The Place of the Concept of Civil Disobedience in Gaining an Understanding of the Democratic State

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INTRODUCTION

Siyasa (politics) is an Arabic word derived from a root meaning the training or management of horses. The word sa‘is, meaning a groom or driver of horses and used colloquially, is related to it. Generally speaking, politics refers to the government of a country and the management of its affairs. The term ‘politika’ is derived from Greek. As defined in Aristotle’s work Politika, it is used in reference to the affairs of the city-state. Politics means the art or science of government, while polity (politeia) means an organized state, constitution, or republic.¹

In its present-day meaning, political science as used by William Godwin and J. Bentham studies the questions of state and political process. What is meant by ‘questions’ is investigating the state, its organs, political forces, and the establishment and functioning of power. To put it another way, it is the clarifying of the political system and structure. This is the positive side of politics.

The political process also has a normative side, which investigates ‘what aught to be.’ Here, it studies value judgements. It investigates the ideal, what aught to be. This is political philosophy, and studies how the state and lawful authority, the subject of politics, should be. It analyses the past and present of politics, in one sense the question of sharing, and develops ideas about the ideal. The starting point here is always the topical, for turning to the past is necessary in solving topical or new problems.
In this context, I think democracy is the chief problem of current political philosophy. And the democracy issue can be dealt with in respect of the joint concept of civil society-state on the factual level, and the ideas of freedom and equality on the ideal level. This in turn requires the study of ethics. What is meant by this is the ethical bases of political philosophy being seen in the context of the philosophy of law.  

It is because of this that sound political science cannot be developed without knowing the philosophical explanations of the great thinkers or philosophers about the phenomenon of politics, and their value judgements, and descriptions of political concepts and institutions. Knowing the philosophers’ perspectives does not mean accepting their interpretations exactly, for according to the philosophy of history, the past never repeats itself exactly. So if one aims by reinterpreting the knowledge/system of the past to put forward an authentic and specific approach, a philosophy/point of view being eclectic does not prevent it being original. If we state this from Said Nursi’s point of view, whose ideas we are going to study, every era has its prevailing ideas and some of these may be abrogated, what is important is to be able to makes new interpretations. His slogan expressing this was “Eski hal muhal; ya yeni hal veya izmihlal (It is impossible to revert to the old situation; it’s either the new, or we’re finished).”

There is no repetition in the universe that does not contain something new; what is important is to see that the opposition between what is repeated/the general/what is similar, and what is particular are two dimensions of the same problem. So long as we cannot include the general, repeated matter in the particular, personal dimensions, it will be impossible for us to make any meaningful and pertinent interpretations of our experiences. We know perfectly well that the new will come from within, not from imitation.

2. Why Said Nursi?

Moving on from the above, I shall attempt to investigate the place of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s (1873-1960) thought in the establishment of the idea of the civil, democratic state, for his thought matured during the process of Ottoman modernization and secularization. He accepted the legitimacy of both the constitutional government at the end of the Ottoman period, and the republican government set up on the foundation of the Republic, but in both periods he provided an example of passive opposition in the face of oppression and injustice. I shall therefore study the place in the process of democratization of this passive opposition, which particularly in the single party period of the Republic when no official opposition was recognized, rejected violent or direct action (as individual and social reactions).
I shall attempt to pinpoint the Islamic framework/environment he created basing it on the Qur’an and Sunna, and the place of this in the process of democratization. The reason I am focussing on a person and community whose religious dimensions are preponderant is that generally Muslims continue to base their political identities and political loyalties on language and roots, and their religious community identities, rather than the countries they live in.\(^5\)

Similarly, Nursi looked more favourably on a parliamentary system adapted to Islam, and in this context was promising a re-democratization. He looked on the republican government as an Islamic government which had adopted a number of civil laws, as required by the times, and which disallowed irreligious movements that would be detrimental to the country and nation. What was important from his point of view was whether or not the government gave preference to good over bad.\(^6\)

In the light of what he told Eskişehir Criminal Court in 1935 about “the Republic,” we can say this: he took the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs as his model and since his early life had been “a religious republican.” The chief attributes of republicanism were justice, consultation, and the supremacy of the law.\(^7\)

He defined the Republican Government as one that separated matters of religion from those of the state, and did not interfere with religiously minded people the same as it did not interfere with those without religion, which is important in so far as it shows his position vis-à-vis secularism.\(^8\) He asserted that his movement was a movement for the revitalization of Islam that did not engage in any actions against the secular laws of the state. For paradoxically in the final analysis the secularizing reforms rendered religion more ‘Islamic.’

What I mean by this is that Islam ceased being something that was lived but not questioned. A base was therefore necessary so that this new understanding of religion could be constituted within its own limits. That is, by referring it to the private sphere, it became the focal point of life and gained new strength. It was probably because of this that after 1925 he never spoke of the Caliphate, a central institution, and thought it should be combined with the collective personality of representative institutions.\(^9\)

Basically, this promise indicates the different readings in Islam’s different cultural universes; or more correctly, that the same world-view and network of similar understandings may pave the way for different arrangements in different geographical and cultural areas.\(^10\) The technical name for this is ‘renewal’ (tajdid). Said Nursi was one of those rare persons who can effect renewal on the social, political and religious planes. For he was someone who devoted himself to the nation, religion, and state. Nevertheless, he considered it difficult for one person to bring about renewal in these three important areas. He states, however, that at the end of time, the Mah-
Di and his collective personality, who represent the luminous community of the Prophet’s Family, could achieve these three matters. He says too that the *Risale-i Nur* is this community.¹¹

Said Nursi was knowledgeable about both the classical Islamic sciences and the modern scientific mentality (positivism).¹² In his view, Western civilization, which some people wanted to adopt, was based on five unacceptable (negative) foundations. So precautions had to be taken, individually and as a society.¹³ He combined in himself theory and practice,¹⁴ and dedicated his life to seeking solutions by various means all directed towards the same aim, for the problems that arose in different situations.

His aim here was for Islam to again be the determining force. He was the charismatic leader of a new faith movement who put up a fight with his own conceptualizations rather than rejecting apologetically the impersonal and faceless efforts at westernization, presented as ‘modernization,’ of the ‘National Leader’ period in particular.¹⁵

Thus, as a thinker who lived in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and the various stages of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the attitudes Bediuzzaman assumed and ideas he put forward while the status of ‘citizen’ was in the process of being won over that of ‘subject’ have great importance. Because, as someone familiar with the terminology of 19th century liberalism, in the face of the state, which comprised the legislative, executive, and judicial powers and was established on the thesis of the supremacy of the law, he strove to devise an open social project (a civil society/the *Risale-i Nur* community) that sought greater autonomy and freedom, took everyone into consideration, and disdained violence.¹⁶ For freedom and liberty cannot be limited by arbitrary laws. The law should be used only for justice and punishment; so long as no crime is committed, everyone’s rights are protected, and everyone is free within the bounds of the lawful. The law is always necessary; if through ignorance a nation does not apply its laws, even a patriotic government will be oppressive.¹⁷

Having developed according to a different social model, the struggle in the Ottoman Empire focussed on the community-state axis, which to an extent explains this endeavour. For when this dynamic focus, which Mardin calls “the spring of society,” is understood, it assists in illuminating many misunderstandings.¹⁸ In other words, Nursi and his works performed the function of protest/reaction against the predominance in social relations of 19th century positivism and materialism, and the abandonment of Islamic values.¹⁹

This reaction was the natural result of the view that social change would be possible only through transforming individuals whose religious belief was internalized.
The change experienced by the individual would be extended to the family and state. Individual transformation of this sort was the precondition of delivering the social and political life of the country and people from the dangers of anarchy.

Even in the Constitutional Period Nursi described the nation (millet) as the dominant element and said that the state existed for it (family-society). The government was in the position of servant. What rendered this possible in the Ottoman period was the distinction between public law (örf-i sultan/hikmet-i hüküm) and personal law (Shari'a), if only partially. And although the trade guilds, village associations, and nomadic tribal organizations were under local administration, they performed the function, to an extent, of independent bodies. As institutions which performed numerous services that may be thought of as public services, (such as the building of bridges, roads, irrigation canals, and hospitals, and helping the poor) charitable foundations (vakıf) in particular performed the function of civil society units in the position of mediator.

3. The Limits of This Study

The rediscovery of religion in Turkey, contemporaneous with the rest of the world, is a question that deserves study. Mardin in particular has sought to study the multidimensional character of the religious structure since the 1950s. The Risale-i Nur movement (Nurculuk), which at one time he belittled since he saw it as an elite popular movement in popular culture, removed from the upper classes, he subsequently studied in an independent work that emphasized the academic and elitist dimension it had acquired. This increases the importance of the above point. Moreover, events in Turkey since 28th February 1997 have expedited studies on the multidimensional character of Islam.

What is aimed here is a political analysis of culture. But I am aware that to do this will reveal only one dimension of the problem. For with all its concreteness there is a socio-political life outside the texts that will be studied. So to analyze the political phenomenon, it is not enough to look at the texts alone; one has also to investigate the individual and group responses to the texts in real life. The works entitled Barla Lahikası, Kastamonu Lahikası, and Emirdağ Lahikası are important in this respect.

To put it another way, the change from “methodical individualism” to “collective representation” should be investigated. The question of whether or not this “collective representation” is an open structure is very important from the point of view of the civil society example. For numerous court cases were opened against Said Nursi, his students, and his works for the crime of founding a secret organization/society. This accusation shows the need to stress the difference between a community and a society. Following F. Tonnies, we may define a ‘community’ as a unit that
retains its unity despite containing divisive elements, while a ‘society’ is a divided entity despite all its unifying factors. Since love, loyalty, pride, and friendship are characteristic of the community, there are within it close relations, deep emotionalism, moral compliance, social togetherness, and continuity.\(^{32}\)

Indeed, if the *Risale-i Nur* movement wants to be a community as its leader said, it can participate in the democratization process as a formation that preserves individualism and is open to all sorts of constructive criticism. Otherwise it will be defined as a rigid hierarchical structure governed by one person, as in the tariqats and societies/organizations, and face the danger of individual personalities and identities being eliminated. This means the community is transformed into a society. I shall follow Şerif Mardin in the question of whether or not the community has turned into a society, and investigate it taking note of those dimensions that undergo continuous change.\(^{33}\)

An important point is that in none of the stages he underwent personally, did Said Nursi adopt an aggressive stance towards the universalization of Western knowledge and science that occurred when non-Western societies began to be influenced by international politics and capitalist Western modernization.\(^{34}\) Rather, by revitalizing Islam through rational ethics, he practised a sort of political psychology that studies how the dominant-official state ideologies (centralized bureaucracies, organized complexes) were reflected on the individual’s psychology and how they affected it, and whether or not they were destructive.\(^{35}\)

Besides official ideologies, it is necessary to keep in view the individual psychology in ‘special’ ideologies (such as the Naqshbandi, Qadiri, and Ishraqi orders, the reform movements following Afghani and ‘Abduh, and the Sanusis), which were influential on Nursi’s life.\(^{36}\) As he himself said, there were three Said’s. These may be observed in the context of political psychology in the texts he wrote.

