

Said Nursi and the Qur'anic Vision of Coexistence: Rethinking Civilizational Dialogue in an Age of Polarization

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi as articulated in *Risale-i Nur*, proposing it as a hermeneutic and civilizational praxis for fostering coexistence in a polarized world. Rooted in the Qur'anic principles of *tawhid* (Divine Unity), *rahmah* (compassion), and *'adl* (justice), Nursi's framework transcends apologetics to offer a transformational model of dialogue. Key concepts such as *ma'na-yi harfi* (symbolic hermeneutics), *hizmet* (service), and the *darshane* (learning circle) are analyzed to demonstrate how Nursi reconciles revelation with reason and tradition with modernity. This research adopts a qualitative, thematic analysis of primary texts and contemporary scholarly discourse, arguing that *Risale-i Nur* provides an ethical and epistemological foundation for interreligious and intercultural engagement based on *ta'aruf* (mutual recognition). The findings position *Risale-i Nur* as a vital civilizational manuscript that addresses modern challenges while remaining anchored in Islamic core values.

Keywords: Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur*, Civilizational Dialogue, Tawhidic Hermeneutics, Islamic Epistemology, Coexistence

INTRODUCTION

Amidst rising cultural polarization, religious tensions, and exclusive nationalism, the need for a constructive civilizational dialogue has become urgent (Esposito, 2002; Ramadan, 2009). Islamic thought is called upon to provide an approach that maintains theological authenticity while engaging meaningfully with other worldviews. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877–1960), a seminal Turkish Muslim thinker, developed a tawhid-based epistemological response to this challenge through his magnum opus, *Risale-i Nur* (Zaidin, 2003). Written during the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate and the rise of assertive secularism, this work articulates a worldview where *ma'na-yi harfi* (the universe as signs of Divine Oneness) creates a metaphysical common ground for dialogue (Vahide, 2005; Turner, 2013). Grounded in *rahmah*, *'adl*, and *hikmah* (wisdom), Nursi's framework advocates for a transformative, rather than merely tolerant, engagement.

This study explores how *Risale-i Nur* contributes to an Islamic hermeneutical model for civilizational coexistence. It investigates the translation of Qur'anic values into social ethics, communal praxis (*cemaat*), and educational discourse, with particular focus on the *darshane* as a micro-structure for dialogical civilizationbuilding (Michel, 2005; Abu-Rabi', 2003).

Historical Context and Thought of Said Nursi

Said Nursi's intellectual journey was shaped by the late Ottoman decline, World War I, the abolition of the Caliphate (1924), and the establishment of a secular Turkish Republic (Vahide, 2005). He perceived these events not merely as political failures, but as symptoms of a deeper epistemological and spiritual crisis within the Muslim world (Suhaib et al., 2024).

In response, Nursi championed a path of spiritual and intellectual renewal (*tajdid*) through Risale-i Nur. Rejecting both rigid traditionalism (*taqlid*) and a complete break from heritage, he offered a contemporary reinterpretation of the Qur'an (Markham & Pirim, 2017). Central to his thought is *ma'na-yi harfi*, which views creation as a symbolic text pointing to God's unity, thereby bridging revelation and science (Michel, 2005). This approach fosters a Muslim identity that is intellectually confident and open to civilizational exchange. Concepts like *hizmet* (service), *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), and *sohbet* (spiritual dialogue) underpin a social ethic based on compassion and shared responsibility, positioning the Muslim community as a proactive contributor to universal human welfare (Michel, 2005; Vahide, 2005).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative hermeneutical approach, focusing on thematic analysis of Nursi's primary texts: *Sozler* (The Words), *Mektubat* (Letters), and *Sualar* (The Rays). The analysis identifies and interprets core concepts *tawhid*, *ma'na-yi harfi*, *hizmet*, *sohbet* within their historical and linguistic context, consistent with approaches outlined by Michel (2005) and Abu-Rabi' (2003). Secondary scholarship (e.g., Turner, 2013; Vahide, 2005; Markham & Pirim, 2017; Esposito, 2002; Ramadan, 2009) provides contextual and analytical depth. Textual triangulation across Nursi's works ensures interpretive consistency, while the framework of *ta'dib* (holistic education) and *adab* (civilizational virtue) as articulated by al-Attas (1993) is used to evaluate the contemporary relevance of his ethical-educational model. This methodology treats Risale-i Nur not only as a theological exegesis but as a civilizational manuscript with implications for dialogue, education, and societal renewal.

Tawhid As the Foundation for Coexistence

In Risale-i Nur, *tawhid* is the comprehensive axis of epistemology, ethics, and civilization (Turner, 2013). Through the lens of *ma'na-yi harfi*, every aspect of creation is seen as an *ayah* (sign) manifesting Divine Names, establishing a shared ontological ground for all beings (Michel, 2005; Vahide, 2005). This perspective dissolves dichotomies between nature/revelation and science/religion, allowing for a constructive engagement with modern thought (Aydin, 2019).

Nursi's tawhidic framework integrates *'aql* (intellect) and *qalb* (heart), rejecting the extremes of rationalism and moral relativism that characterize the post-Enlightenment world (Abu-Rabi', 2003). It fosters an identity rooted in *ta'aruf* (mutual recognition, Q. 49:13) and *ukhuwwah insaniyyah* (human brotherhood) (Michel, 2005; Yavuz, 2013). Consequently, *tawhid* becomes an ethical impetus for *rahmah*, *'adl*, and *hikmah* -values essential for a civilizational dialogue that is theologically deep yet universally resonant, offering an alternative to Huntington's (1996) "clash of civilizations" thesis (Markham & Pirim, 2017).

