim deified, sexuality, which Freud deified, the individual, which Sartre made into a false god. All these are nothing other than names given to acts and events pertaining to society, life, man, and the universe, which God has created.⁶

Darwinism propounded that man was a special animal. The Darwinistic view implied that both humanity’s moral nature and its religion had developed naturalistically. Now, there was no need for a God or religion to explain life. Darwinism contradicted ideas in the Holy Scriptures and was seen as a threat to revealed religions.⁷ Another great scientific revolution of the time was that of Freud’s, which placed sex at the heart of the personality: Civilization was argued to depend on the sublimation of sexual energy.⁸

Philosophers and artists increasingly became aware of this basic problem of modern humanity, our loss of faith, and struggled to replace it. According to Burckhardt:

The sun-centred system bears a clear symbolism, for it situates the light-source at the centre. However, Copernicus’ rediscovery of this system did not bring any new spiritual view. It was in fact the popularization of an esoteric truth to a dangerous extent. The sun-centred system has no shared aspect with people’s subjective experiences. Religious belief has no organic place in this system. In place of pointing out to man’s intellect the ways it could surpass itself and ensuring the evaluating of everything within the extraordinariness of the cosmos, it merely opened up the way to a materialist Prometheanism which was not even human, let alone superhuman.⁹

Surrounded by such ideas the basis for unreligious traditions, Nursi appeared as renewer and strengthener of belief and faith in God. His discourse was based on “experiential” arguments for the existence of God^{10,11} and his aim was to corroborate, prove, and publish the truths of the Qur’an and pillars of belief.¹² For Nursi:

Man came to this world to be perfected by means of knowledge and supplication. In regard to his nature and abilities everything is tied to knowledge. And the foundation, source, light, and spirit of all true knowledge is knowledge of God, and its essence and basis is belief in God.¹³

Nursi was of the opinion that in order to make people convinced, strong believers, the relation between God and divine vicegerency, public order and social harmony is essential. He says:

The parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, which consists of the sciences of belief, establishes and maintains public order and security. Yes, belief, the source of good character and virtues, certainly does not disturb public order, it is unbelief with its bad character that spoils it.¹⁴

In his *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi generally deals with the issue related to the next world rather than this world. In his words:

The *Risale-i Nur* does not discuss the broad sphere of religion which encompasses the laws regulating social life; its chief subject and aim is discussion of the mighty pillars of belief, which are the choicest and most elevated part of religion. Moreover, those I mostly address are firstly my own soul, then the philosophers of Europe.¹⁵

As a religious man, Nursi believed that “the revival of religion is the revival of the nation. The life of religion is the light of life.”¹⁶

Religious Pluralism and Tolerance

Absolutism and Relativism

According to Nursi, understanding of the truth is not one; the understandings may be many and can have different forms according to time and place. Even sacred laws change according to the passage of time. Indeed, in one age different prophets may – and have – come.¹⁷ There were even different prophets and laws in the same continent in the same century.¹⁸ Regarding the diversity of the schools of law, Nursi replies:

If you say: The truth is one; how can the different ordinances of the four, or twelve, schools be true?

The Answer: The same water governs in five different ways in five ill people of different disposition, thus: for one, the water is a cure for his illness, and according to medicine, necessary. For another, it is like poison for his sickness and harmful, and medically prohibited. For another, it causes a small amount of harm, and is reprehensible medically. For another the

water is beneficial and without harm; according to medicine that is *sunna* for him. And for yet another it is neither harmful nor beneficial; he can drink it with good health, and for him it is medically permissible. Thus, here the truth has become numerous; all five are true. Are you able to say: "The water is only a cure, only necessary, and it governs in no other way?"¹⁹

In this context, according to Voll, Nursi's approach to interpretation is pluralistic: "In terms of Qur'anic commentary, Said Nursi argues that the verses of the Qur'an reflect the vastness of God's message and depths of meanings." He then quotes Nursi:

