

SAID NURSI'S STANCE ON MATERIALISM

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ABSTRACT

The spread of nineteenth-century European rationalism in the Muslim lands had subjected the foundations of belief under attack. Said Nursi (1876-1960), one of the great Islamic thinkers was deeply concerned about the increasing dominance of Western values. Among the western philosophies like materialism, nationalism, communism, capitalism and atheism he encountered, he provides apt and logical arguments in a simple but metaphorical tone. To counter these negative effects, Nursi sought to strengthen the belief of people and make the Qur'an a central point of life. He emphasized that adherence to Islam and its morality in this era could establish a true civilization. Nursi attempted to heal the wounds of those affected by the materialist philosophy and misguidance of science. This paper will be an attempt to explore Said Nursi's stance on materialism which he calls 'the most dangerous production of the enlightenment' vis-à-vis his *magnum opus* Risale-i Nur.

Keywords: Said Nursi, the West, materialism, *Risale-i Nur*, spirituality

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Ancient Greece is regarded as the earliest in history to dissociate its institutions, customs, arts and sciences from religion therefore a first true secular society. Ancient Greek philosophy was based on an argument that a perfect and harmonious society contented with beauty and justice could be achieved by an intelligent application of human reason solely without any supernatural entity. One can see the secular character as the dominant theme in Western Civilization even now.¹ This secular legacy was adopted and nourished by Pagan Rome but because of their dominant military character, the worship of beauty was superseded by the worship of force.² Between the downfall of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Renaissance, there was a thousand-year gap where Roman Catholicism was dominant. This gap is referred to as 'The Middle Ages' during which the historical relations between Europe and ancient Greece and Rome remained fractured. 'The Middle Ages' had a distinct and unique civilization of its own, no features in common whatever with that of Greeks, Romans or Europe. 'The Middle Ages' civilization thus could be called 'Western' only because of its geographical location.³ The Renaissance simultaneously with the rejection of Christianity (Religion) by the leading intellectuals of Europe who adored uncritically ancient Greece and Rome marked the return of the Western Civilization towards its origin.⁴

The Europeans identified ancient Greece and exclusively Athens in its golden period (500-400 B.C.), as the fountainhead of the plinth of thought and culture of the Western civilization. Each civilization possesses its own distinguished core values, beliefs and principles, its own unifying spirit which sets it apart from other civilizations. Civilizations are said to have a life cycle like that of humans: they are born in some particular place and time; as young they are energetic, flexible, creative, able to absorb new ideas; when mature (golden period), reach the pinnacle of their power; then gradually they, lose their energy, are less creative, rigid; and finally, they decline and are off the scene or are absorbed by some other vigorous civilization.⁵

The Greeks too were influenced by the culture and civilization of their neighbors to the south and east⁶ that is not to say that Greece did not produce giants or did not create anything new and distinctive. But it is also apparent that ancient Greek culture did not come into existence in a vacuum, it was influenced by the culture of the adjacent peoples at the same time

they were also influenced by Greek culture and civilization. What ancient Greeks achieved was not their own completely but was interwoven with the achievements of other people and cultures.⁷ Aristotle marked the Greeks as neither Asian nor European but a different people who were benefitted from the qualities of both due to its spectacular location between the two.⁸ After the Macedonian king Alexander — the Great (r. 336-323 B.C.) defeated the Persian empire, Greece continued to be influenced by the Persians and other eastern cultures as a result he adopted the Persian style of kingship and is said to have admired the fusion of his own Hellenic culture with that of the Persian one.⁹

Later with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 20th century, the leadership transferred from the Muslim countries to the non-Muslims. The 'West' is not a novel term rather its roots and outlook trace their origin to ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. Until the 19th century, Western nations tamed the spirit, philosophy, sciences, literature and the ideas of the Greeks and Romans and then produced them in a new outlook. 'The intellectual heritage, structure of the ideas, conceptions, modes of expression and the forms of the literature of the west are the progeny of Greek thought.'¹⁰ The Greek civilization is regarded as the first civilization built according to the Western lines, therefore, was the materialization of the Western mindset.¹¹ According to Robert Briffault, "Greece made the European world.... There was no European world. There was only one form of civilization, that of the Orient.... Greece did not save Europe, she created it. Before Greece there was no Europe; Greece brought it into being."¹²

Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi sums up the intellectual foundations of the Greeks as disregard of transcendental truths; want (deficiency) of religious feeling and spirituality; worship of material comfort; and exaggerated patriotism.¹³ Nadvi further writes that the plinth of the European civilization was set up by Ancient Greece. To substantiate his argument Abul Hassan Ali quotes a German Scholar Dr Haas who expounded the aim of Greek civilization was, "to develop man harmoniously...a beautiful body [that] emphasized the senses. Physical education – games and dancing – and mental education – poetry, music, drama, philosophy,

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.,12.

9 Ibid, 14.

10 Robert Briffault. *The Making of Humanity* (London: Ruskin House, 1919), 117-18.

11 Ali Nadvi. *Islam and the World: The Rise and Decline of Muslims and its Effect on Mankind*, tr., Asif Kidwai (London: Islamic Academy, 2005), 102.

12 Briffault, *op. cit.*, 118.

13 Nadvi, *op. cit.*, 103.

1 Maryam Jameelah. *Islam and Modernism* (Sant Nagar, Lahore: Muhammad Yusuf Khan, 1966), 1.

2 Ibid, 3.

3 Ibid, 3-4.

4 Ibid, 4.

5 Zachary Lockman. *Contending Visions of the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.

6 Ibid,10.

even the sciences – were kept in proportion so as to develop the mind but not at the expense of the body. Its religion had no spirituality, no theology, no mysticism.”¹⁴ Abul Hassan Ali terms Greek civilization as agnostic who had no place for God in their practical life. “They [western materialists] interpreted the material universe and its manifestations along mechanical lines and called it objective and scientific method, rejecting as slavery to tradition whatever was based on belief in the existence of God. One by one, they disowned everything that existed apart from matter and energy, everything that was not realizable in experience, or could not be weighed and measured.”¹⁵

I. THE RISE OF THE WEST

West emerged as a diverse civilization based on continual development, across time and space, based on the ancient Greek civilization, and took it almost twenty centuries to reemerge and flower in the modern age in the 15th and 16th century Western Europe. This was a chain of cultural continuity that the West claimed to be a civilization with some essence that had remained unchanged and competent on the one hand and on the other hand unique and different from all other cultures. While framing the new history it ignored many aspects of its history, culture and society that could not be made to fit with the new part of the story about the West and its transcendental values.¹⁶

During the late 15th and early 16th century (age of discovery) what marked the expansion of Europeans’ geographical and cultural vistas, a new global empire and a new global economic order was dominated by Europeans. West was moving towards a global hegemony, exercised its power over the non-western nations. The inhabitants tended to define themselves in a way that made them distinct among the *others*, which lined the characteristics and virtues which they identified as unique and accredited for their increased power, wealth and knowledge. But it was other societies’ lack of these characteristics and the core values which made them weak and backward hence justifying Western domination¹⁷ and white supremacy.¹⁸

Europeans now employed this difference to explain that they were distinct from their neighbors the Ottoman Empire (termed as the ‘Sick Man of Europe’), other Muslim states and all other Afro-Asian societies. The West saw itself as the realm of freedom and law as opposed to other societies which suffered from social and political perversions, thus not claiming only superiority but justifying their rule over the *others* for progress and modern civilization.¹⁹ The West claimed to possess the qualities like freedom, law, rationality, science, progress, and intellectual curiosity, the spirit of the invention, adventure and enterprise as the special and exclusive hallmarks of their civilization. These were the core values that enabled them to develop the attitudes, ideas, technologies and institutions necessary to create the modern world and dominate it politically, economically and culturally.²⁰ The West was conceptualized as the working force in the world history, although other civilizations had contributed to human knowledge and culture in the history but now it was the West which was dynamic and a vanguard of modernity. The West was seen as modern, while the non-west was envisioned as pre-modern, traditional and backward. They were left with the choice of either to imitate the west and become modern or to maintain stagnancy and fall behind in the march of civilization.²¹

