

Bediuzzaman said Nursi's views on Muslim-Christian relations

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Abstract

The article attempts to highlight the views of Said Nursi (1876-1960) on Muslim-Christian relationship with reference to his writings. The article specifically discerns that the non-legalistic and positive understanding of certain verses of the Qur'an (5:51) on the subject is unique and of immense significance not only for the healthier cooperation and dialogue between the two communities but also for the world peace at large, for Islam and Christianity are two major contemporary religions.

Keywords: muslim-christian relationship, said nursi

Introduction

Throughout the nearly fifteen centuries of Muslim-Christian encounter, individual adherents of both traditions often have lived peaceably with each other. At the same time, Muslim expansion into Christian territories and Christian imperialism in Muslim lands have fostered fear and ill-will on both sides. Repercussions from the Crusades continue to resound in the contemporary rhetoric employed by defenders of both faiths. In recent years relations between Muslims and Christians across the globe have become increasingly polarized, fanned by anti-Islamic rhetoric and fearmongering. While a number of verses in the Qur'an call for treating Christians and Jews with respect as recipients of God's divine message, in reality many Muslims have found it difficult not to see Christians as polytheists because of their doctrine of the Trinity. Christians, for their part, traditionally have viewed the Qur'an as untrue and Muhammad as a pretender. Conflicts in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere for much of the 20th century were often labeled as ethnic, political, or ideological perpetuations of long-standing struggles over land, power, and influence. These conflicts now tend to be labeled in accord with the specifically religious affiliation of their participants.

The two great Semitic religions have influenced the world for centuries and are continuously playing a crucial role in the world affairs. As such one of the most demanding subjects in our modern-day global community is the matter of Muslim-Christian relations. The present article aims to highlight Said Nursi's views on this important issue and that his unique and positive interpretation of certain verses of the Qur'an on the subject are of extreme significance for the contemporary world.

The Holy Qur'an encourages people to develop positive relationships by knowing each other. There is no doubt that knowing is the first step in any constructive engagement. As the Arabic proverb says, 'The human being is the enemy of what he does not know.' Having this general principle, the Qur'an also strongly commends dialogue between all human beings as a general principle, and between Muslims and

Christians in particular. The best-known Qur'anic verse on human relationships seems to be indispensable for any dialogue between two human beings or between the adherents of any religions of the world. The holy book of Islam clearly proposes that human beings are created in different shapes and colors in order that they should know each other, not so that they should struggle or fight against one another: *'O mankind! We have created you male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct. God is the Knower and the Aware* ^[1]. There are other verses that encourage Muslims to engage in dialogue with others based on common pedigree and brotherhood: *O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer* ^[2].

At the outset, it will be pertinent to draw the attention towards the 4th and 5th verse of the Chapter II (*al-Baqarah*) of the Qur'an. According to Nursi's interpretation the verses describe 'the saved' (*al-muflihun*) as those who believe in the revelation given to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as well as the revelation given to the prophets before him. These verses clearly state that belief in pre-Qur'anic scriptures is an essential part of faith and piety in Islam. In order to be a Muslim, one should believe in all the revelations of God, including the revelation of the Qur'an and the revelation of scriptures prior to the Qur'an. In his famous, unfinished commentary on the Qur'an, *Isarat al-I'jaz* (The Signs of Miraculousness) ^[3], Nursi comments that the language of the Qur'an is rather tender towards the followers of pre-Qur'anic revelations, namely Christians and Jews. According to Nursi, this verse encourages all people to accept the revelation of the Qur'an particularly the 'People of the Book' (Christians and Jews) due to the fact that the Qur'an itself is evidence and witness to the truthfulness of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The verse declares the honorable position, of those People of the Book who have come to believe in the Qur'an,

and exhorts others to follow their example. Nursi's commentary on this verse further elaborates this point: "O People of the Book! As you believe in the past prophets and the divine books, believe in Muhammad and the Qur'an as well. That is because the early prophets and their scriptures give good news of his coming. The proofs that show the truthfulness of those prophets and their books are truthfully and spiritually found in the Qur'an and in the personality of Muhammad. Therefore, the Qur'an is the word of God. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW), is the messenger of God [4]. Nursi continues his interpretation of this short verse with respect to Christians and Jews, indicating that the Qur'an shows them tenderness, familiarity, and flexibility. He comments that the verse has the following connotation:

O People of the Book! There is no difficulty for you to embrace Islam, as there should not be. That is because Islam does not ask you to abandon your religion entirely. It allows you to complete your creeds and build on the principles of religion that you already have. This is because the Qur'an contains all the beauties of the previous revelations and the principles of early religious systems. Essentially, the Qur'an balances and completes them. Due to the change of time and space it establishes some new details which contain no illogical or unreasonable elements [5].

Nursi then elaborates on another verse of the Qur'an directly related to Muslim-Christian relations. In this verse, the Qur'an asks Muslims to debate their differences with the People of the Book in the kindest way. Without doubt, this is a quest for a sincere understanding of differences. The verse says, 'And debate with the People of the Book in the way which is the best' [6]. The verse makes it clear that there will be debates between Muslims and Christians about doctrines and perhaps other issues, but says the discussion should always take place in a positive manner. According to Mahmoud Ayoub, a well-known scholar of Islam in the United States, this can be seen in the Qur'an's use of the term 'do not exaggerate' (*la-taghlu*) [7] when it speaks of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Ayoub suggests that the Qur'an considers this doctrine as extreme, but not outright kufr or unbelief [8].

The third Qur'anic verse upon which Nursi elaborates is the one that prohibits the taking of Christians or Jews as *awliya'* (friends or patrons): 'O you who believe, take not the Jews and Christians for friends (*awliya'*)' [9]. The verse is probably one of the most debated verses in the study of Muslim-Christian relations. Nursi's interpretation of this verse came at a time when most of the Islamic world was under the colonization of Western powers. In his social environment, there were Armenian Christians of various denominations and Greek Orthodox Christians, as well as Sephardic Jews. Out of great confusion about the introduction of constitutionalism, a new system of governing, into the Ottoman state, many of Nursi's contemporaries presented this verse as a proof text against developing friendship with non-Muslims, particularly Christians and Jews.

One of the important words used in this verse is the word *awliya'*, which has a variety of meanings in different Qur'anic

verses. Before elaborating on Nursi's commentary, it is important to give some etymological background for the term. The famous Arab linguist Ibn Manzur, in his well-known lexicon, gives various meanings of the word, such as love, friendship, and alliance. To clarify, he uses two opposite terms: *muwala*, a derived form that comes from the same root as *walaya* (amity), and *mu'ada*, a derived form that comes from the same root as *'adawa* (animosity), saying that the essential meaning of the roots makes *muwala* the opposite of *mu'ada*. Thus, according to Ibn Manzur, *awliya'* is the plural form of *wali*, which is the opposite of *'aduwa* (enemy) [10]. If the verse is taken literally, as many commentators did in the past, there is an apparent prohibition of Muslims establishing positive relations with Christians and Jews. However, Nursi has an entirely different approach to the interpretation of this verse. There is no doubt that his deep knowledge of Islamic law and the methodology of Qur'anic exegesis have contributed to his commentary. Nursi says, "First there should have been a definite implication as it should have definite form. Thus there is a way to interpret this verse with many possible meanings. For the Qur'anic prohibition is not *'amm* [a general rule applicable to all and not to be contradicted] but *mutlaq* [the laws that are general but need not be applied in every circumstance]. Unlike *'amm*, *mutlaq* can be restricted. In this instance, time is a prominent interpreter. If it puts a limitation on the verse, nobody would object to it [11],

Nursi brings to our attention the importance of time and space as interpreters of the Qur'an. He speaks of the environment in which this particular Qur'anic verse was revealed and how the modern-day environment is considerably different: "During the time of the Prophet there was a sizable religious revolution. Everyone's ideas at that time were inevitably concerned with religion. People hated and loved each other solely on the basis of religion. Therefore, a close relationship with non-Muslims was considered a form of hypocrisy. Today there is a civilizational and secular revolution. The human mind is occupied by civilizational progress and worldly life [12].