As the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition expresses truths through its explicit, clear meanings and senses, so it expresses many allusive meanings through its styles and forms. Each of its verses contains numerous levels of meanings. Since the Qur'an proceeds from all-encompassing knowledge, all its meanings may be intended. It cannot be restricted to one or two meanings like man's speech, the product of his limited mind and individual will. It is because of this that innumerable truths contained in the Qur'an's verses have been expounded by Qur'anic commentators, and there are many more which have not been expounded by them.²⁰

According to Voll, "this openness to many different levels of understanding reflects a pluralism that is not a relativist position, but rather emphasizes the importance of the role of the individual in the interpretation."²¹

The background to Nursi's approach to tolerance is explained by Michel:

Many years before in 1910-1911, Said Nursi was questioned concerning his desire to build relations of friendship with Christians. He was confronted with the restrictive interpretation that some Muslims had placed on the Qur'anic verse: "O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors (5:51)." In the light of this verse, he was asked, why did he say that Muslims and Christians should be friends? His answer is instructive, not only for understanding Said Nursi's desire to encourage love and friendship between Muslims and Christians, but for his approach to Qur'anic interpretation. In his view, the Qur'anic proscription is not general but absolute and, as such, can be restricted ...

Time is a great interpreter; if it determines its limits, it cannot be gain-said. That is, when a matter becomes clear in the course of time, one

cannot object to it. Moreover, if the judgment is based on derived evidence, the source of the derivation shows the reason for the judgment.²²

In applying this principle to the interpretation of this verse, he holds that the prohibition against friendship with Jews and Christians is effective only when they reflect Jewishness or Christianity. “But,” he concludes:

just as not all of the characteristics of an individual Muslim necessarily reflect the teaching of Islam, so also, not all of the qualities of individual Jews or Christians reflect unbelief.²³

If Muslims find in a Jew or Christian qualities that are in agreement with Islamic teaching, they should consider those qualities praiseworthy. It is those good qualities that form the basis for friendship with Jews and Christians. “Can a Muslim love a Christian or Jew?” he asks, and in answer gives as example a man married to a woman of the People of the Book. “Of course, he should love her.” His argument is the very fact that the Qur’an permits a Muslim man to marry a Jewish or Christian woman presumes that he can and should love her.²⁴ Nursi’s understanding of interpretation and his openness to the qualities of individual reflect pluralism.

The Other or the Others

One of the main concerns that religious pluralism addresses is the concept of “the other” or the others. This concept involves social–ethnic divisions, categorizations, and labelling used to maintain traditional religious polarity. Such categories as believers–non-believers, Jewish–Gentile, Christian–non-Christian will be employed in a society. As Marshood puts it:

Civilizations have always constructed “the other” in forms that serve their own interest, and have treated “the other” very violently and the history has been very much filled with this kind of violency. Tolerance is rare. Indeed, the term civilization implies that a ranking hierarchy is always present and that the social construction of civilization is a product of competing interactions between groups. Although some religions are more exclusionist than others, virtually all of them either assert or imply that their own version of the world is true, thereby rendering competing worldviews inferior. In religious language, “the other” is always evil and dirty. Humans couldn’t have created a loving and caring God without creating evil. It is the creation of a jealous god that can’t coexist alongside that of “the other.”²⁵

In other words, from the very beginning of history the nature of man has always led to the constitution of the other or the others, and then attempts to challenge and change that “other.” If this is not possible, man has tried to destroy it. In this regard, history is full of religious commitments to and wars for absolutism. Huntington has claimed that the twenty-first century will see the clashes of civilizations, in other words, clashes of the others. Pluralism is an attempt to try to understand the differences in order to promote life and the universe.

Religions

Nursi summons believers to love and brotherhood:

O unjust man nurturing rancour and enmity against a believer! Let us suppose that you were on a ship, or in a house, with nine innocent people and one criminal. If someone were to try to make the ship sink, or to set the house on fire, because of that criminal, you know how great a sinner he would be. You would cry out to the heavens against his sinfulness. Even if there were one innocent man and nine criminals aboard the ship, it would be against all rules of justice to sink it.