In the period he called “the Old Said,” up to 1921, Said Nursi played a part in social life and served religion and his country by means of politics. 1918 to 1921 was an intermediate stage during which he was a member of the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-Islamiye, and constantly questioning himself, there were significant changes in his ideas. He discarded his political ties, and started to work on the popular level, for which reason, from 1923 to 1949 during the single party era, he wrote the works known as the *Risale-i Nur*. The reason he aimed at the masses was that since most of them cannot themselves discover reality, he thought he should present them with the Qur’an’s truths.\(^{37}\)

The ten-point manifesto he delivered to the newly opened National Assembly in this period, that of the New Said, was important in that it demonstrated the breakdown in Islamic values. He refused the official posts offered him and as a follower
of the truth, dedicated himself to learning and teaching. His withdrawal into solitude and preoccupation with teaching and writing did not mean he had withdrawn from social life. Indeed, he was arrested and imprisoned on numerous occasions during this period, and made important defence speeches in the courts. Despite his considerable influence in the east and the persecution he suffered, he did not join the Shaykh Said revolt.

The period focussed on in this study includes these years. Nursi’s activities in the final decades of the Ottoman era, known as the Old Said, and the Third Said, who symbolized his return to politics in the Democrat Party period, then his again withdrawing from politics, and what in my opinion is the period of the Fourth Said.

The main texts I shall consult are Tarihçe-i Hayat [Nursi’s ‘official’ biography], Barla, Kastamonu and Emirdağ Lahikalari [collections of letters], and Nursi’s court defences, Müdafaalar. The latter is particularly important because of its legal base. It both shows his relations with the government of the time, and documents that he too had to pay the penalty for having personal influence (if indeed he had any) and his efforts to prevent others from suffering injustice. These works are important also because, since they describe the teaching of religion and its message to the people of that time and later; they are documents of socio-political nature. In the appropriate places, the two volume İÇTİMAYI RECETELER, which consists of various articles analyzing West and East, will also be consulted.

The point I want to make here is this: these works are in the final analysis the official documents of the Risale-i Nur community. I am trying to understand from the opponents’ history a formation that has suffered much repression from government authorities, who are the state’s executive, for opposition to the official discourse. This in one sense is natural, for the impasses of official history can be understood only from the historical writings of its opponents. This is really something all governments or official discourses should do. I am doing this personally as part of a project aimed at understanding the present and building an open society. But the speeches delivered by opponents in courts of law in particular should be compared with the official state archives. There is the risk otherwise that oppositional history will be imprisoned within the official discourse.

It is necessary before studying the above works to look briefly at the concepts of the state and civil society.

I. The Concepts of the State and Civil Society

I think political conceptualizations of this sort were necessary in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic when the westernizing solutions and proposals that began with the Tanzimat as the state’s defensive reflex against imperialist Europe were being experimented with. Islam should be studied as a new
dimension in the three-sided relationship between state-society and the West. For
religion in Turkey performs the function of a mediator of action.41

Nilufer Göle expresses the importance of this question like this: “Left-wing and li-
beral ideology concerned itself with only the political and economic aspects of qu-
estions of the state and civil society, whereas right-wing ideology reflects the cultural
dimension of this relationship, and this was not studied.”42 This point is impor-
tant because in this context, as a part of general culture, political culture forms the
totality of beliefs, emotions, and values related to the political system, and plays a
role in the emergence and direction of political behaviour.43

Similarly, the Risale-i Nur movement began to acquire the most striking universalist
characteristics in Turkey after 1950, by following modernizing policies and displaying
an organic relationship with them.44 So much so that although its long-term goal was
to establish a social ethic and revitalize Islam as a world power, its short-term goal
was the easing of the community’s situation from the political point of view. The ap-
pointment of a deputy in the National Assembly to facilitate the printing and disse-
mination of the Risale-i Nur45 confirms this statement of Nilufer Göle.

To mention a matter that has received insufficient attention and will add to this pa-
per’s importance: we see on comparing the political languages of Islam and the
West that there are many shared aspects, some of which are historical. In which ca-
se, similar problems may give rise to similar solutions.46 What is important here is
that while recalling the axiom that there can be no viewpoint in the history of tho-
ught that is not eclectic,47 to note existent resemblances and differences and pro-
duce from different traditions something original.

1. The Concept of the State

The state is the largest of the political institutions. It is a social organization the aim
of which is to secure social order, justice, and the well-being of society; it is equip-
ped with a political organization (the government); and has a people who inherit a
particular territory (country). Since it is not possible for the masses/the people to
govern this social organization, they make over their right of representation to the
state. That is to say, political authority is constituted of people who have to be obe-
yed and who have been officially ratified by the people. So we can also say that au-
thority is a manner of influence or power, constituted suitably to the rules, beliefs,
and values of society. Thus, compliance with political authority is directly propor-
tional to belief in its rightness and correctness, in other words, its legitimacy. In short,
the idea of the state becomes defined when authority ceases to be personal and
becomes institutionalized.48 The state is a symbol of the political unification achieved
with representational democracy, whose distinguishing characteristic is its being
sovereign and independent, and which has three main functions.
Legislative: the defining of rights;

Judicial: the establishment of rights for each concrete situation;

Executive: the defence of rights in the face of violation of the law.\textsuperscript{49}

With its legislative, executive, and judicial organs, the state takes the precautions necessary to protect individuals, and thus society. Because its aim is to protect individuals by means of the law, a state governed by law does not only uphold it, it is also subject to the laws it makes. Those that govern are also obliged to comply with the law. For they do not have subjective rights over the state; as organs of the state, they exercise the powers invested in them by it.\textsuperscript{50}

It is because of this that the state is known as ‘a state governed by law’ (hukuk devleti). The law protects the governed against the state, ensuring security of law; this prevents it being a ‘police state.’ We may say therefore that the chief principles of a state governed by law are the legitimacy of the state authorities, those authorities being subject to the law, the independence of the judiciary, and the guaranteeing of fundamental rights.

At this point the question arises of relations between the state and the individual, who as a citizen wants the state to make laws for him and apply them justly and fairly. The question of being a citizen rather than a subject, even if in the final analysis paradoxically shows that it is still voluntary subjection. But the citizen is happy to be a voluntary subject; the difference is that he himself makes the laws according to which he will be governed. For this reason, the governed accepts the authority of those that govern, and feel respect for them.

\textbf{A. Relations Between the Individual and the State}

The necessity of there being rules and laws for people to live together, and of the laws being justly implemented, requires the existence of the organization called the state. The state is the institution of institutions organized to offer various services to the citizens.\textsuperscript{51} One of the elements constituting the state is the human element; that is, the people; the individuals making up the nation; the citizens.\textsuperscript{52}

The collectivity the citizens form, who are equal before the law, is called public opinion (kamuoyu). All the groups constituting the social classes benefit from the “public services” offered according to the state’s character, and have their share of responsibility. Thus, the public is defined within its relations with the private.\textsuperscript{53}

What distinguishes the state from other organizations is the individual (citizen)’s obligatory membership of it. The individual cannot decline to comply with its commands and responsibilities when he feels like it. What is important in this question, which we may call voluntary subjection, is that no group can decline to have itself governed in the name of a principle it respects, and not consent to the political authority.\textsuperscript{54}
Another point is the state having monopoly of punishing criminals. Individuals cannot solve their differences according to their own methods, and impose sanctions. There is a close relationship between the state and the individual and between the groups the individuals constitute. The reason for the state’s existence is to serve the people. Its function is to solve clashing interests in defined ways, and to try to remove the differences.

In this sense, politics is the management of relations between the state and citizens. If the government holding power acts in accordance with legal rules and observes the rights of individuals, it is called a state ruled by law (hukuk devleti). The individuals’ rights and liberties, and responsibilities are defined by laws and the constitution, and the state acts within the framework of the same laws. The question of what basic human rights are, which is important from the individual’s point of view, gains importance here. For the recognition and guarantee of basic rights and liberties are very important from the point of view of opposition. These rights are not only instrumental in the growth of opposition, they also influence its formation on the intellectual level.55

**B. The Individual’s Basic Human Rights**

The fundamental human rights the individual as a citizen awaits from the state are of three sorts:

1) Protective rights: personal immunity, protection of private life, the inviolability of the home, and rights such as freedom of settlement and travel, thought and belief, science and art, freedom of the press, of association, of expression, and to organize.

2) Volitional rights: the protection of the family, the right to work, to health, to learn, and to teach.

3) Participational rights: rights foreseeing participation in the use of political power, such as, citizenship, the right to elect and be elected, and enter public service.

**2. The Concept of Civil Society**

The word ‘civil’ in this conceptualization infers the rights and responsibilities that city life brought. Its opposite in this sense is not ‘military,’ but ‘uncivilized.’ According to Hegel’s definition, civil society is “the social unit founded on pure need,” and refers to all the social structures, institutions, and values unconnected to the state and family.56

People are obliged to organize in order to meet their needs and realize their aims. Or it would be truer to say, if new principles are required, or a new method of thought needs to be formulated, or a new religious, moral, or aesthetic current is desired, they have to be transformed into a series of organized activities in order to
acquire meaning culturally. Setting up organizations has great importance, for it is the only way that individuals can participate in political life, and defend their ideas and interests. Such organizations, which reinforce relations between the state and the people, are what we may call civil society organizations.