This Eurocentric approach, which subjects Europe’s rise exclusively to the internal factors and places Europe at the center of the global history, assuming the West as the motor force behind the historical developments from the ancient Greeks till present, is criticized by the scholars like Edward Said (1935-2003), Maulana Mawdudi (1903-1979), Allama Iqbal (1877-1938), Maryam Jameelah (1934-2012), etc. The criticism starts from the principle that pre-modern Asian and African societies, their culture and economy differentiated with that of Europe but, it was not at all so unique to be adequate for its successive rise to power. Despite debate on the features responsible for catapulting Europe into world leadership, they examined the change in ‘Europe’s structural relationship’ with the rest of the world after 1492 A.D., particularly the results of the ‘discovery’ and conquest of the Americas.²² The flow of wealth and profit from Europe’s New World Empire greatly added enormously to the European economy during the 16th and 17th centuries thus laying the basis for a new global economic and political order with its center in Europe.²³

14 Ibid, 104.

15 Ibid, 120.

16 Lockman, *op. cit.*, 56.

17 Ibid, 57.

18 A racist ideology based on the belief that white (denominations) people are superior to other races therefore the white should be dominant and they treated non-white people as second class citizens and slaves.

19 Lockman, *op. cit.*, 57-58.

20 Ibid, 58.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid, 60.

23 Ibid, 60-61.

On the other hand, Muslim society had lost the capacity to order its life effectively, lost its once firm proud grip on the world. This disintegration of the Muslim world happened simultaneously with the high spirits of Europe. At this time Western civilization was moving forward on the greatest rise of expansive energy that human history has ever witnessed. The West was contouring/ reforming its own life and soon the life of the entire world. This new gigantic civilization pacing forward in exploratory restlessness countered the Muslim world. By the 1800s the West was pressing hard to impose its domination on many areas. During most of the 19th century this pressure and subjugation increased; the Dutch in Indonesia, the British in India, the Russians in Central Asia and the French in Africa. Iran and Ottoman Empire held political sovereignty but were independent without being free. Besides being politically controlled, Muslim society, once eminent, dynamic and vigilant, was now everywhere in loose spirit and subject to the forces outside Islam.²⁴

The post-renaissance era in the West was the era of secularization when Europe slowly and gradually drifted away from all religious values and other-worldly considerations. Greek science and philosophy and arts were more in tune with the changed outlook and became the staple intellectual food. This world and this life became the sole object of attention and everything was interpreted to suit this worldview. Physical and empirical science took the place of speculative philosophy and religious discourses.²⁵

II. FRENCH REVOLUTION 1789

The French revolution was the outcome of the ideas, concerning the political reorganization of the states, which came from the middle class and the other came from the peasants and workers who wanted improvement in their economic conditions. These two groups helped each other for a certain time to realize their aim. The period of French Revolution was a period of radical socio-political disorder in France and Europe. The society underwent dynamic changes as feudal, aristocratic and religious privileges were terminated. Prevalent absolute monarchy and hierarchy were replaced by Enlightenment principles of citizenship and inalienable rights. French citizens became politically active amidst massive starvation, frustration and mismanagement of an incompetent monarchy system. The citizens

24 W. C. Smith. *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 46.

25 A. A. Suroor (ed.), *Modernity and Iqbal* (Srinagar: Iqbal Institute, University of Kashmir, 1985), 80.

consciously took a break from the past and stood for a new nation based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The revolution endowed the French with a new political vision, egalitarianism and a representative government.²⁶

III. AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The American Revolution (1775-1783) transformed America into a nation founded on fundamental principles that subordinated/reduced the function of government to natural law. The American Revolution was a conservative movement aimed to safeguard the existing social, political, and economic order in society. It is described as the most fundamental and most influential event in American history besides being culturally, politically, socially, and economically a traditional movement. Traditionalists who joined the American cause opposed British efforts to contravene their rights as Englishmen. In short, the Revolution was a movement to preserve the rights and liberties that Americans had always enjoyed. American society was transformed from monarchy to the most liberal, democratic, egalitarian, modern, and commercial-minded. The Revolution also influenced the culture of Americans and changed their understanding of history, knowledge, science and truth as they employed scientific reasoning in every aspect.²⁷