So too, if there are in the person of a believer, who may be compared to a dominical dwelling, a Divine ship, not nine, but as many as twenty innocent attributes such as belief, Islam, and neighbourliness; and if you then nurture rancour and enmity against him on account of one criminal attribute that harms and displeases you, attempting or desiring the sinking of his being, the burning of his house, then you too will be a criminal guilty of a great atrocity.²⁶

On the diversity of faith, Nursi states:

When you know your way and opinions to be true, you have the right to say, “My way is right and the best.” But you do not have the right to say, “Only my way is right.” According to the sense of “The eye of contentment is too dim to perceive faults; it is the eye of anger that exhibits all vice”; your unjust view and distorted opinion cannot be the all-decisive judge and cannot condemn the belief of another as invalid.²⁷

Elsewhere Nursi asks: “What is the reason for the conflict among the people of truth while the misguided and worldly cooperate without rivalry?” In his answer, he mentions two powerful statements which maintain traditional religious polarity:

1. To act positively, that is, out of love for one's own outlook, avoiding enmity for other outlooks, not criticizing them, interfering in their beliefs and sciences, or in any way concerning oneself with them.

2. To adopt the just rule of conduct that the follower of any right outlook has the right to say, "My outlook is true, or the best," but not that "My outlook alone is true," or that "My outlook alone is good," thus implying the falsity or repugnance of all other outlooks.^{28, 29}

Alliance with Christians to fight atheism was also a part of Nursi's acceptance of pluralism.³⁰ He believed in cooperation between the People of the Book against the common enemy of atheism or other unreligious ideologies. He wrote:

It is even recorded in authentic traditions of the Prophet that at the end of time the truly pious among the Christians will unite with the People of the Qur'an and fight their common enemy, irreligion. And at this time, too, the people of religion and truth need to unite sincerely not only with their own brothers and fellow believers, but also with the truly pious and spiritual ones the Christians, temporarily from the discussion and debate of points of difference in order to combat their joint enemy – aggressive atheism.³¹

According to Michel:

For Said Nursi, the enemy of human happiness and ethical uprightness is unbelief, irreligion. It is people deciding to find their own path through life, not seeking Divine Guidance, not caring about God's will or wise design for humankind, not wishing to give up their own pet desires and ideas to submit to God's teaching about human nature and destiny. In seeking to affirm a Divinely-guided way of life in the modern age, Muslims find their natural allies in those Christians who are committed to following the teachings of Jesus and seek to live according to the truth. Facing a common enemy, that of "aggressive atheism," Muslims should unite, according to Said Nursi, "not only with their own fellow-believers, but also with the truly pious Christians."³²

Nursi was instrumental in promoting interfaith dialogue. Michel states:

In any study of the development of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the 20th century, special attention must be given to the writings and preaching of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. As one of the first religious thinkers in the course of this century to propose and promote dialogue between Muslims and Christians, Said Nursi's advocacy of this dialogue dates back to 1911.

This was a full half-century before the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council urged Christians and Muslims to resolve their differences and move beyond the conflicts of the past to build relations characterized by respect and cooperation. Bediuzzaman's repeated promotion of Muslim-Christian dialogue is even more striking in that his recommendations frequently date from times of tension and even warfare between Muslim and Christian communities.³³

According to Nursi the other or the others (for Nursi's time this would be Europeans) are not enemies. He even saw them as friends and gives a number of reasons for this. As Canan states:

1. They were the means for our awakening.
2. We would obtain science from them.
3. We had to persuade them that Islam is the religion of peace.
4. They were our neighbours, and being neighbours necessitated friendship.^{34, 35}

Nursi maintained that there was no harm in loving non-Muslims. Since they are developed in science and civilization, such love comes from their improvements in science and civilization that they possess. In addition, public order is the basis of all the worldly felicity. Such loving has not been avoided in the Quran.³⁶ He wrote:

Yet a man is not loved for himself. Maybe the love comes from his attribution or art. It therefore does not necessarily be right that all the attribution of a Muslim is Islamic and contrary to this all the attribution of an unbeliever is un-Islamic. Nevertheless the attribution or the art which are Islamic might be observed by those who are not Muslim.³⁷

Elsewhere Nursi states:

We shall look at the Europeans not as enemies, but as friends and servants, since they encourage us and compel us towards our happiness and prosperity, and progress and civilization, which are the means at this time to upholding the Word of God.³⁸

Nursi considered Europe as having two faces:

Europe is two. One follows the sciences which serve justice and right and activities beneficial for the life of society through the inspiration it has received from true Christianity. This first Europe I am not addressing. Rather, I am addressing the second, corrupt Europe which, through the darkness of the philosophy of naturalism that considered the evils of civilization to be its virtues, has driven humankind to vice and misguidance.³⁹

In a sense, Nursi's approach to non-Muslims amounts to pluralism. He wrote: "Our action towards non-Muslims is persuasion, for we know them to be civilized, and to show Islam to be elevated and worthy of love."⁴⁰

Michel states:

Writing during one of the most tragic periods in the history of Anatolia, Said Nursi could not ignore the reality of the deaths of so many innocent persons. It is to his great credit that he rose above sectarian loyalty to address the question of innocent Christians as well as Muslims who fell victim to the times.

Even if those innocent people were unbelievers, [he stated], in return for the tribulations they suffered due to that worldly disaster, they have such a reward from the treasury of Divine mercy that if the veil of the Unseen were to open, a great manifestation of mercy would be apparent in relation to them and they would declare, "O Lord, thanks be to You! All praise belongs to God."⁴¹

Ethnicism

According to Nursi's metaphor, there are four categories of workers in the palace of the universe: angels, animals, plants and inanimate creatures, and humanity. Their diverse duties of worship, in a sense admit pluralism.⁴² His characterisation of the universe displays a universal pluralism.

For despite the earth's smallness and insignificance in relation to the heavens, its being filled with intelligent beings and from time to time being emptied and then refilled with new ones suggests – indeed, states clearly – that the heavens too, with their majestic constellations like adorned palaces, are filled with animate creatures, the light of the light of existence, and conscious and intelligent creatures, the light of animate creatures. Like man and the jinn, those creatures are spectators of the palace of the world, and ponderers over the book of the universe, and heralds of this realm of dominicality. With their universal and comprehensive worship, they represent the glorification of the large and universal beings in the universe.⁴³

According to Nursi:

Man is the place of manifestation of all the Names, but the Names being various has resulted in the universe's variety and the differences in the angels' worship, and has also caused a degree of variety among men. The different laws of the prophets, the different ways of the saints, and the different paths of the purified scholars have arisen from this mystery.⁴⁴

In his interpretation of the verse: “And there is nothing but it glorifies Him with praise” Nursi displays pluralism, saying:

That is to say, since beauty and perfection are loved for themselves, they love themselves above everything. They are also both loveliness and love. The union of beauty and love stems from this point. Since beauty loves itself, it desires to see itself in mirrors. Thus all the lovable bounties and beautiful fruits which were set on the statue and on the picture bear the flashes, each according to its capacity, of that meaning of beauty. They display those flashes both to the owner of the beauty and to others. In exactly the same way, the All-Wise Maker delimits, orders and gives determined proportions and shapes to all things, particular and universal, through the manifestation of His Names; to Paradise and this world, the heavens and the earth, plants and animals, men and jinn, angels and spirit beings. By doing this, He causes them to recite His Names of Determiner, Orderer, and Giver of Form.⁴⁵

Concerning ethnicity, Nursi expounds the verse, “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other.” That is, “I created you as peoples, nations, and tribes, so that you should know one another and the relations between you in social life, and assist one another; not so that you should regard each other as strangers, refusing to acknowledge one another, and nurturing hostility and enmity.”⁴⁶ Nursi states: “That is to say, being divided into groups and tribes should lead to mutual acquaintance and mutual assistance, not to antipathy and mutual hostility.”⁴⁷

Salvation

As an Islamic scholar, Nursi held that salvation could be obtained only through Islam. On the question of whether one who says *There is no god but God*, but does not say, *Muhammad is the Messenger of God* is saved, Nursi argues:

The two parts of the confession of faith cannot be separated; they prove each other, comprise each other; one cannot be without the other. Since the Prophet (Upon whom be blessings and peace) was the Seal of the Prophets and the heir of all the prophets, he is at the start of all the ways leading to God. There can be no way to reality and salvation outside his mighty highway. All those with inner knowledge of God and the authorities of those who have researched into reality have said like Sa’di Shirazi: “*It is impossible, Sa’di, to be victorious on the way of salvation, except by following Mustafa.*” They also said: “All ways are closed except the highway of Muhammad.”