People set up organizations for themselves or enter already existing ones, and share their scales of values and goals. There are two elements in civil society, a concept that appeared with the birth of political science. In civil society, a) the course of life outside the state is guaranteed; b) economic activities are independent, even within national life. It may be noted that here civil society is looked on as a historical and social phenomenon rather than an abstract concept, and defined as a social totality (global society) formed of numerous groups that are interconnected but that do not interfere with each other.

The fact that state control is not the determining factor in social activities does not mean that civil society is ostracized by the state. It is not right to conceive of them as organically separate structures that grow or diminish in opposition to each other. The state and civil society are interdependent and inseparable structures that blend with each other in balanced fashion.

The distinction between the state and civil society is not organic, but methodological and legal. By means of this distinction and basing it on the principle of the separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, attempt is made to prevent despotism. In this sense, civil society is a definition linked to the way a society searches for rights, renews itself, and organizes itself.

This has to be achieved for there to be a democratic state governed by the law (hukuk devleti). Here, the citizen’s freedom to act cannot be limited by claiming “it is excessive;” everyone is equal before the law and everyone’s rights are guaranteed. The important point here is that, in the quest for rights or in order to achieve an aim, an authority, a division of labour, is necessary in organizing civil society. In this sense, authority means having the power to take decisions, take up a position in disagreements or misunderstandings, and also to implement decisions. In short, the existence of authority is the essence of social organization, both the state and civil society are necessary, and it is important that unwanted results/chaos do not arise in either of them. But this is not to say they are not above criticism or cannot do wrong, and are therefore infallible.

4. The Distinction Between the State and Civil Society

The distinction between civil society and the state is based on law and defines the necessary grounds for a liberal democracy. This is what aught to be. What ‘is’ however is the state’s having been transformed into an institution that is governed according to the interests of a particular group or class or classes. Unfortunately in Tur-
key this has resulted in a narrow usage of the concept of public space, and also a wrong one. Whereas the distinction between the public space in which the state is organized and that in which civil society is organized is very often eliminated. But in the face of political authority another area is necessary so that the individual liberties can be guaranteed. Civil society is an area in which the state does not interfere, and protected, can develop freely. For a truly open and free society to be formed, the problem emerges at this point of preventing one element of civil society coming to dominate other elements. At just this point civil disobedience investigates ways of third persons not infringing superior rights, and organizes various activities for this purpose. Thus, both a public space is perpetuated that the state cannot easily destroy, and no sector of society can dominate another, even by means of democracy.

The natural result of this is that unfortunately political parties, charitable foundations, associations, and civil society organizations like working communities/groups are not civil society organizations in the true meaning. For the state strenuously imposes its own mentality on them, frequently infringing the law. It is necessary therefore to consider the concepts of opposition and civil disobedience as a code of conduct in the process of building a liberal and democratic society in which individuals and the state can establish healthy relations and all transgressions of the law can be eliminated.

II. Civil Disobedience as a Form of Opposition

1. The Relationship Between Political Power and Opposition

In a political system, power arises from the consensus of the leader and the citizens who support him. The terms power (iktidar) and authority are synonymous. Power is a particular condition of the use of influence. When not following any accepted political model, the use by those in power of compelling measures is called ‘authority.’ Using its ‘authority,’ those in power bear down on their opponents either directly or indirectly, threatening to cause them severe loss. Their intention is to influence their opponents’ policies.

It is easier to command obedience when there is a religious injunction. For example, functional in this matter is the verse, “Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you.” (4:59) However, neither the authority of those governing, nor the responsibility of the governed to obey is absolute and unlimited. The starting-point of oppositional thought is when a state, attempting to fulfil political and social ideals, deviates from its stated aim. This provides the possibility of putting forward real political alternatives. It also tries to show that political power is not absolute.
It is important that the opposition should emphasize this question, for the government should be an influence (or power) conformable with the society’s beliefs and values. An organized opposition in this sense is vital for democratic government. What is intended here is the legality of an opposition in conformity with the constitutional system. The primary characteristic of democracy is that fundamental rights and freedoms are guaranteed and organized opposition is permitted under the name of ideological plurality. Complete, radical reforms, or partial reform of the political structure may be sought; that is, of the regime or socio-economic structure; that is, the system; so long as they are not sought by violent means. Opposition may be voiced by different groups, organized or otherwise, or by individuals, in legal, and sometimes illegal, ways.65

If the opposition engages in activities aimed at influencing the political authorities in order to achieve certain ideological goals or realize spiritual values,66 in addition to the Qur’anic verse mentioned above supporting authority, there are verses that foresee groups within the political and social system that undertake the duty of criticism, and summon others to good and restrain from evil; in other words, that undertake the duty of opposition. (Qur’an, 3:104)67

Thus, opposition is made by citizens who do not say “yes” to the wrongdoings of those in power; do not want to be reconciled with them, and who are not content with their administration. One form of this is to oppose the authorities passively. It means partial compliance with the authorities, but this definitely does not mean acceptance of them.68

We can describe the nature of opposition as “looking on debate and analysis of the political authorities’ actions as a social right.” This is a natural, human phenomenon. The philosophy of opposition is based on the acceptance of differences in views as a licit right.

Another important point is that those holding different views should organize themselves and act within the bounds of the law, and not waste their energies on internal bickering and divisive disputes. Thus, the opposition plays an important role in the formation of political culture and of political conduct, an inseparable part of it.

Here, we should not forget that political culture is a part of the general culture dominant in the social structure (of the general history, socio-economic life). The political culture, seen as the totality of beliefs, emotions, and values pertaining to the existent political system, also has some influence on how opposition will be conducted.

For example, if in society there is a conciliatory and tolerant political culture, the opposition will act moderately and co-operatively. But if concepts like the system,
the state, and authority are embedded in the political culture as symbolic of trustworthiness and respectability, it is very difficult for a radical opposition to emerge. At this point, the elements constituting political culture, (political beliefs, the criteria used in making judgements and emotional tendencies, and intellectual tradition) will play an influential role and emerge in a way that will either assist political participation, or hamper it, or assist in producing a certain type.69

If differences in views depart from the legal domain, they lead to illegality, dispute, and conflict. Conduct of this sort should be described with the concept of sedition (fitne) rather than that of opposition. For in the Qur’an, God mentions argument, debate, and intellectual struggle, but while saying that there is no single view that everyone accepts, forbids such opposition going so far as dividing the Umma. “And fall not into dispute, lest you lose heart and your power depart.”70

In short, there may be opposition to political actions opposed to religion. This is what makes it different to ‘sedition,’ used in the public political context. By rejecting something threatening the existence of society, opposition aims to assist in society regaining its health. But with sedition and rebellion, although their motive is said to be the diagnosis of a sickness in the body of society, because their method of treatment is not sound, they destroy social peace.71

A writer who has studied the types of opposition in the history of Islamic thought, Nevin A. Mustafa, classifies them as the school of rebellion and the school of patience.72 I think that according to this generally accepted classification, the patience/passive opposition school does not consist of those who put up with every sort of injustice and agree to wrong. I have discussed this matter in reference to Hasan Basri’s position in the formation of early Islamic society, and offered it to the public.73 Now I am attempting a similar study for the modern period.

2. Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience, also called, passive opposition, may be defined as “together with accepting the legitimacy of a system, an action performed fairly against injustices when legal means have been exhausted without having recourse to violence, that is, an action that has political and moral motivation, but which is contrary to the system’s laws, and is calculated and planned.”74

The words “attitude” or “stand” could be substituted for “action.” Civil disobedience emerged as a contemporary stand in a new type of legal and state system, and is a part of the civilization and culture in which it is realized, and of the ideology of fundamental human rights and liberties. It is also the protector and defender of the law.75
The chief matters distinguishing civil disobedience from other forms of opposition are these:

Being contrary to the system’s laws is a basic element of this type of action/attitude/stand. For there are times a judgement is legal, but not right. But it should be noted here that civil disobedience does not mean “ratifying” an underground organization that sets out to form a “collective” group which conceals people’s identities, is hierarchical and has regulations.

This matter necessitates the second main element, which is openness; that is, the action being performed openly and its consequences being reckonable. For although the aim is to remove injustice and wrong, certain points could lead to the destruction of educated manpower and increase unrest and instability in sections of society. These should be evaluated carefully. Moreover, political action such as this should have a sound basis in law and scholarship.

Another important element is the rejection of violence. For it is essential that no harm should come to sections outside of the authorities and those who oppose them. It also should not be forgotten that once the injustice is removed, they should again be able to co-operate. Protest should be made with the tongue of peace, not of violence.

In other words, the main aim is to dispel enmity rather than exacerbate it. And so, non-material resources like the conscience should be made functional and ways of persuasion sought, rather than eliminating opponents. For political authority cannot determine ethical principles, for which reason, when building a just and moral society an authority should be sought over and above human laws. Only in this way can the majority of society be called on and the message reach its goal. In this sense, it is a sort of call to the public conscience. In this context, civil disobedience may have a religious philosophy, but it does not have to. It may have natural law, or a religious legitimacy.76

Civil disobedience means opposition, not to the system as a whole, but to individual injustices. The rejection of attempts to cause change by meeting evil with evil and the use of force, also renders passive opposition different to such actions as rebellion, resistance, revolution, and revolt. However, I want to say that terms like rebellion, resistance, and anarchy were not used as the common stereotype reflecting entirely negative ideas in the form of movements whose intention was to cause chaos in society and spill blood. They did not find wide acceptance in society because they used force when they considered it necessary against political authorities they thought had illegally seized power (gosib), and because, since they had not systemized their ideas or made them consistent, they made matters worse, although their intention was to rectify them.77
If we neglect to note this matter, which I consider important, we shall inevitably evaluate most of the oppositional movements in the history of thought in the light of the stereotypes of the “status quo.” And this will achieve nothing more than writing a sort of official history. What I say is that violence is avoided in civil disobedience not because it is abominated, but because it reflects a particular attitude.\textsuperscript{78}

Another matter rendering passive resistance in this sense different to rebellion and anarchic actions is that those who take part in it do not have to share the same ideology. What is important is that they share the same views concerning what they are opposing or what they seek. In other words, on the intellectual level, partial disagreement is sufficient, rather than general consensus. The movement’s success is directly proportional to the ability of those with different tendencies to direct their efforts towards a shared goal. Another condition for success is there being no double standards or hypocrisy in the face of injustice.