IV. NURSI'S STAND

Said Nursi describes Materialism (most dangerous production of enlightenment) as the cause of malady of heart and conscience.²⁸ Nursi compares the world to the tree which has multiple branches to make the concept explicit. He further says that there are two lines of thought in the world of humanity: a line of Prophethood and religion and; of philosophy in different forms. The branch of philosophy which does not remain subservient to Islam develops into a Zaqqum tree that spreads the darkness of ascribing partners to God and misguidance. The branch of power of intellect generates the fruits of atheism, materialism

26 Pëtr Kropotkin. *The Great French Revolution 1789-1793* (London: William Heinemann, 1909), 7ff.

27 Bernard Bailyn. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967), 162f.

28 Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. *The Words*, (tr.), Sukran Vahide (New Delhi: Barla Publications, 2015), 474.

and naturalism and pushes humanity into confusion. And in the quest for power, it acts as Nimrud, Pharaoh and Shaddad on humanity.²⁹ Materialism, according to Nursi, has resulted in the absolutism of appetites and beastly desires.³⁰ Humans who have snapped such an indifferent plague (spiritually) and a terrible fever, inculcated and imitated it are to be visited by Divine wrath suddenly.³¹ The philosophy of materialism is in vogue so much that is regarded as the source of everything.³² In the present age, many are turning back to their faith because of this plague but the entire persona of materialism will be killed by the true believers of Jesus (PBUH).³³ *Risale-i Nur* proved the existence of Jinns and spirit beings to counter materialism.³⁴ Ali Mermer writes that *Risale-i Nur* has impeded the growth of materialism³⁵ and Nursi memorized different texts, it seems, to expound and defend the message of the Qur'an against the onslaught of materialism.³⁶ Hasan Horkuc also maintains this point that it was in the library of Tahir Pasha, probably, Nursi realized that the traditional form of Islamic theology was not enough, and the study of science is necessary, to counter the doubts raised by historical materialism.³⁷ He might have studied there about the ideological background of Positivism, Materialism and Naturalism by studying science and philosophy.³⁸ After these experiences he felt a need for a new Qur'anic commentary to prove the truths of belief by intermixing science and truths of religion and which would address the modern man and counter materialist philosophy.³⁹

When materialism emerged between 1908 and 1918, Nursi produced his writings in response to materialism and to stop its advancement into the Muslim culture because it negated Islam.⁴⁰ Nursi also realized that the influence of Western ideas, institutions and practices were to destroy the Muslim culture which helped Muslims resonance with the rest of the

world.⁴¹ Serif Mardin further writes that this stand of Nursi was against a new image of social relations and practices linked to it. The new 'reformed' concept of social relations ignored the Islamic law regarding personal relations and understood society as an 'impersonal machine'.⁴² The incompatibility between Islam and modern (Western) materialistic civilization, as Nursi states, is that the former gives importance to the individuals and regards them as fundamental units of social life while the latter pays importance to the concept of nation.⁴³ Of all the themes presented in *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi stressed on morality and persuaded on its revitalization. Nursi says, Religion is a balm to the wounds suffered by individuals and one can achieve harmony while being in the frame of the universe taught by Islam. The Qur'an can restrain the dangerous appetites of man as he feared that 'I' or 'Me' may usurp a Muslim's life, which according to Nursi, has been supported by materialism.⁴⁴ Materialism pushed Nursi into the period of 'crisis of conscience. After 1926 Nursi lived a solitary life and opposed totally the philosophies of positivism and materialism.⁴⁵ Nursi's thoughts, methods and writings did not developed in a vacuum but was the result of the influence of his times and historical changes that challenged the Muslim world then, like the establishment of a legislative system based on materialistic and scientific outlook that governed Muslims. The world was in great crisis as the philosophies of materialism and communism were at the peak⁴⁶ than ever before in human history.⁴⁷ Nursi's ideas came to fore during the flow of materialistic writings in the Ottoman Empire. It was the time when the Western philosophical ideologies (Materialism, Positivism, Darwinism, Freudianism, Socialism, Atheism and Existentialism) influenced Ottoman intellectual life. It later influenced Turkish Republic's policy makers also who attributed Turkey's problems linked to Islam without seeing the spiritual crisis of modern man.⁴⁸ However at this time, Nursi aimed to inculcate the spiritual truths in the hearts of people when their values were on the brink of destruction⁴⁹ and opposed vehemently positivism and materialism that ignored God, in his view.⁵⁰ Nursi attached importance to preserving individual beliefs by making Muslims aware of Islamic ethics. He was concerned