However, it sometimes happens that people may be on the highway of Muhammad and within it, without knowing that it is the highway of Muhammad. And it sometimes happens that they do not know the Prophet, but the road they take is part of the highway of Muhammad.

It happens too that being in a state of ecstasy or entirely immersed in contemplation or having withdrawn from the world, not thinking of the highway of Muhammad, *There is no god but God* is sufficient for them. Nevertheless, a most important aspect is this: non-acceptance is one thing, while the acceptance of non-being is another. Ecstasies and recluses or those who have not heard or do not know, do not know the Prophet or they do not think of him so that they should accept him. They are ignorant in that respect. They only know *There is no god but God* in regard to knowledge of God. They may be among those who will be saved.

But if those who have heard of the Prophet and know his message do not affirm him, they do not recognize Almighty God. For them, the phrase *There is no god but God alone* does not express the affirmation of Divine Unity, which is the means of salvation. For that is not ignorant non-acceptance, which may be excusable to a degree, it is rather the acceptance of non-being, which is denial. A person who denies Muhammad, who with his miracles and works was the pride of the universe and glory of mankind, certainly can in no respect receive any light and will not recognize God. However ... that is enough for now.⁴⁸

The above discussion implies a degree of pluralism. Other evidence of Nursi's tolerance comes from the following passage: "I have seen some unreligious people who agreed on and supported that consequences of Islam and Islamic shari'a were beneficial for the social life and especially for the politics of Ottomans." Nursi considers them as Muslims, that is to say they were submitting to the truth but were not believers. They are called unbeliever Muslims.

Nursi continues:

I have seen some people who, in the name of the West and civilization, were embracing innovations and supporting un-Islamic ideologies, yet have faith in God, the hereafter, and the Prophet. Since they have not bound themselves by the laws of Muhammad they are non-Muslim believers.⁴⁹

He points out, however, that Islam without belief cannot be the means of salvation, and belief without Islam cannot be the means of salvation.

Nursi maintained the view that it was a wild principle of civilization that for the sake of society an individual might be sacrificed, or for the sake of a nation parts of society's rights are dispensable:

The pure justice of the Qur'an does not spill the life and blood of an innocent, even for the whole of humanity. The two are the same both in the view of Divine Power, and in the view of justice. But through self-interest man becomes such that he will destroy everything that forms an obstacle to his ambition, even the world if he can, and he will wipe out mankind.⁵⁰

Nursi's recognition of pluralism might be summarized by the metaphor of different personalities in the same individual:

If someone is both a teacher, and a policeman, and a clerk of the court, and an inspector in the civil service, in each office he has both relations, and duties, and obligations, and salaries, and responsibilities, and promotion, and enemies and rivals who are the cause of his failures. He appears before the king with many titles, and he sees the king. He seeks help from him with many tongues. He has recourse to many of the ruler's titles, and seeks his help in many forms in order to be saved from the evil of his enemies. In just the same way, man, who manifests many Names and is charged with many duties and afflicted with many enemies, invokes many of the Names in his prayers and supplications. Like Muhammad the Arab, the cause of pride of mankind and truly the most perfect man, supplicated with a thousand and one Names in his prayer, *Jawshan al-Kabir*.⁵¹

Moderation

Believing Islam to be the middle way, Nursi stressed the importance of moderation and keeping away from want and excess, saying: "Too much or too little of anything is not good. Moderation is the middle way."^{52,53}

One instance of his applying the notion of pluralism concerns his defense of Muhyiddin al-'Arabi, an Islamic scholar of the Unity of Existence: "Yes, Muhyiddin was rightly-guided and acceptable, but in all his works cannot be the guide and instructor ... However, he is free of misguidance. Sometimes, a word may appear to be unbelief, but the one who spoke it is not an unbeliever."⁵⁴ He also quotes Muhyiddin: "Those who are not one of us and do not know our station should not read our books, for it may be damaging for them."⁵⁵

Nursi's efforts in legitimizing Sufism and his attempts to reach common understandings with the Shi'ah also manifest a pluralistic view.