Since civil disobedience is directed towards rectifying legal and political matters considered contrary to the public conscience, the judiciary has to be independent so that such actions can be conducted. For legal theories look on non-violent opposition to law and government actions as proper. This is based on the premise that obedience to the law is not absolute, but relative, and they deem possible the removal of possible wrongs. For this reason civil disobedience is seen as an important means of dispelling the danger of the legal system’s corruption.\textsuperscript{79}

\textbf{III. Said Nursi and Civil Disobedience}

As part of the secularization process, the Turkish Republic adopted the Latin alphabet and Swiss civil code. The Caliphate was abolished as Islam was disestablished as the religion of the state. The law unifying education was passed (tevhid-i tedrisat), thus eliminating the ‘ulama’s influence. With the breaking of the learned institution’s power and repression of the Sufi orders’ political opposition, who combatted the other reforms, the two pillars of religious power collapsed.\textsuperscript{80}

Said Nursi was not surprised by the Westernizing changes.\textsuperscript{81} It is from this point that his importance stems. He did not join the movements of political opposition that judged the reforms contrary to the fundamentals of religion, and he did not support those who did join them. Nevertheless, in order to analyze the approach to science and learning dominant in the new state, he learnt modern science, questioned its relation to religion, and tried to produce alternatives. Furthermore, he did this while conducting his struggle within the framework of legality, without going underground or embracing illegality. He also did it without accepting any official post.\textsuperscript{82} It is for this reason that I am making this study of his stand and position vis-à-vis the state.
I shall start the essay with a few examples from what is thought of as a sort of introduction to his life, and covers his activities in the first fifty years of his life directed at serving belief and the Qur’an. I shall then discuss the second part of his life, when he was compelled to reside in Barla in Isparta Province. In this way, in the context of the transitional period between the first and second Said’s, I shall also investigate the democratization process of a new state.

1. The First Said Period and Civil Disobedience

This should be seen as a fresh reading of a religious scholar’s attitude towards the present and current affairs and his interpretation of them. For example, as was mentioned previously, civil disobedience is a stand taken in the face of matters thought to be contrary to the public conscience and is the open intention to rectify them. When necessary, civil disobedience may also employ spiritual factors, in order to draw people together, rather than causing conflict and the dissolution of society.

Since his childhood, Said Nursi displayed an innate tendency to oppose injustice and oppression. Also, as necessitated by ‘commanding the good and restraining from evil,’ he resisted injustice on religious and ethical grounds. His principle while doing this was “the best trick is to be without trickery,” that is, always to be open and honest. It is because of this that I am studying Nursi’s attitudes and stand in questions related to civil disobedience.

1.1. Elements that influenced his personality and attitudes

Said Nursi’s personality was such that without hesitation he always spoke his mind to the leaders of society, such as the scholars, shaykhs, and tribal leaders, and was unable to abide injustice. His criterion was “if injustice or wrongdoing was directed towards his own person, he had the right to disregard it; but he had no right to forgive those who trampled the rights of others, for then he would be a partner in their wrongdoing.”

He had a nervous temperament, as was reflected in his attitudes and actions. If one adds to this his constant participation in debates on religious matters and winning them, it seems reasonable that he should always have had opponents and been sent into exile. He states that essentially this was the struggle to save belief and that obstacles were unimportant.

We said at the beginning that he was a charismatic leader of a faith movement. What is meant by this in the human sciences is this: it is believed that a person has extraordinary innate abilities which endow him with an authority different to other people. It is not important whether or not he actually possesses these abilities; the people are made to believe that he does through various means. Holders of power base their legitimacy on the extraordinary attributes ascribed to them by ot-
hers, and claim they are charged with carrying out great missions. According to Weber, such authorities/ways of discharging power emerge at times of social crisis, and in time are transformed either into traditional authority or legal-national authority.\textsuperscript{87}

This point has considerable importance in reference to the \textit{Risale-i Nur} leader and movement. Said Nursi said apropos of his position, that he was not a spiritual guide or master, but a “fellow-student.” He did not want others to await his prayers and saintly influence.\textsuperscript{88} On the other hand, in the appropriate places most of his works mention his mission and state that it was ratified in dreams by many religious figures. He attributed his being saved from eight instances of poisoning to the intervention of Gawth al-A’zam.\textsuperscript{89}

This needs special study, but here it should be said that the Naqshbandi Order had a strong influence on the formation of his political and cultural identity. For Nursi was influenced in the decisions he made in his life by Baha’uddin Naqshband’s view that in the final analysis political power distances a person from his Creator and allows him to exploit religion for political ends. This does not mean abandoning worldly relations; the Naqshi teaching is the opposite: to be aware of the divine presence while among the people, and to act in a way pleasing to God.\textsuperscript{90} For this reason, for if a person performs the obligatory acts of worship and avoids sin, and does not accept wrongdoing, all he does during the day including earning his livelihood will count as worship.

In addition, a person wants to be told his mistakes as soon as he commits them, and to be questioned and criticized. This is quite important, for it indicates that Nursi did not accept Naqshbandism in its institutionalized form, for in his view, the present is not the age of the ‘tariqat,’ it is the time of reality (hakikat). What is essential is to perform the obligatory and Sunna acts of worship and to avoid grievous sins. It is therefore more meritorious to save a person’s belief than to raise him to a rank of sainthood such as shaykhdom.\textsuperscript{91} Nevertheless, he stated openly the importance he attached to the Naqshi concept of ‘recolletion of death’ during his transition from the Old Said to the New Said, and also informed followers of the Sufi orders that the ideas of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani, Shah Naqshband, Imam Rabbani, Imam Ghazzali, Muhyi al-Din al-‘Arabi, and Mawlani Khalid are found in the \textit{Risale-i Nur}.\textsuperscript{92}

If one studies the functions and authority of the above-mentioned figures in the history of Islamic thought, it is seen that they followed Sufi teachings but led extremely active lives. \textit{This demonstrates that solitude and distance from politics, that is, an apolitical stance, can give rise to a political, that is, a transformatory, posture}.\textsuperscript{93} It should be added that wherever Nursi went, he immediately attracted followers and had good organizing abilities.\textsuperscript{94}
In regard to factors influencing his personality, 1892 was a turning point for Nursi. He learnt of the discourses about modernization in the Islamic world from students of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abduh. He learnt also of the Sanusi struggle in Africa against Italian imperialism and the function of religion in the founding in Libya of a modern nation-state, and how it operated.95

The primary model in the formation of his personality and identity, over and above all the others, was the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). For the Prophet appeared with a great cause, and displayed great worship, prayer, and belief, and showed the greatest patience, fortitude, and courage in disseminating it. He never displayed the slightest hesitation, anxiety, or fear; however powerful his opponents, and challenged the whole world although he was alone. The message he brought became the guide of hundreds of millions of people. It illuminated their hearts, purified and trained their souls, and through it they progressed materially and spiritually.96 This shows that his government was based not on repression, threats, and intimidation, but was an open society and open system.97

1. 2. The Source of the Problems and Their Solution

According to Said Nursi, the backwardness of Islam stemmed primarily from despotism, and then from the corruption of the inmates of the religious schools (medrese), secular schools (mekteb), and Sufi lodges (tekke), and generally speaking, he believed salvation could be achieved by applying the following: the union of hearts within the framework of the principles of religion, love of the nation and cooperation between its members, education, respect for man’s labour, and the giving up of all kinds of vice.98 He emphasized particularly the teaching of the religious sciences in the secular schools and the necessary modern physical sciences in the religious schools instead of outdated knowledge, and specialist religious scholars teaching in the Sufi lodges. It would be possible with the combining of these three matters to ensure progress and raise their standards.99

The main reason he constantly criticized the ‘ulama concerning this question was that he observed the crisis in religious studies and thought that the system had to be restructured. He therefore proposed firstly to Sultan ‘Abdülhamid and later to Sultan Mehmed Reşad the building of a university in which, within the secular Ottoman system, the religious and modern sciences would be taught. When he was invited to the National Assembly of the new state, he repeated the proposal. If we wanted to attain happiness and prosperity, we had to take science from modern civilization, acquaint the ‘ulama with it and teach it in the religious schools. He also received inspiration from Abduh’s university of al-Azhar.100

In my opinion, his calling his educational establishment the ‘Zehra’ shows the degree of this influence. For ‘zahra’ is the feminine form of ‘azhar’. That is the etymological
connection, also the feminine form suggests fertility; that is, the Medresetü’z-Zehra would combine religion and science, reason and heart, matter and meaning. For unity may be achieved through the combining of ideas, not through ignorance.\textsuperscript{101}

Another important aspect of the project is understood when one recalls ‘Abdülmahmid’s policies towards the religious scholars (’ulama), which consisted of neglect and rather than destroying their functionality directly, leaving it to time, and trying to pacify them.\textsuperscript{102} When considered from this point of view, the project was an attempt to expand the boundaries of those who had failed to become integrated in the Tanzimat’s secular system. That is to say, the plan for the Medresetü’z-Zehra may also be seen as a sort of protest against ‘Abdülmahmid’s policies towards the ‘ulama.’\textsuperscript{103}

1. 3. His Attitude Toward Social and Political Degeneration

The best example of Nurzı’s openly commanding the good and restraining from evil, and uniting hearts rather than aggravating enmities, was his dialogue with the chief of the Miran tribe. As stated above, when one adds to the solutions he offered for various problems the knowledge that is binding on the person alone, like dreams and inspiration (the approval of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani; Ghazzali’s recommendation; Sirhindi’s predictions), his confronting Mustafa Paşa, the Miran tribal chief, with his tyrannical collection of taxes, although it was under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman state, and his forcing him to accept it, was very significant.\textsuperscript{105} However, unfortunately Şerif Mardin described this as Quixotic.\textsuperscript{106} But Nurzı’s stand was the natural result of his looking on the Islamic principles of honesty and straightforwardness as the basis of social life, and his rejecting hypocrisy, flattery, and dissembling.\textsuperscript{107}

His attitude here may be corroborated with several other examples. When he heard that the Governor of Bitlis was holding in a drinking session with his officials, he immediately confronted them in person and said openly that such conduct was unacceptable in a country whose people were religiously minded. The Governor subsequently admitted his error.\textsuperscript{108}