Nursi thus accepts that we, as human beings, are fundamentally historical creatures, living in time and space. He considers time as an interpreter of the Qur'an. He is definitely aware of the realities of current situations and the necessity for positive relationships between Muslims and Christians. This is not to limit the meaning of the Qur'an, but to understand it as an eternal revelation of God, which addresses all ages.

Accordingly, Nursi's interpretation, using a very strong Islamic methodological approach, is that the verse should not be seen as a prohibition of friendship with Christians and Jews:

"One can be beloved not because of his essence but because of his attributes and profession. Therefore, it is not necessary that a Muslim's attributes be considered Muslim too. And likewise, it is not necessary that a non-Muslim's attributes are non-Muslim. Thus, it is possible that a non-Muslim individual could have a Muslim attribute and a Muslim profession. Why must this necessarily be impermissible? And why would the Muslim attributes of a non-Muslim not be a cause for praise and imitation? [13]

Here Nursi elucidates the importance of characteristics rather than the person's religious affiliation. According to Nursi, good characteristics are good wherever they are and whoever attains them, regardless of people's religious backgrounds, and should be considered praiseworthy. Based on this principle put forward by Nursi, one can argue that Muslims should benefit from the good characteristics of Christians and adherents of other religions and should establish positive relationships based on those attributes, which are considered Islamic regardless of where they occur. To support his case further, he refers to an Islamic legal principle with regard to marriage, pointing out that this Qur'anic prohibition of friendship is limited by the application of the Islamic legal principle that permits a Muslim man to marry a Christian or Jewish woman, which is also supported by texts from the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet. He says, 'If a Muslim man has a Christian or Jewish wife, is he not supposed to love her? On the contrary, certainly he does love her.' If the prohibition were absolute, there would be no permission for Muslims to marry Christian or Jewish women. Concluding his interpretation of this verse, Nursi says, "therefore our friendship with them [Christians and Jews] is now from the standpoint of looking positively at their civilization and progress, and borrowing it from them. Also, it is from the standpoint of the protection of social order which is the basis of all happiness in human life. Thus, it is certain that such a friendship is not included in the Qur'anic prohibition^[14].

Although Nursi does not speak directly about the Qur'anic verse that invites the People of the Book to common ground, one can see the implications of this verse throughout his writings. In many of his private letters to his students, which have been published separately as appendices, Nursi speaks of cooperation between Muslims and Christians. He suggests that Muslims, particularly his students, should not focus on the points of disagreement; rather they should concentrate on the common ground. It appears that Nursi is extremely concerned about cooperation with Christians for common goals such as justice, the struggle against poverty, the dissemination of knowledge, and contemporary problems, such as environmental protection. In other words, Muslims and Christians, who constitute more than half of humanity, could bring about a great change in the world through dialogue and cooperation. To open such a dialogue, the Qur'an praises some Christian qualities, such as humility. It says, '*you will find among people who are the closest to Muslims in love are those who say "Lo, we are Christians."*' It describes the attributes of their monks as being humble and not arrogant, and their eyes flow with tears when they hear the verses of God^[15].

Here it is evident that Nursi takes his point of departure from his primary reference, the Qur'an, which has been inviting the People of the Book to common ground since the time of the Prophet: '*O People of the Book! Let us come to an agreement between us and you that we shall worship none but God and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him and that none of us should take others for Lords beside God*'^[16]. In his Treatise on Brotherhood, addressing the issue of brotherhood between Muslims, Nursi considers 'belief in the same God' as the most important tie between believers. Similarly, about Christians and Jews, the Qur'an says, '*Our God and your God is one*'

^[17], This seems to be the most important common ground that is addressed in the abovementioned verse as well.

Since the renaissance of Islam in 7th century Muslims and Christians have been in constant interaction. Among the early encounters is when Prophet received the first revelation. It is narrated that the Prophet met with Waraqa bin Nawfal bin Asad (d. 611 CE), the cousin of his wife, Khadija. Waraqa, who had become a Christian earlier, strongly supported the Prophet and wished to live longer to help him in his message. He even prophesied that the people of Mekka would compel him to migrate.