Though on the one hand, he expressed the opinion that some people attached too much importance to Sufism at the expense of serving the cause of spreading the truths of belief, on the other hand, he pays attention to legitimizing sainthood and Sufism and choosing the middle way.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Nursi spent his life for his beliefs. His main ideas were the need to strengthen belief and reform society by moral-based discourse. By advocating a middle way, Nursi raised a voice of reasonable pluralism in the Islamic world in the early twentieth century. By viewing one person as having many personalities, all of which display different qualities,⁵⁷ he accepted diversity as the key to understanding the truth, from religiosity to ethnicism, and from moderation to salvation. He was neither an absolutist nor a relativist.

To conclude, it might be said that Nursi, with his religious background, is pluralistic in his approach to this world and the hereafter. He accepts different views, ideologies, and races, and his understanding of ethnicity demonstrates pluralism. He supported cooperation with Christians to fight against atheism, and did not consider Christians and Jews as enemies. For him, pluralism or tolerance does not necessarily mean integration or conversion, but rather the necessity to promote universal life.

In his understanding, the importance given even to one innocent person shows an impressive attitude of religious pluralism. We read in the Qur'an 5:32: "If any one kills a person, unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land, it would be as if he killed the whole people." Nursi states:

The rights of an innocent man cannot be cancelled for the sake of all the people. A single individual may not be sacrificed for the good of all. In the view of Almighty God's compassion, right is right, there is no difference between great and small. The small may not be annulled for the great. Without his consent, the life and rights of an individual may not be sacrificed for the good of the community. If he consents to sacrifice them in the name of patriotism, that is a different matter.

As for relative justice, a particular is sacrificed for the good of the universal; the rights of an individual are not considered in the face of the community. A sort of relative justice is attempted to be applied as the lesser of two evils. But if it is possible to apply pure justice, to attempt to apply relative justice is wrong. It may not be attempted.⁵⁸

Finally Nursi communicated a message of hope and tolerance to others when he wrote “The thing which is most worthy of love is love, and that most deserving of enmity is enmity. It is love and loving – that render people’s social life secure and that lead to happiness – it is these which are most worthy of love and being loved”⁵⁹ and “The time for enmity and hostility is finished.”^{60,61}

Notes

1. For the whole writings of Nursi in three languages, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD. 1.0 ed. (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil, 2000).
2. See M. H. Yavuz, ed. “Special Issue: Said Nursi and the Turkish Experience.” *The Muslim World*, ed. I. Abu-Rabi (July–October 1999), The Duncan Black McDonald Center at Hartford Seminary: New York.
3. See S. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. S. A. Arjomand (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 23.
4. As put in S. Vahide, “Biography,” in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil, 2000), 39.
5. H. Ashur, “Bediuzzaman’s Defence Strategy against the Naturalists,” in *The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil, 1992).
6. M. R. Ubayd, “Methods of Teaching in the *Risale-i Nur*,” in *Ibid*.
7. See Section 14, “Shaping of the Modern World” in www.fordham.edu/halsall/, in Brooklyn College Core Curriculum.
8. *Ibid*.
9. As quoted in I. Killioglu, “The Concept of the ‘I’ in the Establishment of Nature in Bediuzzaman’s Works from the Point of View of Naturalist Philosophy,” in *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil, 1995).
10. See I. Yusuf, “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Discourse on Belief in the Existence of God: A Study of Texts from the *Risale-i Nur*,” in the *Fourth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Contemporary Approach towards Understanding the Qur’an: The Example of Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil: 1998).
11. I. Yusuf, “Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Discourse on Belief In Allah: A Study Of Texts From Risale-i Nur Collection,” *The Muslim World* 89:3-4 (1999): 340.
12. See B. S. Nursi, “Sualar,” in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 392.
13. B. S. Nursi, “The Words,” in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 324.
14. As quoted in N. Beki, “The Qur’an and Its Method of Guidance,” in *Fourth International Symposium*.