29 Ibid, 561, 564.

30 Ibid, 748.

31 Ibid, 764.

32 Said Nursi. *The Letters*, (tr.), Sukran Vahide (New Delhi: Barla Publications, 2015), 525-526.

33 Said Nursi. *The Rays*, (tr.), Sukran Vahide (New Delhi: Barla Publications, 2015), 108, 224.

34 Ibid, 361.

35 Ali Mermer. *Aspects of Religious Identity: The Nurcu Movement in Turkey Today* (Durham: University of Durham, 1985), 403.

36 Ibid, 485-86.

37 Hasan Horkuc. *Said Nursi's Ideal for Human Society: Moral and Spiritual Reform in the Risale-i Nur* (Durham: University of Durham, 2004), 104-105.

38 Ibid, 159.

39 Ibid, 112.

40 Serif Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 142 and 8-9.

41 Ibid, 8-9.

42 Ibid, 9.

43 Ibid, 169.

44 Ibid, 168-69.

45 Horkuc, *op. cit.*, 129, 138.

46 Ibid, 156.

47 Ibid, 255.

48 Ibid, 159.

49 Ibid, 190.

50 Ibid, 255.

with the moral and spiritual destruction of both the individual and society and thought Islamic ethics would repair the harm caused by these negative philosophies.⁵¹ Nursi aimed to prove the existence of God and the truths of religion and the irrationality of the materialistic philosophy.⁵²

V. TOWARDS REFORMING THE SOCIETY

Materialism engulfed not only the cultural realm of the society but the economic and political aspect as well and the society was fashioned according to a materialistic outlook. Nursi saw it as the influence of the French Revolution which led to the 'dehumanizing values of Soviet communism.' Men remove all the limits to class and oppress the sacred which ends in anarchy. Nursi applies the Qur'anic teaching about Gog and Magog to modern history and presents a trace of French libertarianism from communism to anarchy. Nursi maintains:

Socialism sprang up in the French Revolution from the seed of libertarianism. Since socialism destroyed certain sacred matters, the ideas it inculcated turned into bolshevism. Because bolshevism corrupted even more sacred moral and human values and those of the human heart, of course, the seeds it sowed will produce anarchy, which recognizes no restrictions whatsoever and has respect for nothing. For if respect and compassion quit the human heart, those with such hearts become exceedingly cruel beasts and can no longer be governed through politics.⁵³

Nursi terms the clash prevalent in modern society as the result of materialism. He terms the two Great Wars as a manifestation of Divine Wrath in punishment for the vice and misguidance of civilization.⁵⁴ The civilization founded on the doctrine of conflict, competition and enmity leads to war and damage. Nursi comments on the Qur'anic passage about "the blowers of knots" in the context of 20th Century history as:

51 Ibid, 257-58.

52 Ibid, 327-28.

53 Nursi, *The Rays*, op. cit., 105.

54 Said Nursi. *The Damascus Sermon*, (tr.), Sukran Vahide (New Delhi: Barla Publications, 2015), 38.

The sentence "the blowers of knots" coincides' with the dates when due to their ambition and greed the European tyrants who caused the two World Wars, instigated a change of Sultan and the Balkan and Italian Wars with the idea of spoiling the consequences of the Constitutional Revolution which favored the Qur'an. Then with the outbreak of the First World War, through the political diplomats blowing their evils, material and immaterial, and their sorcery and poison into everyone's heads through the tongue of the radio, and inculcating their covert plans into the heart of human destiny, they prepared the evils that would savagely destroy a thousand years of the progress of civilization, which corresponds exactly with the meaning of "the blowers on knots."⁵⁵