In the early years of the prophethood of Muhammad (SAW) there were other occasions of positive encounters among Christians and Muslims. A well-known example is the story of the migration of persecuted Muslims to the land of the Christian King Ashama of Abyssinia, the Najashi. This migration is considered a milestone in the establishment of positive relations between the members of these two great religions. As a matter of fact, this very event was the occasion of the revelation of the Qur'anic verse that praises Christians as being the nearest in love to Muslims. As briefly mentioned above, the verse says: *And you shall find that the nearest of all people in love to the believers [Muslims] those who say, 'Lo, we are Christians.' That is because there are among them priests and monks and because they are not arrogant. When they listen to what is revealed to the messenger you see their eyes overflow with tears as they recognize its truth. They say, 'Lord, we believe. Count us among the witnesses.*'^[18].

Under the leadership of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib (d. 630 CE), the cousin of the Prophet, 83 Muslims, male and female, migrated from Mekka in order to take refuge in King Ashama's territory, modern-day Ethiopia. Despite the insistence of the Mekkans on bringing them back by diplomatic means, the King kept them in his country under his protection. This event pleased the Prophet of Islam to the extent that, when King Ashama died, the Prophet said to his Companions, 'Your brother Najashi has died,' and he arranged an Islamic funeral for him in Medina. Even after his death, the Prophet continued building a positive relationship with the next Najashi. Some Islamic sources contain a record of the Prophet's letter to King Ashama, whose contents constitute a very important historical document for Muslim-Christian relations. In his letter, the Prophet speaks of Jesus as the word of God and a spirit from Him. It is worth noting that he begins with Jesus as the common ground between Muslims and Christians. Today's Muslims could benefit from the Prophet's practices with regard to communication with Christians.

Another early encounter is the Prophet's debate with the Christians of Najran. This encounter was the occasion for the revelation of the famous Qur'anic verse of *mubahala* (mutual cursing). Despite the fact that the debate was initially heated, at the end the Prophet extended the hand of friendship. He also allowed the Christians to pray in his mosque and signed an agreement with them. Since the beginning of Islam, Muslims and Christians have been in constant relationships in a myriad of ways, including living together and sharing the same society, for most of the time peacefully, but sometimes in conflict.

It is generally agreed that the two major events that had a negative effect on the feelings of Muslims towards Christians

are the Crusades and colonization. It is pertinent to mention that Nursi witnessed the era of colonization of many parts of the Islamic world. Despite the fact that the majority of the Islamic world was under the colonization of European powers, Nursi was very hopeful when he gave his famous *Damascus Sermon* in 1911, which is considered a milestone in his discernment of the future of Islam, as well as of Muslims' relations with Christians ^[19]. One should remember that, as mentioned above, Nursi delivered his sermon just a couple of years before the beginning of the World War I, when conflicts and struggles were spreading in the world. As a result of the Muslim reaction to colonization, the dominant Muslim view at this time was one of animosity and determination to struggle for independence against Western hegemony. In such a tumultuous time, Said Nursi focused on the importance of positive relations between Muslims as well as between Muslims and Christians. One can discern that Nursi approached the subject from a non-legalistic point of view. In the *Damascus Sermon* Said Nursi, speaks of enemies that he considers obstacles in the way of cooperation and understanding between Muslims and Christians. The enemies he speaks of are not countries, peoples, or individuals, but are described as certain social, moral, and political diseases. Nursi offers a diagnosis of the six main problems that caused the backwardness of the Islamic world and presents prescriptions to cure the problems. The problems are: the growth of despair among Muslims; the death of truth in the social life of Muslims; love of animosity; ignorance of the important ties between believers; dictatorship; and the emphasis on efforts to gain personal advantages ^[21]. Nursi wanted the Islamic world to see first its own faults and weaknesses, and correct them, in order to engage constructively with the modern world. Here, he speaks of positive developments such as the idea of freedom and seeking truth in the world of Christianity, which led him to believe that there would be Muslim-Christian cooperation in the future.