As is well-known, no one in Anatolia would allow any piece of writing taken from the Qur’an to be put on the ground; they would immediately pick it up. It is a tradition at least a thousand years old, etched in everyone’s minds and hearts. But at one time, the attempt was made to degrade religion and everything to do with it. One day, Said Nursi saw gravestones with ‘Bismillah’ written on them placed on a sewer. A number of notable people were also present. Nursi intervened and very sternly condemned the action, and prevented it.\textsuperscript{109}

Another example illustrates his attitude when he was unable to do anything personally. In 1913, having been wrongly informed, the Governor of Bitlis tried to gather excessive taxes in the government’s name, but the people revolted and seized control of the town. The Ottoman army later retook it, and the violence escalated.
When Nursi realized that he could do nothing in unjust incidents such as this, he tried to do something by means of politics. Supposing that the Ottoman government would be able to prevent similar injustices he joined the secret service set up by the Young Turks in opposition. He had always been a supporter of freedom, and was influenced the Young Turks’ support for it. He assisted in the preparation of the Service’s calls for jihad (fatwa). He saw later that the Committee of Union and Progress had failed to integrate Islam into their ideology, so in keeping with his principle of never saying yes to wrong, he criticized them severely and unhesitatingly, pointing out their errors, severed his relations with them.\(^{110}\)

The problem emerges here of Nursi’s exploiting religion for politics. He was aware of this, and said that what he did was exploiting politics for religion, and that he preferred one truth of religion to a thousand political matters.\(^{111}\)

The best example of his avoiding rebellion and anarchic actions, but defending his ideas in even the most difficult of circumstances was the 31st March Incident.\(^{112}\) The revolt occurred in the Constitutional Period, instigated it is claimed by those wanting the application of the Shari’a, and was suppressed brutally. Nursi was tried by the court martial in full view of fifteen men of religion hanging on the gallows. When asked by Hurşid Paşa whether he too wanted the Shari’a, he replied: “If I had a thousand lives I would be ready to sacrifice all of them for one truth of the Shari’a, for it is the source of prosperity and happiness, pure justice and virtue. But not like those who revolted wanted it.”\(^{113}\) He thus stated that the Shari’a has no connection with despotism. As is clear, his objections were not directed towards the authorities and the system of government, he opposed wrong action, even if performed by the Sultan, that is, tyranny (zulm). This is why he declared openly as he quitted the court martial: “Long live Hell for all tyrants!” What was important was to have no part in the tyranny or wrongdoing, for which reason he considered dying oppressed in prison preferable to living as an oppressor.\(^{114}\)

2. The Period of the Second Said and Civil Disobedience

The Barla and Eskişehir Periods

The government was unhappy at Said Nursi’s emphasis on religion and sent him into exile in Burdur. The armed group he was with and the people and notables, did not want to hand him over to the gendarmes, but he prevented any incident erupting. For the struggle against opponents of the Qur’an and belief had to be carried out by persuasion and proof, not force. When he arrived at Burdur he starting preaching, and when complaints were made about this, he was sent to Barla, the transitional stage from the Old to the New Said’s.\(^{115}\)

Barla had been thought of as a place of exile, but in fact resembled a western model of Bitlis, which during the years he stayed here, 1925-1934, made it more pro-
He was charged with opposition to the regime, arrested, and sent to Eskişehir (1934-5). He lived a life, in his words, “wrongfully deprived of all civil and human rights, and the rights of life.”

He did not concern himself with politics at all during this period, and explained that this was not out of fear; or due to family and property ties, or the loss of family honour; his sole aim was to serve the Qur’an. He had been sent into exile so that he would withdraw into solitude and the people would not be drawn to him, but his work with the Qur’an attracted them even more.

Because of this, that is, because of his serving the Qur’an, he was accused of trying to acquire social standing for himself and a position of power outside that of the authorities, and he began to suffer repression and ill-treatment. This was legitimized by the idea that those who apply the law cannot be oppressors; on the contrary, those who refuse to comply with it are rebellious.

His reply to such accusations are a good example of civil disobedience. Because for such practices to be lawful, first of all those who lay down the laws have to obey them, and they have to be in conformity with the principles of human nature and conscience. They will not succeed if they are opposed to the innate disposition of things. Moreover, if the divine law in force in human nature is changed and the law of equality applied, this would be very difficult, but in the final analysis he would agree to it too. What is important is to support total justice and oppose tyranny and oppression. However, the treatment accorded him had no connection with the law and no one at all could approve it. Moreover, there was no legal basis for their applying to others what could not be applied to themselves.

Charged with opposing the regime, political reaction, and organizing a secret society, Nursi was sent to Eskişehir Prison together with 120 of his students. Notwithstanding the tortures he suffered here, he continued to offer guidance and a large number of the other inmates of the prison were reformed. In other words, all situations can be made functional, even turning prisons into reformatories, their true function, by a right, consistent, and positive method, together with great patience and endurance.

When the court sentenced him to eleven months, he rejected its contempt of the law and inconsistency saying that it was the penalty of a horse thief or kidnapper; and wanted either to be acquitted or given a 101 year sentence or the death penalty. For he was not guilty of the crime with which he had been charged. If he had been, the sentence should have been severe. For in law, people are considered innocent until proved guilty; to send someone to trial for murder because he is a potential murderer is one thing, and to try him for an actual case of murder is another.
The reply Nursi gave in court to the charge that his refusal to wear European style headgear inferred rejection of the reform laws is worth noting here. He pointed out the difference in law between rejecting a law and not applying it to oneself, and said that while the penalty for the former was execution, that of the latter was a warning or a small fine. He said he did not act in accordance with it because he lived alone in solitude so it did not apply to him, and that such laws are not applicable in private homes. The reason for this and most of the accusations made against him were political reaction and opposition to secularism, which shall now be discussed.

2. 1. Rejection of the Use of Secularism as a Quasi-religious Ideology

To define it in Nursi’s words, secularism means the state being impartial in the face of religion and irreligion, and the separation of the matters of religion from those of this world. The republican government had separated these, and was an institution that should interfere neither with religiously minded people nor with those without religion. Rather than discussing this generally, I want to concentrate on the problem arising from secularism being transformed into a religious ideology.

In the West, in the face of the Popes whose word was law, the kings were supposed to be only appliers of the law, but in the process called secularization they founded modern states and brought together the principle of political power and its application. A sacred function was thus added to the function of the law’s application; that is, secularism began to be used as a religious ideology. Basically, everything social is political, and everything political has a religious dimension. This latter dimension ranges from the simplest, concrete forms of belief to the most complex, abstract ones.

What is important is not the sacralization of secularism, but the secularization of religion. It must be because of this that in modern Turkey, religion was made a private matter. As with Durkheim, Ataturk thought that the modern state should be supported by “civic religion,” which was secondary or in a marginal position. But unforeseen circumstances arose. Also influenced by modernity, religion, which had been limited to the personal sphere, ceased being something lived but unquestioned, and gained a new vitality and power from the new self-questioning. In short, religion gave rise to opposition to the process of reducing religion to the sphere of private beliefs.

Explaining this matter to the court, Said Nursi pointed out that the problem had arisen from the officiousness of the Governor of Isparta and some officials, and he had been faced with the charges. For living alone, rather, in enforced residence, he had in no way exploited religion for political ends due to political reaction, and that even to think of it was contrary to serving religious belief. If he had wanted to, not
there but previously, he could have worked for the government, but as the New
Said he wanted to work for the hereafter.\textsuperscript{127}

He said that all his life was well-known, and what he lived on, and that even his ac-
cusers knew that he was not involved in Sufism. In his view, in reality the guilty we-
re the two-faced sycophants who muddied the waters, oppressed the innocent, and
accused others while they caused the country serious harm.\textsuperscript{128}

Nursi said that his being charged under Article 163 of the Criminal Code and tri-
ed for political reaction was one of the plots continuously hatched against him. The
simplest investigation would show that the works that were the object of the ac-
cusations were written before the Civil Code and the call to prayer in Turkish had
been introduced. It was clear there were legal irregularities and people were ex-
pecting to profit from them. He hoped in the name of justice that the Republic and
its institutions would not be exploited by them. The state was an arbitrator, so it
should distinguish between right and wrong, and punish those who were wrong.\textsuperscript{129}

The much debated questions of secularism and freedom of thought should now be
examined.

2. 2. The Republic, Secularism, and Freedom of Thought

The judgements in Eskişehir Court had nothing to do with the law, for in Nursi’s vi-
ew, the Republic forsees the practice of freedom in the widest sense.\textsuperscript{130} It is un-
thinkable that so long as they do not offend the public mind, the irrefutable ideas of
science should be repressed. For nowhere in the world is there a state system who-
se single official teachings/political thought is binding on all its people. It is therefo-
re natural that people should have different ideas and express them. The \textit{Risale-i Nur}
is an example of this, and discusses the highest part of religion, that of the tenets of
belief. Those who study them would never be involved in seditious activities. Moreo-
ver, the right for religion to be taught in official institutions and for persons to learn the-
ir religion cannot cancelled. Freedom of religion and conscience demands that teach-
ing of this sort is free. Nursi pointed out that there was no difference between
what he did and what the Head of the Department of Religious Affairs and the
‘imams’ did. He also had a certificate verifying his position as preacher and imam.\textsuperscript{131}

All these indicated that the charges had no base in law. There is also the legal and
sociological fact that secularism does not signify irreligion. There is no nation any-
where that has no religion, especially the Turks, who had been the standard-bearers
of Islam; it was impossible that they should have no religion. The problem arose not
from religion being exploited for politics, but certain European philosophers and ot-
her irreligious philosophers who were inspired by them exploiting politics for irre-
ligion, and using secularism ideologically in this sense. “The Republic that I know,” sa-
id Nursi, “is an Islamic government which has accepted a number of civil laws as de-
manded by the times, and would not allow irreligious currents to cause harm to the country and nation.”

2. 3. The Kastamonu, Denizli, and Afyon Periods

Said Nursi was sent to the province of Kastamonu after being discharged from Es-
kiyehir Prison. He spent eight years of oppression in enforced residence here
(1936-1943). Then, this seventy-year-old scholar was accused of organizing a secret
society, inciting the people against the government, and opposing the reforms, and
was sent for trial in Denizli Criminal Court together with 126 of his students. The-
ir sojourn in Denizli Prison was from 1943-1944.