VI. ROOT OF SPIRITUAL CRISIS: WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

The spiritual crisis which erupted from science and philosophy was not an intellectual problem rather it was a problem that affected Nursi personally. He recollects his internal struggle (spiritual crisis) that brought him pain after relying on the experience or knowledge of the people of misguidance and philosophers. For his victory over the crisis Nursi thanks God and for his experience which might help others to get out of the despair and confusion of western philosophy. It was only through meditation on the Qur'an he arrived at the understanding of Divine unity which made him able to comprehend the egression in all the creatures the artwork of the Creator. Nursi recalls:

..., my soul, which had been a temporary student of Satan and the spokesman for the people of misguidance and the philosophers, was silenced, and, all praise be to God, came to believe completely. It said: "Yes, what I need is a Creator and Sustainer who possesses the power to know the least thoughts of my heart and my most secret wishes, who will answer the most hidden needs of my spirit and will transform the mighty earth into the Hereafter in order to give me eternal happiness."⁵⁶

55 Said Nursi, *The Rays*, op. cit., 287.

56 Said Nursi. *The Flashes*, (tr.), Sukran Vahide (New Delhi: Barla Publications, 2015), 306.

Nursi observes that Satan makes use of the rational element of Western civilization to allure him to disbelief. He marked the diabolic influences responsible for the evils in modern society. Modern civilization is equivocal because of its various sources of inspiration. Modern civilization retains the notions of love, justice and harmony from the truths of revealed religion and its destructive elements from anti-religious philosophical ideologies and perhaps from the evil spirits. Nursi says, modern civilization – the product of human thought and perhaps the jinn also – has preoccupied a position opposite to the Qur'an and attempts to attack the miraculous nature of it by its necromancy.⁵⁷ Nursi comprehends satanic tactics in false nationalist ideologies which aim to enforce a way of life based on European civilization. It presents itself with numerous promises but at length offers nothing to be appraised, exclusively to pious believers and to those who suffer. Nursi adds:

...The way that the misguided and bogus patriots have taken extinguishes the spiritual lights of the pious people of belief, destroys their true consolation, and shows death to be eternal nothingness and the grave to be the door to everlasting separation. Are the benefits of disaster victims, the sick, and those who have despaired of life, to be found in the way of a European-type, irreligious civilization?⁵⁸

Nursi witnesses a demonic element in the material luxury and self-satisfaction that strives to replace the eternal life with the worldly one, an eternal paradise with an earthly paradise. Nursi sees this as the work of Dajjal who represents in essence the personality of the "second Europe". Nursi describes Dajjal as:

...superficially like a human being. ...arrogant and Pharaoh-like and has forgotten God, a foolish Satan and the intriguing person who calls his superficial, tyrannical rule godhead. His huge current of atheism, his collective personality, is truly vast...The Dajjal's false paradise are the alluring amusements and enticements of civilization...brings a false paradise for the dissolute and the worldly, while for the people of religion and Islam, like the angels of Hell it brings dangers in the hand of civilization, and casts them into captivity and poverty.⁵⁹

Nursi feels that if Muslims and Christians unite and work together, they can defeat the Dajjal and its false promises in future. Nursi sees fighting atheism as a motivation for both of these. As a religion, true Christianity which comprises the collective persona of Jesus (PBUH), will stand against the Dajjal. Jesus (PBUH) will descend from the heavens and will ward off the distortions and superstitions from Christianity and unite it with the truths of Islam.⁶⁰

VII. IN THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

One of the deadly features of Modern civilization is its propagation of material goods and cheering people by convincing them that they need such things to attain happiness. This does not happen accidentally but is a direct outcome of the desertion from the spiritual side of life, examines Nursi. Man does not love to be obedient to God in daily matters and has lost the hope of eternal life with God and has become preoccupied with the material aspect to grant himself temporary happiness. Modern western civilization acts opposite to the basic laws of the revealed religions. Its good aspects have been outweighed by its errors and evils, contentment by extravagance, hard work by laziness.⁶¹ Unlike in the earlier times, where people only needed a few things for their contentment and they worked hard to get them, the modern man has made the unimportant things as important which has led him to wastefulness and misuse of things. He further says, "In place of four things that someone used to need modern civilized man is now in need of twenty."⁶² Nursi traces this consumerism from the abandonment of religion. In the earlier periods wars were fought for religion and justice and now they are fought for possession of resources. Nursi accuses modern civilization for not paying heed to the revealed religions and for increasing the needs, 'wastefulness', 'greed' and 'covetousness'. It has exploited the lives of useless things.⁶³