After referring to the cures for these diseases, Nursi speaks about one of the lost values of Islam in our century: love as a cure for the disease of animosity. One can argue that Nursi's idea of love constitutes the foundation for positive relationships with adherents of other religions, particularly Christianity. The concept of love is depicted here as the outcome of his life experience. Nursi says, 'The attribute most deserving of love is love itself. And the attribute most deserving of hatred is hatred itself.' Since this is directly related to Nursi's understanding of Muslim-Christian relations, it is relevant to consider what he says in his examination of this particular cure. He revised his sermon in the 1950s and translated it into Turkish from Arabic when he realized, after the fact, how important it was. In this period, Nursi's writings reflect his dismay of the destruction wrought by both World Wars: as a prisoner of war in World War I, and as a horrified witness to World War II. In the revised version of the sermon, Nursi expresses the importance of love and the danger of hatred: "It is time to end hatred and animosity. The two World Wars have shown how ugly animosity is and how it can be destructive and wrong. It has been proved that there is no benefit from hatred. Therefore, the mistakes of our enemies, as long as they do not include attacks against us, should not make us hate them. The punishment of God in the

Afterlife for those who disobey is enough ^[22].

This eschatological approach, by relying upon the judgment of God in the afterlife, creates a paradigm that is bound to lead to forgiveness and compassion towards all, even one's enemies. Nursi, by way of comparison, likens the reasons for love to a mountain, while the reasons for hatred are only small, cheap stones. Small, cheap stones should not be preferred over mountains. He enumerates some of these reasons for love as 'faith, Islam, and humanity', which he describes as unbreakable chains and collective fortresses that connect people to each other. Nursi seems to see three levels of positive relations. Without arranging them in any order of importance, they are, at the first level, positive relations and love between all Muslims. On the second level, there should be positive relations between all peoples of faith. On the third level, he presents the importance of positive relations between all human beings. He describes this concept of love as a part of the chemistry of Islam (*mizaj-i Islamiyet*). Conversely, he compares those who hate with pessimists, always looking for the negative aspects of life. If there is any possibility of negative feelings towards others, these pessimists will never prefer to have positive thoughts. Nursi says, 'Their attitude is to cover ten positive things with one mistake. This attitude is clearly against the Islamic characteristics of fairness (*insaf*) and judging positively (*husn-i zan*)' ^[23].

Post two World Wars, having seen the disasters caused by nationalism and racism, Nursi was fearful of the negative consequences of nationalism, which generally results in hatred towards an entire nation or ethnic group. He strongly advocates a positive relationship between all Islamic nations, regardless of their nationalities and ethnicities. He says, 'The foundation and the spirit of our nationality is Islam. Arabs and Turks are true brothers and they are the guards of the fortress of Islam' ^[24]. Nursi believed that Muslims, if united, would have more positive relationships with Christians and therefore, on many occasions, he suggested that Western countries, such as the United States, should work for the unity of Muslims to establish better relationships between Muslims and Christians. Christians and Jews were minorities in the Ottoman state, which accepted constitutionalism as a system of rule in the beginning of the 20th century. Nursi's early writings emphasize the need for Muslims to respect the equal legal rights of the People of the Book under this new system of government. He defended the concept of constitutionalism as an Islamic principle and a bulwark against dictatorship. Some Muslims of his time, particularly the Kurdish tribes of eastern Anatolia, were concerned that constitutionalism would bring more privileges to non-Muslims. He traveled to this region to convince tribal leaders of the importance of the new model of governance and to respond to their various anxieties, including the status of non-Muslims in the empire. In his dialogues, one can see how Nursi faced an uphill struggle to convince his audience ^[24]. On one occasion, when he was asked how a Muslim and a non-Muslim could be equal in an Islamic society, Nursi responded as follows:

Equality is not in virtue and honor but it is in law. Before the law, a king and a slave are equals. Is it possible for a Shari'a law, which forbids stepping on or tormenting an ant, to allow its followers to ignore the rights of human

beings? Never!. Yes, the leader of Muslims, Ali, may God be pleased with him, was equal to a simple Jew in the court. Similarly Salahaddin Ayyubi (Saladin) of whom you are proud [most of his audience were of Kurdish origin] was also equal to a poor Christian in the court. These examples, I assume, serve to correct your mistake ^[25].