The replies he made to the same charges began with a definition of the republic,
and the concepts of secularism and freedom of conscience. He described Article
163 as an “elastic” law that, used as a screen, could be manipulated this way and
that. The treatment meted out to himself and his friends could in no way be said
to conform to freedom of any sort (religious, scholarly, or of conscience); there was
nothing for it but to die or go to prison; all this showed that the law had ceased to
have any meaning as far as they were concerned. However, since religion was the
only power that governed the conscience, it cannot be dictated to by the law. Se-
rious crimes such as murder, adultery, theft, gambling, and drink, which cause the
most harm to society, cannot be prevented by putting people in prison. The Risale-
i Nur was a citadel defending against unbelief; it repulsed anarchy, repression, and
tyrranny. It was completely meaningless therefore that he himself and those who re-
ad it should suffer such ill-treatment and injustice.

Nursi was very pessimistic in respect of the law. For in his view, all the concepts had
been reversed. Absolute despotism was being called the Republic; apostacy, the re-
gime; and vice was being called civilization; and the judiciary and authorities were
being misled. Furthermore, no government has any basis other than the laws of
its judiciary, and they are applied equally everywhere. According to this, a murderer
has the right to defence even if he has killed a hundred people, and he can use it.
Nursi had undertaken to defend the truths of the Qur’an, which were free in the
country, against unbelief, but he had not been allowed this right. He pointed out
therefore that the law was not being applied equally. Despite all this repression
Said Nursi did not have recourse to violence and abided in patience, and he requ-
ested of his students that they preserved their unity and moderation. For positive
action had the effect of an atom bomb.

On being acquitted by Denizli Criminal Court, Nursi remained in Emirdağ till 1948,
when he was arrested a third time. This time he was tried by Afyon Court. Despi-
te his advancing years, he continued to be deprived of every kind of freedom by
the republican government, which claimed to provide all freedoms. He was senten-
ced to twenty months, and was poisoned in prison. Nevertheless, he warned his
students against seeking revenge, even if he were to die. He thus rejected violence
in all situations. He did not even curse those who wronged him, and called for re-
conciliation.\textsuperscript{138} It was also natural that since his guiding principle was not to cause
harm to the country or nation or to public security, he should have had no connec-
tion with any underground, secret organizations.\textsuperscript{139}

In Afyon Court he provided a perfect example of civil disobedience. As given abo-
ve, it may be defined as: “together with accepting the legitimacy of a system, an action
performed fairly against injustices when legal means have been exhausted without ha-
ving recourse to violence, that is, an action that has political and moral motivation, but
which is contrary to the system’s laws, and is calculated and planned.”

In Nursi’s view, it was natural for a system to have fierce opponents. As was deman-
ded by freedom of thought and conscience, on scholarly grounds some of the Ri-
sale-i Nur students might not accept the regime and its principles, and might oppo-
se it, they might even be hostile to its leader. But so long as they did not infringe
the system they could not be touched legally. Because it is one thing to reject somet-
thing, something else not to accept it, and something completely else not to act in accor-
dance with it. The government looks to actions, not to the heart.\textsuperscript{140}

Nursi pointed out too that there might be arbitrariness in the law at any time, or
someone in authority might make arbitrary decisions in the name of the law, but
no one was obliged to endorse such actions intellectually. No individual had to act
in accordance with them.\textsuperscript{141} The best example of this was the banning of the call
to prayer in Arabic. He replied following the above logic to charges of opposition
to the Turkish call to prayer, and said that he was a Shafi’i and Turkish was not his
mother-tongue, so it was not incumbent on him to follow a fatwa issued by a Ha-
nafi scholar. By putting it this way, he was pointing out that to say this and to not
recognize the fatwa were two different things.\textsuperscript{142}

The crucial point was not to interfere with government despite all the oppression and
not to be involved in any actions that would disturb public order: This question, which
was a legal sanction at that time, has no legality or validity today. In which case, one
should always keep in mind any possible arbitrariness in the laying down of laws.

\textbf{V. Obstacles Before Civil Society/Communities}

It emerges from the court cases and trials that none of those who conducted the
trials of Said Nursi and his works is known, but his followers continue to be active
in the civil society groups that serve religion and the state and nation by different
methods, with the intention of building an open society in Turkey. They describe
themselves as a group of believers who want to spread the truths of belief thro-
ugh the Risale-i Nur; they say they are not a Sufi order or society. \textit{For many go to Pa-
radise without belonging to a Sufi order, but none go there without belief.}\textsuperscript{143}
It is important to state the difference between a society/organization and a community/group. For Said Nursi himself said they were a community the aim of which is to first save themselves, and then society. In this way people would be saved from anarchy and aimlessness, and through the *Risale-i Nur*’s truths, as strong as steel, would be protected in the face of atheism, which destroys the life both of this world and the next. In other words, belonging to the Nur community was a privilege which reaps benefits materially, as well as saving the life of the hereafter through belief. This is normal from the point of view of civil society, for people may come together and undertake joint material and spiritual ventures. But if such a venture is fraught with risks and threatened by severe losses material and moral, one may re-examine claims that there is a civil society.

Another matter is that those who serve in civil societies in order to build an open society should preserve their identities, but if they are attacked personally, they should be able to withdraw immediately. However, the *Risale-i Nur* community has a powerful and worthy collective personality, which requires that physical, individual, and mortal personalities are not given importance. Moreover, another sort of introversion is experienced. If those who direct criticism at the community are religious scholars or pious believers, they should be met in friendly manner, but they are still met cautiously, for if such people enter the community circle, it is possible they will weaken the resolve of existent members and direct their attention away from the *Risale-i Nur*. And it is important that the community defends its collective personality.

There is one further point that needs to be explained. Although Nursi said that the present is not the time of the *tariqat*, but the time of ‘reality,’ it could be said that he foresaw a sort of Sufi order-like formation. Moreover, he said that the *Risale-i Nur* did not have only one circle, but levels like concentric circles (pillars, owners, devotees, publishers, students, and supporters). This infers the elimination of the pluralist structure that ensures the autonomy of the elements of civil society, the privacy that preserves their individuality. And once this is eliminated, it destroys the ‘publicness’ that maintains the responsibilities of the social elements towards each other. The natural result of this is that it puts an end to the legality ensuring a shared framework.

This and similar matters may be associated with the socio-political conditions of the single party era. But those who want to carry over to the present the message of this faith leader should take a new look at such questions as are open to criticism. For the above matters, which recall a secret cast system, are seen more often in the structures of Sufi orders or society/organizations, and are obstacles to civil groups/community, which are one of the chief elements of the open society.
In short, attention should be paid to the risk of turning the community into a secret society in the name of caution and precaution. That is to say, it should not be allowed to turn into an illegal hierarchical structure like a Sufi order or organization. This means a person putting the community and service of it first instead of his personality and identity, children, and spouse, in short, his family and work. Whereas a democratic, open society is formed of families consisting of persons of character who decide what is of prime importance for them.

Finally, at this stage it has to be said that although in truth the Risale-i Nur performed this function at one time, some groups seeing it as the sole source of truth and the cure for every ill, and completely disregarding all other sources of knowledge (books, newspapers, and television) has led to it turning inward. In my opinion that is the reason for it.

In reply to the question of why he had no book with him other than the Qur’an, Nursi replied that he had left aside all other books in order to understand the Qur’an. Because of this some people might think that since the Risale-i Nur is the representative of the Qur’an’s truths, they have no need of other books.

This deduction is actually to claim a sort of monopoly of the truth, about which Said Nursi complained. It is a contradiction to claim such a monopoly on the basis of the works of a leader who criticized such a thing, or else it means they have remained within the positivist discourse, which he also criticized. Nevertheless, some sub-groups of the Nur community persist in their claims to having a monopoly of the truth.

Whereas, if Said Nursi’s life and works are studied keeping in mind the tie between his ideas and events, it is seen that in the period of the Old Said, he devised a project for a return to the Qur’an. Those who lived physically in the 13th century (of the Hijra) but mentally had remained in the middle ages, due to bigotry or blind imitation, or ignorance, or pessimism resulting from the disorder, immorality, and intellectual stagnation of society, or from oppression, imagined that there was a clash and contradiction between some of the findings of modern science and some matters of Islam. Whereas “Islam is the master and guide of the science, and the master of true knowledge.”

Nevertheless, instead of referring directly to the Qur’an in matters pertaining to the essentials of religion, other books were given preference. While the books on the Shari’a should have shown the Qur’an transparently like glass, because of the errors of the blind imitators, they became tarnished and concealed it. These books had therefore to be made clear and sharp so as to show the Qur’an. Every era has its own dominant idea, and these are sometimes displaced by others. So with the First War, his project for returning to the Qur’an, which may be characterized...
by his slogan, “to return to former times is impossible; it’s either the new, or we’re finished,” was left half-done. Later the new state’s policies towards religion in general and towards himself and his students in particular, drove people to be cautious about carrying books on religion. It might have been because of this that he wanted people to read only the Qur’an and its commentary, the *Risale-i Nur*.

When considered in the light of the conditions of the time and place, this may be seen as natural. But one point worries me; I want to draw attention to some things said by way of criticism. Those that say “religion is not restricted to Said’s method,” can be interpreted as “being used by an academic who was speaking on behalf of atheism and anarchy, and who was hostile to the Nur community, and wanted to discourage its members and if possible make them give it up.” I want to recall that Nursi himself said that what he said should not be accepted without first striking it on the touchstone.

Furthermore, the danger of the charismatic authority mentioned above, who emerges in times of social crisis, being turned by his followers into traditional authority, even if he himself does not want it, became reality, and he started to be seen as an infallible guide. But what is important here is democracy being transformed from the inside. For this reason, it is as important to define their approach to human rights and pluralism, as much as to consultation. This will give shape to a mature political culture through the mutual interpretation of democracy’s discourse on rights and religion’s discourse on responsibilities and duties. Here, since it is a question of an epistemological pluralism founded on the idea of fallibility, within the time this is achieved, democracy will emerge as an ideal form of government.