15. As quoted in D. Dursun, "Bediuzzaman as the Representative of Social Opposition," in *Third International Symposium*.
16. B. S. Nursi, "The Letters/Seeds of Reality," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 548.
17. Compare this with B. S. Nursi, "The Words," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 501 Then, since with the coming of the Prophet of the end of time, man as though advanced from the primary to the secondary stage, and through numerous revolutions and upheavals reached a position at which all the human peoples could receive a single lesson and listen to a single teacher and act in accordance with a single law, no need remained for different laws, neither was there necessity for different teachers. But because they were not all at completely the same level and did not proceed in the same sort of social life, the schools of law became numerous. If, like students of a school of higher education, the vast majority of mankind were clothed in the same sort of social life and attained the same level, then all the schools could be united. But just as the state of the world does not permit that, so the schools of law cannot be the same.
18. See conclusion in Nursi, "The Words," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 500.
19. Conclusion in *Ibid.*, 501.
20. J. O. Voll, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and Religion in the 1950s," *The Muslim World* 89:3-4 (1999): 255-56.
21. See Voll, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," 255-56.
22. T. S. J. Michel, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," in *Fourth International Symposium*.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. N. Marshood, *Religious Pluralism and Social Change*. Hudson County Community College, on-line.
26. Nursi, "The Letters," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 312.
27. *Ibid.*, 314.
28. B. S. Nursi, "The Flashes," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 203.
29. In this regard also see Voll, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," 255-56.
30. In this regard, see *Ibid.*, 255-56.
31. Nursi, "The Flashes," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 203, note 7.
32. T. S. J. Michel, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," *The Muslim World* 89, nos. 3-4 (1999): 326-27.
33. *Ibid.*, 325.
34. See I. Canan, "The Chief Questions Facing the Islamic World and Their Solutions According to Bediuzzaman," in *Second International Symposium On Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Yeni Nesil: 1992).
35. For more on this, see Nursi, B. S., "Munazarat," in *Kaynakli- Indeksli-Lugatli Risale-i Nur Kulliyati* (The Epistle of Light), (Istanbul: Nesil Basim Yayin, 1996), 1944.
36. *Ibid.*

37. Ibid.
38. As cited in Canan, "The Chief Questions," 1992.
39. Nursi, S., "The Flashes," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 2000, Yeni Nesil: Istanbul. p. 160.
40. Cited in, Canan, "The Chief Questions," 1992.
41. One of the most significant points in Nursi's understanding of pluralism is the manifestations of the Divine Names in the various realms and worlds of the universe, and their diversity. In accordance with this, in one of his writings he deals with the reasons for the differences and even contradictions in the truths experienced by saints through illumination, and among scholars arrived at by rational proofs, and why previous to the Qur'an, all the pillars of belief were not taught in detail by the prophets. See his "The Words," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 2000, Yeni Nesil: Istanbul. p. 344. Also see note 22.
42. See Nursi, "The Words," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 361.
43. Ibid., 521.
44. Ibid., 343.
45. Ibid., 656.
46. Nursi, "The Letters," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 379.
47. Ibid., 380.
48. Nursi, "The Letters," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 394.
49. See Nursi, "Barla Lâhikası," in *Kaynakli-İndeksli-Lugatli Risale-i Nur Kulliyati*, 1554.
50. Nursi, "The Letters: Seeds of Reality," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 549, no. 64.
51. Nursi, "The Words," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 344.
52. Nursi, "The Flashes," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 43.
53. In this regard also see Voll, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," 254.
54. Nursi, "The Flashes," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 371.
55. Dealing with the Unity of Existence issue, Nursi says: "While the All-Glorious One is free and exempt from, pure of and exalted above all change, alteration, division, and being comprehended in time or place, it gives rise to conceptions which are not fitting for His necessary existence, holiness, and being free of all defect, and leads to false teachings. Yes, if one who speaks of the Unity of Existence rises in the mind from the ground to the Pleiades, leaves the universe behind and fixes his gaze on the Sublime Throne, ecstatically reckoning the universe to be non-existent, through the strength of belief, he may see everything to be directly from the Single One of Unity. But for one who stands behind the universe and looks at it, and sees causes before him and looks from the ground, is the possibility of becoming submerged in causes and falling into the swamp of Nature. The one who rises in the mind to the Divine Throne may say like Jalaluddin Rumi: "Listen! The words you hear uttered by everyone, you may hear as uttered by Almighty God, like natural gramophones." But if you say to the one who cannot rise as high as Jalaluddin, nor see all beings from the ground to the Divine Throne in the form of mirrors: "Listen! You will