On another occasion on the same trip, Nursi was asked about non-Muslims being in high positions in the Ottoman Empire as a result of constitutionalism. They asked, ‘Are non-Muslim Armenians now becoming governors or senior officials of a district?’ Nursi responded very realistically: “Just as they can be watchmen, mechanics or janitors. This is because in the constitutional government, the ruler is the people and the government is the servant of the people. If the system of constitutionalism is implemented correctly, the governors and senior officials will not manage the people, but will be paid servants of the people” ^[26].

Nursi identified this with hadith of the Prophet: ‘The masters of the people are the servants of the people’ ^[27].

In the above responses, it is evident that Nursi was very concerned about the application of justice to minorities—particularly Christians and Jews—under Islamic rule and this same concern is found in sayings of the Prophet when he emphasized the protection of minorities in Islamic society. Nursi presents this idea as part of his pietistic understanding of Islamic law and principles and so always promoted peaceful coexistence between Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and minority groups, including Christians of Greek and Armenian backgrounds. One can see this approach reiterated in the Damascus Sermon, and with more emphasis on the importance of Muslim–Christian relations in the revised version of the 1950s. He believed that world peace would be possible through cooperation between Islam and Christianity ^[28].

One can discern a steady development in Nursi’s thought with regard to Muslim–Christian relations. After the 1920s, with the new era of the dominance of worldwide philosophical materialism, he shifted his emphasis from issues of equality to cooperation between Muslims and Christians against this materialistic philosophy. The new spirituality-oriented Nursi asked his students to cooperate with Christian spiritual leaders against the spread of irreligiosity. Nursi believed that cooperation would strengthen both religions. It is interesting that this cooperation was to be only against materialistic philosophy, not against any other religion or nationality. As mentioned above, he believed that Islam and Christianity, united, would lead to the establishment of world peace. In one of his letters to his students, Nursi advises as follows: “Missionaries, Christian spiritual leaders and Nurcus [a term used for Nursi’s students which means, ‘the followers of light’] must be careful. Sooner or later the northern movement [communism] will try to break down their alliance in order to defend itself against their joint storm. This movement may deceive some Muslims to join it by its false claims that it allows lay people more freedom, promotes the Islamic principle of Zakat, prohibits interest, and promises equality of wealth” ^[29].

In one of his major works, *Maktubat* (The Letters), Nursi elaborates on the symbolic meaning of the famous hadith of

the Prophet on the descent of Jesus, from an Islamic theological perspective. Without denying the general interpretation of traditionalist scholars, he speaks of the descent of Jesus as a symbol of Muslim–Christian cooperation. That is because in some versions of the hadith it is said that Jesus and the Mahdi, the Muslim messianic figure, would pray together in the same mosque. Nursi sees this as an indication of future Muslim–Christian cooperation and gives eschatological significance to this alliance because both figures are considered prominent end-time symbols in Islam. In one of his interpretations, he says, ‘A devoted Christian society, rightly deserving the title of Christian Muslims, will attempt to unite the two—Christianity and Islam’ ^[30].

With a distinct interpretation of the theological themes Nursi understands these sayings of the Prophet as using allegorical rather than literal language. This understanding is evident in his analysis of Europe. When he examines European civilization, he carefully distinguishes between its two aspects. On the one hand, Nursi praises the positive aspect of European civilization, which is inspired by the teaching of heavenly revelation. On the other, he criticizes what he calls the negative aspect of European civilization inspired by materialistic philosophy. He says, “Not to be misunderstood, Europe is two. One is inspired by the true religion of Jesus and has brought beneficial arts, justice, and truthfulness to the social life of humanity by following the sciences. In my critical address, I do not mean this Europe. My address is to the second Europe, which through the darkness of naturalistic philosophy, thinking of the evil aspects of civilization as good, has led humanity to indulgence and astray. My address is to this corrupt Europe” ^[31].