Yet another problem emerges here: is a rational social ethic conformable with the total identity of the project to revitalize Islam? It seems that a positive answer may be given to this question from the *Risale-i Nur*’s point of view. Whereas in civil society all ideologies that claim totality and dominance should be rejected. This is not only the indispensible condition for everyone accepting democracy as “good,” it is also the limit of the state in the face of civil society, and the limit of the mutual responsibilities of the groups within civil society. The clarification of this limit clarifies the democratic ethic, and its indistinctness gives rise to despotism. For this reason, in actions of civil disobedience a religious philosophy may be important, and civil societies may be effective for natural law as well as religious legitimacy. These matters are very important in connection with the aim of “making politics the friend of religion, instead of exploiting religion for politics.”

If we are to give an example in the context of the *Risale-i Nur*, we may say, basing it on the concepts of freedom and equality, that Islam is not a total ideology. For freedom forsees everyone’s liberty within the bounds of the licit. It also prohibits
the intervention in the freedom of third persons. Because this definition of equality is based not on virtue and honour; but law, it makes it obligatory that non-Muslims are not ill-treated and left to live in peace. The best proof that all their rights are protected is that they can be appointed to the positions of governor and ‘kaymakam.’ In Nursi’s view, the Ottomans provided an excellent example with this practice. What is important here is government being correct, and officials serving the people by means of it. The pluralist political culture based on new interpretations inspired by these and similar points will indicate to citizens the manner and extent of their political participation. The importance of civil disobedience here lies in its performing the function of democracy’s motor.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, my proposal is that, keeping in mind this and similar contradictions, the position of these works should be reviewed vis-à-vis the contemporary understanding of knowledge and science, rather, vis-à-vis current paradigms, as Said Nursi did himself. This would be appropriate and consistent. Otherwise, the passive opposition type of legal struggle, which they conducted in the face of the unjust treatment they received in the single party era and which we too consider important, would cease to have any meaning. And the community that could form an example of civil society would turn into an official discourse/organization that rejects other conceptions of reality.

REFERENCES


3. For a discussion of the question of authenticity from the point of view of Islamic philosophy, see, Alparslan Açıkgenç, Bilgi Felsefesi (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1992), 91ff; Mehmet Bayrakdar, İslam Felsefesine Giriş (Ankara: 1988), 124ff; Majid Fakhri, İslam Felsefesi Tarihi [trans. K. Turhan] (İstanbul: İklim Yayınları, n.d.), 64.


5. See, Bernard Lewis, İslam’ın Siyasal Söylemi (orig. The Political Language of Islam) [trans. Ünsal Oskay] (İstanbul: 1997), 10. Since the Risale-i Nur proves the fundamentals of belief with numerous arguments and evidences, and defends them and saves them from doubt, at that time he said that it was like basic sustenance for everyone. See, Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası (İstanbul: Tenvir Neşriyat, n.d.), 13-14.


7. See, Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, Tarihe-i Hayatı (İstanbul: Tenvir Neşriyat, 1987), 38; Nursî, Müdafaalar (İstanbul: Tenvir Neşriyat, 1988), 229-230; Safa Mürsel, Bediüzzaman Said Nursî ve Devlet Felsefesi (İstanbul: Yeni Asya Yayınları, 1980), 278, 239.


See, Nursî, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 208. The idea of the Mahdi has become functional whenever and wherever in the Islamic world things have become chaotic. Using *jafr* and numerology, Said Nursî’s students found numerous indications that he was a regenerator of religion (*mujaddid*). This is a subject worth studying, as is the Mahdi teachings of the Sanusiyya. The Naqshi *mujaddid* Mawlana Khalid was born in 1193H and Nursî was born in 1293. The former began his work of renewal in 1224, the latter in 1324. They based this on the Hadith: “God will send someone to renew His religion at the start of every century.” See, Nursî, *Barla Lahikası*, 154-5; Emirdağ Lahikası (İstanbul: Tenvir Neşriyat, 1991), i, 218-19, 262.

Nursî, *Tarihçe*, 43-4; *Müdafaalar*, 45-8. For the claim that he was called Bediuzzaman because of his superior knowledge of the modern sciences, see, Nursî, *İçtimai Receteler*, i, 23. It should be noted that the bases of positivist philosophy were different to the principles underlying the Ottoman intellectuals’ views, but the pragmatism underlying western European science prepared the ground for a shared political and philosophical pragmatism. See, Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 39, 76, 80, 87, 136.

The West’s starting point is force, and due to it transgresses rights; its aim is to serve its interest; its principle in life is dialectic/conflict, and due to it always seeks to destroy its opponents; through negative nationalism and racialism it wants to swallow up others; its result is following the base lusts of the soul, which cast man down from the level of the angels to that of the animals. Nursî, *Tarihçe*, 131; *İçtimai Receteler*, i, 166.

This question is important because one of the reasons for our backwardness was that ignorant religious scholars treated their work as a means of livelihood. For this reason, Nursî did not accept even gifts in return for his teaching or services rendered, let alone a salary. Nursî, *Tarihçe*, 44, 54.

See, Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 12, 26-7, 227, 230; Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), 38, 103; Compare, Dabaşi, *İslam’da Otorse* [trans. S. E. Gündüz] (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1995), i ff.

In Nursî’s view, the present is the time of the community. See, Nursî, *Tarihçe*, 140. Compare, Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 8-9, 85, 136.


Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 165-6, 169, 218-9, 222-3, 229; Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji*, 90. The word ‘bireycilik’ here does not mean ‘individualism,’ but ‘personalism.’

In this context, what is important is security, the opposite of anarchy, the giving up of lawlessness, being friendly and kind to people, knowing what is licit and illicit, and avoiding the latter. See, Nursî, *Tarihçe*, 308-9, 530; *Müdafaalar*, 218; Emirdağ Lahikası, 28; Mürsel, 266.


Şerif Mardin suggests that this situation in Islam, which is multidimensional and has gained momentum since 1940, should be studied as soon as possible. In his view, the Islamic revival after 1940, was 1) the vic-
tory of secular intellectuals over obscurantist science; 2) the falling apart of the bureaucratic state and increase in anarchy; 3) a means of fundamentalist Sunni Muslims increasing Islam’s control over society; 4) a golden opportunity for officials of the Dept. of Religious Affairs to rectify conditions for Sunni Muslims countrywide; 5) a good development for local Sufi leaders and charismatic shaykhs, by which they could increase their influence and numbers of followers, who were generally inherited; 6) Shi’i Alevi looked on it as a threat to their religious identity. See, Mardin, Türkiye’den Din ve Siyaset: Makaleler II (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), 83.

27 Mardin, Din ve İdeoloji, 169.

28 For a similar evaluation, done years previously, see, Nursî, Tarihe 23.


30 See, Nursî, Emirdoğan Lahikası, 5ff.

31 For the court decisions, see, Nursî, Müdafaalar, 469ff.


33 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 7-8, 232.

34 Nursî, Tarihe 52. For his students’ attitude, see, Emirdoğan Lahikası, ii, 27-8, 35; Mardin, Türkiye’den Din ve Siyaset, 105; Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 140ff, 172-3, 228; Müşref, Devlet Felsefesi, 45, for capitalism, 257.


36 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 16.

37 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 163, 218, 221-2.

38 Nursî, Emirdoğan Lahikası, 10; Nursî, İctimai Receteler, ii, 38.

39 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 40, 48. The Justice Party and its leader looked favourable on the relationship between religion, the community, and politics. Perceived as a native of the village of İslamköy near Isparta he received the support of a large part of the Nur community. What lies at the bottom of this is that Said Nursî said that someone would appear from there and serve Islam. But this was not Demirel, but the great person called Hafiz Ali, who made many conquests with his “diamond pen” and died in Denizli Prison, thus sacrificing his life in the way of serving Islam. This matter shows how religion can be exploited for political ends. For Hafiz Ali’s place in the Nur community, see, Kastamonu Lahikası, 70, 103-4. For one of his letters to Bediuzzaman, see, Barla Lahikası, 111.


41 Mardin, Din ve İdeoloji, 38, 157.

42 In this sense, “Islamist ideology is tied to the emergence of the modernism that followed the western modernization period instigated by the state.” See, Nilüfer Göle, Mühendisler ve İdeoloji: Öncü Devrimcilerden Yeni İlişki Seçkilere (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1986), 15.

43 Nükhet Turgut, Siyasaal Muhalifet (Ankara: 1984), 92; Ahmed N. Yüce’türk, Siyasetin Toplumsal Tabanı (Ankara: 1987), 13. For a discussion of this from the point of view of Islam and Turkey, see, Mardin, Din ve İdeoloji, 58.

45 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 24-5.

46 Lewis, İslam’in Siyaset Söylemi, 15, 137.


50 Kapani, Política Bilimine Giriş, 23.

51 Kapani, Política Bilimine Giriş, 23.
For definitions of the concept of ‘people,’ see, Giovanni Saittori, *Demokrasi Teorisine Geri Dönüş* [trans. T. Kar

Sanbay & Öğün, *Bir Politikbilim Perspektifi,* 43.


Turgut, *Siyasal Muahalefet,* 37.

Mardin, *Türkiye’de Toplum ve Siyaset,* 91.3; Sanbay & Öğün, *Bir Politikbilim Perspektifi,* 63-4.

See, Bronislaw Malinowski, *İnsan ve Kültür* [trans. M. Fatih Gümüş] (İstanbul: 1990), 41, 45.


Cemal Bali Akal, *Sivil Toplumun Tanrısı* (İstanbul: 1990), 29-30.

Malinowski, *İnsan ve Kültür,* 53-60. For power types and an evaluation from the point of view of the Islamic world, see, Abdullah Laroui, *İslam ve Modernlik* [trans. Ayşegül Yaraman] (İstanbul: 1993), 21-4. For a com-

Akal, *Sivil Toplumun Tanrısı,* 23, 34ff.


Duverger, *Siyaset Soşyolojisi,* 190-1.


Turgut, *Siyasal Muahalefet,* 6, 11-12, 38, 41.


Qur’an, 8:96. The concepts of *tanazu,* *shajar,* and *jadal* (dispute, argument) in the Qur’an may also be con-
sulted.


Nevin A. Mustafa, *İslam Düşüncesinde Muahalefet* (İstanbul: Seba Yayıncılık, 1999), 52, 119, 183.