- hear the Divine speech from everything,” just as he will in effect fall from the Throne to the ground, he will also be afflicted by false imaginings contrary to the truth!...” For more, see Said Nursi, “The Flashes,” in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 369-70.
56. Nursi in one of his treatise by Nine Allusions, about the ways of sainthood and Sufism deals with the definition of the Sufi path, and explanation of the truth underlying the terms Sufism, path, sainthood, and spiritual journeying. Some of the issues Nursi takes a closer look at in this concern are how the heart is “worked” through reflective thought and remembrance of God, and how this is a means to happiness. He explains how sainthood is a proof of prophethood, and the Sufi way is a proof of the Shari`a. The way of sainthood is both very easy and very difficult; and very long and very short; and it is both valuable, and dangerous. This explains also the two ways of “inner journeying” and “outer journeying.” He explains the reality of the Unity of Existence and the Unity of Witnessing, and establishes the superiority of the people of “the legacy of prophethood.” He also discusses the following: 1) Three Points showing that the best of the ways of sainthood is following the Practices of the Prophet (PBUH), and its most important foundation, sincerity; and that this world is the realm of wisdom and service, not reward; so spiritual pleasures and illuminations should not be sought here; 2) Four Points pointing out that the Sufi way should serve the Shari`a; that its highest degrees are matters of the Shari`a; that it should always remain as a means and follow the Shari`a; and an answer to the question: Can saints be found outside the bounds of the Sunna and Shari`a?; 3) Eight Abysses on the Sufi way; and 4) Nine of the sweet fruits of the Sufi way. Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said, “The Letters,” in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD. 2000, Yeni Nesil: Istanbul. p. 518.
 57. In this treatise Nursi explains how a person may have numerous personalities in respect of his different duties, and describes the three personalities of the author. Nursi, “The Letters,” in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 377.
 58. *Ibid.*, 75.
 59. As cited in Michel, T. S. J. “Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” in *Fourth International Symposium*.
 60. As also cited in *Ibid.*
 61. If you wish to nourish enmity, then direct it against the enmity in your heart, and attempt to rid yourself of it. Be an enemy to your evil-commanding soul and its caprice and attempt to reform it, for it inflicts more harm on you than all else. Do not engage in enmity against other believers on account of that injurious soul. Again, if you wish to cherish enmity, there are unbelievers and atheists in great abundance; be hostile to them. In the same way that the attribute of love is fit to receive love as its response, so too enmity will receive enmity as its own fitting response. If you wish to defeat your enemy, then respond to his evil with good. For if you respond with evil, enmity will increase, and even though he will be outwardly defeated, he will nurture hatred in his heart, and

hostility will persist. But if you respond to him with good, he will repent and become your friend. The meaning of the lines: If you treat the noble nobly, he will be yours, and if you treat the vile nobly, he will revolt, is that it is the mark of the believer to be noble, and he will become submitted to you by noble treatment. And even if someone is apparently ignoble, he is noble with respect to his belief. It often happens that if you tell an evil man, "You are good, you are good," he will become good; and if you tell a good man, "You are bad, you are bad," he will become bad. Hearken, therefore, to these sacred principles of the Qur'an, for happiness and safety are to be found in them:

If they pass by futility, they pass by it in honourable disdain. If you forgive, pardon, and relent, verily God is All-Relenting, Merciful. Nursi, "The Letters," in *Risale-i Nur* 1.0 CD, 315.