In this long address, he criticized this particular Europe for lacking a sense of spirituality, focusing on the materialistic aspect of life, and claiming that people will be happier through materialism. Responding to this claim, Nursi expressed his confidence that human happiness is not possible without a spiritual life. Here, like many devout Christians, Nursi also criticized the materialistic characteristics of Western civilization. Nursi’s criticism of Western materialistic civilization could be heard nearly 70 years ago when he asked, ‘Is it possible for someone whose body is in paradise and whose spirit is in hell to be happy?’ ^[32] By this Nursi was indicating that, through the entertainment industry, Western civilization puts peoples’ bodies in paradise like conditions while their spirit is tormented in hell-like situations.

Although he was critical of Western civilization, he was hopeful that Europe and America would cooperate with the world of Islam in the future. He quoted the opinions on Islam of many prominent Western figures, such as Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881) and Otto von Bismarck (d. 1898). Furthermore, in his commentary on the Qur’an, *Isarat al-I’jaz*, he quoted statements by 40 American and European intellectuals who praised Islam ^[33]. He found that these intellectuals inspired hope for positive relations between Muslims and Christians. In referring to them, Nursi said that, since the intellectual environment of America and Europe had allowed for the emergence of truthful personalities, such as Carlyle and Bismarck, he was confident that in the future there would be more positive attitudes towards Islam in America and Europe, as well as more such personalities ^[34].

Nursi, thus, saw the relationship of Muslims and Christians from much larger spectrum for he saw it in tandem with the Europe-America-Islam relationship. He would, as such, frequently encourage his students to promote dialogue with Christians. The students thus inspired played a very important role to disseminate the message of Nursi. Prominent among them being Fathullah Gulen, who furthered the cause of Muslim-Christian cooperation. Furthermore, few years back two ministers of religious affairs in Turkey, Mehmat Nuri Yilmaz and Ali Bardakoglu, have met with two popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, to promote Muslim-Christian relations. Thus, the inclination to develop such relations is very alive in the Turkish-Islamic context. Post 9/11, to strengthen the relationship between Muslims and Christians is far more urgent and need of the hour. The survival of the humanity in the 21st century will depend on the closer cooperation between Muslims and Christianity, as advocated by S Nursi, for the lasting peace in the world.

Reference

1. Al-Qur'an, 49:13.
2. Al-Qur'an, 4:1. Also consider the verse: We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about. (Al-Qur'an, 5:48).
3. It is believed that Nursi intended to write 60-volume commentary on the Qur'an, but the war (World War I) prevented him from doing so. Pertinently Nursi wrote this commentary during the war, while Turkey was in alliance with a Christian nation, Germany, against another Christian nation, Russia.
4. Nursi. *Isarat al-I'jaz*, 2002, 1175.
5. Ibid.
6. Al-Qur'an, 16:125. It is worth noting that the recent letter from 38 Muslim scholars to the Pope, entitled 'Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict, begins with this qur'anic verse to indicate that the relationship between Muslims and Christians, even when they are engaged in debate, should always be somehow beautiful, 16.
7. Al-Qur'an, 4:171.
8. Ayoub M. Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Goals and Obstacles, *Muslim World* Of course, not everyone subscribes to this view. 2004; 94:313-319.
9. Al-Qur'an, 5:51.
10. Ifriqi MIM. *Lisan al- Arab* Beirut: Dar Sadr. 1986; 15:405.
11. Nursi. *Munazarat* (Istanbul), 1996, 70.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Al-Qur'an, 5:82-83.
16. Al-Qur'an, 3:64.
17. Al-Qur'an, 29:46.
18. Al-Qur'an, 5:82-83.
19. The speech was addressed to a group of scholars and worshippers as a Friday sermon at the magnificent Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. This mosque is significant in the Islamic tradition because many Muslims believe that Jesus will descend to it at his second coming, and because it contains the tombs of John the Baptist and Saladin.
20. Nursi. *The Damascus Sermon*. New Delhi: Barla Publications, 2010, 28-29.
21. Ibid, 55-56.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. For details see his work *Munazarat*.
25. *Munazarat*, op cit.
26. Ibid, 1945.
27. Ibid, 1944.
28. Nursi, 2010, 30.
29. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 2002; 441: 371-373.
30. Ibid.
31. Thomas Michel. *Insights from the Risale-I Nur*. New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2014, 14-16.
32. Ibid.
33. For details see Nursi, *Risale-i Nur*.
34. Thomas Michel, op. cit.