Though Nursi's stand on the West and Western civilization seems complimentary that does not make him uncritical of the present form of civilization. The virtues and positives of the civilization, if adopted, after sifting them in the light of the Qur'an never created a problem, says Nursi. Neither he exactly defines what civilization stands for nor what the civilized people are, recounts Hasan Horkuc. He further says, Nursi understood the West

57 Said Nursi, *The Words*, op. cit., 420.

58 Said Nursi, *The Letters*, op. cit., 493.

59 Ibid, 80. See also Thomas Michel, *Said Nursi's Views on Christian-Muslim Understanding* (Istanbul: Soz Basim Yayin, 2005), 94.

60 Idem.

61 Said Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 128.

62 Ibid, 129.

63 Ibid, 129-130.

as a geographical region that has produced a philosophy that is positive as well as negative. Nursi criticized those aspects of Western civilization which he saw are based on the negative philosophy. The present civilization failed to understand nature in its totality (body and spirit). Some of the virtues that have arisen due to the exercise of intellect are to be employed only after filtering them through the lens of the Qur'an.⁶⁴ The present-day Western civilization, as Nursi believed, was founded on a genius that emerged from the earth rather than on the guidance from the heavens. Guidance works through the heart and genius in the mind that confuses the heart and the combination of the two is an unfulfilled dream of Christianity, time and civilization. Only the light of the Qur'an and the guidance of the Shari'ah can make reconciliation between the two. Then the lands of Asia and Rumelia can produce the champions' superior to that of Plato, Avicenna and Bismark, Descartes and Taftazani who are needed seriously. And then, "the East will be to the West what dawn is to the Sunset. If that is, they do not wither up by the languor of idleness and poison of malice."⁶⁵

Socio-economic inequalities are the trademark of modern civilization which has widened the rift between the classes and brought humanity to the brink of extinction.⁶⁶ Nursi criticizes the injustice inherent in Western civilization. He characterizes the Western attitude with these two phrases: "So long as I am full, what is it to me if others die of hunger" and "you struggle and labor so that I can live in comfort."⁶⁷ By allowing the social classes to draw far apart, according to Nursi, this attitude has been the cause of such sedition and strife that it has come close to overturning humanity. It has for several centuries destroyed public order and security, and in this century, owing to the struggle between capital and labor has given rise to disaster and disorder on a vast scale and ruined mankind with two world wars. Thus he considered it impossible to approve of a civilization in which its negative points outweighed its virtues and good points.⁶⁸

64 Horkuc, *op. cit.*, 355.

65 Sukran Vahide. *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 55. See also Horkuc, *Ibid*, 354-55.

66 Colin Turner. *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2013), 524.

67 Michel, *op. cit.*, 90.

68 Horkuc, *op. cit.*, 356.

CONCLUSION

Although Nursi reacted to a European-originated materialist philosophy and atheism, he was very careful not to reject Europe altogether. He differentiated among the good and bad institutions and practices of Western civilization. Avoiding the extremes, he worked to create middle and moderate paths in response to the West. He addressed making use of the Western elements and ideas necessary for the development of the Muslim world without loss to Islamic heritage. Believing that modern science and logic was the way of the future, he advocated teaching religious sciences in secular schools and modern sciences in religious schools. Nursi aimed to unite Muslims and worked to create a possibility of dialogue between the two civilizations. He worked to manage the impact of Western civilization on the Islamic world. Any civilization is neither completely good nor completely evil. Nursi's message, more than that of many of his contemporaries, was accessible not only to religiously oriented educated cadres but also to the less educated, who saw in his message a means of integrating faith with modernity, nationalism, and social revitalization. Nursi rejects blind imitation as it makes the individuals laughingstocks.