Qur'anic Values and Civilizational Ethics

Risale-i Nur operationalizes core Qur'anic values as the ethical bedrock for civilized society (Turner, 2013). *Rahmah* (compassion) is an active principle demanding the upholding of human dignity across differences (Michel, 2005; Yavuz, 2013). *'Adl* (justice) is framed as a practical manifestation of *tawhid* and a prerequisite for societal and international order (Abu-Rabi', 2003). *Hikmah* (wisdom) guides the contextual and respectful engagement with other cultures, aligning with al-Attas's (1993) concept of *adab*.

These values are actualized through *hizmet* - service to humanity as worship (Michel, 2005; Markham & Pirim, 2017). This moves ethical theory into social praxis, making Risale-i Nur a guide for constructive dialogue and cooperation. Nursi's ethics, therefore, provide a stable moral compass in an age of value confusion and polarization (Turner, 2013; Vahide, 2005).

Darshane As a Microcosm of Tawhidic Civilization

The *darshane* (study circle) of the Nur movement exemplifies Nursi's civilizational ideal in practice. It functions as a "spiritual laboratory" where knowledge (*'ilm*) is co-constructed through *sohbet* (dialogue), coupled with *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification) and *hizmet* (Michel, 2005). This model challenges authoritative educational paradigms and resonates with both classical *muzakarah* and contemporary transformative learning (Turner, 2013).

As a social unit (*cemaat*), the *darshane* cultivates *adab*, *ukhuwwah*, and collective consciousness, reviving the spirit of historical *halaqa*hs within a modern context (Vahide, 2005; Abu-Rabi', 2003). It adeptly utilizes modern technology for dissemination while maintaining principles of spiritual presence (*hadrah*) and ethical discipline (*ta'dib*) (Markham & Pirim, 2017). By integrating learning, character formation, and social action, the *darshane* demonstrates how civilizational renewal can emanate from grassroots, value-based communities (Michel, 2005; Turner, 2013; Yavuz, 2013).

Risale-I Nur: A Hermeneutic for Contemporary Islamic Civilization

Nursi's hermeneutics, centered on *ma'na harfi*, offer a holistic way of reading both the Qur'an and reality (Turner, 2013; Michel, 2005). This approach bridges revelation, science, and human experience, reviving the concept of *kitab al-kawn* (the Book of the Universe) for the modern age (Vahide, 2005; Yavuz, 2013). It engages the existential dimensions of life, offering a "faith-based hermeneutics" distinct from secular or purely legalistic interpretations (Abu-Rabi', 2003; Markham & Pirim, 2017).

In civilizational terms, this hermeneutic enables a confident and dialogical encounter with modernity, grounded in *adab* and *hikmah* (Michel, 2005; Aydin, 2019). It is non-apologetic and transformative, advocating for inner reform through spiritual enlightenment. Nursi's vision aligns with al-Attas's (1993) *ta'dib*-based education, presenting a vital response to contemporary epistemological and moral crises (Markham & Pirim, 2017).

Risale-I Nur and Interreligious/Intercultural Dialogue

Nursi promotes dialogue rooted in *iman haqiqi* (true faith), which inspires responsibility towards all humanity based on shared *fitrah* (innate disposition) (Yavuz, 2013; Markham & Pirim, 2017). He distinguishes between other faiths—viewed as potential partners in upholding universal values—and materialistic atheism, which he considered a common adversary (Vahide, 2005; Michel, 2005). This perspective fosters inclusive communities (*cemaat*) where engagement is based on sincerity and shared spiritual seeking, directly countering narratives of civilizational clash (Huntington, 1996) and supporting a narrative of mercy and justice (Turner, 2013; Abu-Rabi', 2003).

Thus, *Risale-i Nur* provides a theological foundation for dialogue that is compassionate, principled, and aimed at building a just and harmonious world (Michel, 2005; Markham & Pirim, 2017).

Implementation: The Hizmet Movement as A Contemporary Manifestation

The global Hizmet Movement, inspired by Nursi's teachings, translates the principles of *hizmet* and civilizational dialogue into practice (Yavuz, 2013). Through a network of schools, dialogue centers (e.g., Rumi Forum), and humanitarian projects in over 160 countries, it embodies *rahmah*, *'adl*, and *hikmah*. Its educational institutions combine modern curricula with spiritual-ethical formation, creating environments of mutual respect for students of diverse backgrounds. This demonstrates the practical applicability of Nursi's framework in fostering interfaith understanding and social cohesion on a global scale.

CONCLUSION

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* offers a profound intellectual and spiritual model for civilizational coexistence. By synthesizing *tawhid*, Qur'anic ethics, and a dialogical epistemology, it provides a framework for Muslims to engage modernity confidently while preserving their spiritual core. The *darshane* model shows how this vision can be realized through community-based education and praxis. To sustain this legacy, systematic efforts in curriculum development, scholarly research, and the institutionalization of *ta'dib* (self-discipline), *ma'rifah* (spiritual knowledge), and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) are essential. In an era of polarization, Nursi's thought stands as a vital resource for moderation, wisdom, and hopeful engagement.

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