For a conceptualization of this term and its elements, see, Yakup Coşar (ed.), *Kamu Vcidanına Çağın: Sivil İta-
gin Habermas, *Sivil İtaatsızlık* [trans. Hayreddin Öğesiz] (İstanbul: Afa Yayınları, 1995) (in the preface to this book, Öğesiz makes a sort of summary of the above thesis); C. Hakan Arslan & Fatma Ünsal (eds.), *Sivil İtaatsız-

Öğesiz, *Sivil İtaatsızlık,* 12.

See, Uyanık, *İslam Sıyası Felsefesiinde Sivil İtaatsızlık: Hasan el-Basri Örneği.*

Just as successful revolts were looked on as an easing of circumstances and release (inshir ah), rather than as dis


See, Arslan & Ünsal (eds.), *Sivil İtaatsızlık ve Pasif Direniş,* 111-4; Coşar (ed.), *Kamu Vcidanına Çağın: Sivil İtaat-
sızlık,* 16.

Mardin, *Türkiye’de Din ve Sıyası,* 121-3; Mürsel, *Devlet Felsefesi,* 236, 328ff.

He had predicted that the new state would resemble a child born of the Ottoman state’s union with Eu-
rope. See, Nursi, *Tarihçe,* 91.

Nursi, *Tarihçe,* 396.

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84 Nursî, Tarihçe, 31ff; Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası, 28.
85 See, Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, 9, 67.
86 Nursî, Tarihçe, 13, 255; Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 67-74, 80.
87 Weber, Economy and Society (n.p., 1978), 241ff; Dabaşi, İslâm’da Otonite, 36, 65. For a Weberian reading of the political, economic, and legal relations of Islamic society, see, Turner; Weber ve İslam.
88 Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası, 86.
89 Nursî, Ermişdağ Lahikası, 33; Barla Lahikası, 136; Kastamonu Lahikası, 177. However, in another place in Kastamonu Lahikası, page 80, he says that ‘wonder-working’ is necessary for those whose belief is imitative and have not attained certain, verified belief. The number of times he was poisoned rose to 19 (Ermişdağ Lahikası, 182).
90 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 55, 226.
91 Nursî, Tarihçe, 196, 282; Kastamonu Lahikası, 81; Ermişdağ Lahikası, 234.
92 Nursî, Barla Lahikası, 136, 154-5; Kastamonu Lahikası, 50.
93 Basing it on the principle that an hour’s reflective thought may sometimes be as meritorious as a year’s worship, to ponder over questions of belief may be the means of saving both oneself and others. (Tarihçe, 276)
94 Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 25.
95 Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 19; Tarihçe, 51, 55.
96 Nursî, Tarihçe, 346-7; Ermişdağ Lahikası, 90.
97 Mürsel, Devlet Felsefesi, 340. For the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) charismatic authority, see, Dabaşi, İslâm’da Otonite, 11, 36-40.
98 Nursî, Tarihçe, 51, 55; İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 83.
99 Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 70.
100 Nursî, Tarihçe, 45, 68, 110; Ermişdağ Lahikası, ii, 163-4, 237; İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 24.
101 Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, ii, 73.
102 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 111-2, 124.
103 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 63-4.
104 Nursî, Barla Lahikası, 136; Kastamonu Lahikası, 177. The ‘Committee of Experts’ said in their report that according to Islamic thought, ‘wonder-working’ of this sort should not be written about. In answer to this criticism, Nursî said that basically, it would have been better not to write about them, but since they pertained not to himself but to the Risale-i Nur, they belonged to the Qur’an and expounded it, and so were the source of spiritual power and assistance. See, Ermişdağ Lahikası, 12, 21.
105 Nursî, Tarihçe, 38-9; İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 16-18.
106 Mardin, Türkiye’de Din ve Siyaset, 185. Is Cervantes’ Don Quixote a light comedy to be mocked, or is it a satire directed against injustice? This should be decided.
107 Nursî, Tarihçe, 96-8.
108 Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 20; Tarihçe, 41-2.
109 Nursî, Tarihçe, 325.
110 Nursî, Tarihçe, 49, 50, 281; Kastamonu Lahikası, 76; Ermişdağ Lahikası, 20; Mardin, Religion and Social Change, Nursî, Tarihçe, 97, 101.
111 For the causes of the incident, see, Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 56.
112 Nursî, Müdafaalar, 8; Tarihçe, 60-2, 80ff; Ermişdağ Lahikası, 239; İçtimai Reçeteleri, i, 41; Mürsel, Devlet Felsefesi, 232.
113 Nursî, İçtimai Reçeteler, i, 42-4.
114 Nursî, Tarihçe, 149-50, 153.
115 Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 151.

Nursi, Müdafaalar, 49-50, 75; Tarihçe, 223, 230, 443. 

Akal, Yasa ve Kılıç, 117.

Mardin, Religion and Social Change, 224, 229; Türkiye'de Din ve Siyaset, 121. The source of the principle of secularism was the West, and if Hobbes is studied carefully, it will be seen that it was God who was discarded, not the state. In the process of secularization, the concept of the state was enthroned in place of God. In the context of secularism, the state aimed to dissolve physical power within spiritual power. As the holy spirit, the church could not be another public authority besides the state. The state however had to have a religion, otherwise it would have faced the danger of splitting up. Power cannot be divided up into spiritual and corporeal; it is single, either the state or the church. If the answer to this is the state, there can be nothing more natural that its holding within its control everything political, including religion and the church. The attachment of a religious system to the state, is not only a political adherence, it is also a religious one. The church therefore cannot have a separate set of laws; for since the state has dissolved the church within itself, its laws should be looked on as civil laws. Thus, the Sovereign Power interprets the sacred texts and institutionalizes the religion it finds suitable. If there is any error, it is the state that has sinned; what falls to the people is only to obey. While submitting to the state, the believer should not hesitate as to whether or not he has acted contrary to his beliefs. Obedience to the state is obedience to God, and submission and worship. As is clear, this is a state religion. See, Akal, Sivil Toplum Tanrısı, 14, 26, 117-8; Sanbay & Öğün, Bir Politikbilim Perspektifi, 38-9. 

Nursi, Müdafaalar, 37-9; Tarihçe, 214, 268. 

Nursi, Müdafaalar, 45-6; Tarihçe, 218-9. 

Nursi, Müdafaalar, 75-8; Tarihçe, 231-7. 

Nursi emphasized freedom in particular, for it was attained through preservation of the injunctions of religion, following the conduct of the Shari’a, and good morals. He and his students adhered strictly to these. Nursi, Tarihçe, 52. 

Nursi, Müdafaalar, 49, 52; Tarihçe, 233-4. His certificate for acting as preacher and ‘imam’ had been cancelled, but he did not use it anyway. He made no petition to the government, for if he had they would have applied further sanctions. Nursi, Tarihçe, 263, 267. 

Nursi, Tarihçe, 242. 

Nursi, Müdafaalar, 97ff. 

Nursi, Tarihçe, 379-92; 467, 478; Müdafaalar, 112, 135, 200. For freedom of religion and conscience, see, Mürsel, Devlet Felsefesi, 270ff. 

Nursi, Tarihçe, 393. 

Nursi, Müdafaalar, 114, 149, 396. 

Nursi, Tarihçe, 409-11; Müdafaalar, 238-41. 

Nursi, Tarihçe, 499, 520; Emirdağ Lahikası, 8-9. 

Nursi, Tarihçe, 548, 576-7; Müdafaalar, 133. 

Nursi, Tarihçe, 531; Müdafaalar, 145, 219, 225, 481. For his views of President Mustafa Kemal, see, Emirdağ Lahikası, 182, 278-9. 

As an example of this, he gives Aya Sophia being turned into a museum, and the Shaykh al-Islam’s Office into a girls’ high school. See, Tarihçe, 545; Müdafaalar, 140-1, 257.
Nursî, Müdafaalar, 126.

143 See, Nursî, Müdafaalar, 176; Emirdağ Lahikası, ii, 190.

144 Nursî, Barla Lahikası, 262-4; Kastamonu Lahikası, 21-2, 25, 148; Tarihçe, 27; Müdafaalar, 201, 231.

145 Nursî, Barla Lahikası, 254.

146 Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası, 8.

147 Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası, 223.

148 Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası, 278.

149 Gellner, Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion, 141.

150 Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası, 68; Emirdağ Lahikası, ii, 70.

151 See, Nursî, Barla Lahikası, 270; Kastamonu Lahikası, 72-3; Emirdağ Lahikası, 237.

152 See, Nursî, Tarihçe, 133, 185, 279; Emirdağ Lahikası, 268; İctimai Reçeteler, i, 32.

153 For Risale-i Nur definitions supporting this deduction, see, Nursî, Emirdağ Lahikası, 90, 105ff.

154 It must be because of this and similar views that it is claimed he denied external differences in the context of Islam's teachings on divine unity, and therefore indirectly the pluralism necessary for a civil society. See, Sanbay, 21. Whereas study of the schools of thought, law, and doctrine that emerged from early times onward, shows a religious plurality. And it is well-known that all religious and philosophical matters act as political and social supports. See, J. Oberman, “Political Theory in Early Islam,” JAOS, lv, (1935), 138ff; Ali Bulaç, İslam ve Demokrasi (İstanbul: 1993), 21.

155 For Said Nursî's criticism of this point, directed at the Dept. of Religious Affairs, that they transform the fundamentals of belief and Qur'anic principles into worldly transactions, by putting them into an official form for a particular wage, and claim monopoly of them, see, Nursî, Tarihçe, 262.

156 Nursî, Muḥdhkemāt (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, n.d.), 9-11.

157 Nursî, İctimai Reçeteler, i, 157.


159 Nursî, Emirdağ Lahikası, 116, 155.

160 Nursî, İctimai Reçeteler, ii, 38.

161 Nursî, Kastamonu Lahikası, 86, 178.

162 For this evaluation, based on Abdulkarim Surush, see, Yalçın Akdoğan, “Muslim Demokrat Olabilir mi?”, in Sözleşme, year 1, No: 2, (1997), 24. In the Islamic tradition, this takes the form of the Musawwiba (those correct in their views) and their opponents, the Mukhattia, who said “my conclusion is right, but it is possible it is wrong. The views of other schools are wrong, but it is possible they are right.” See, Nursî, İctimai Reçeteler, i, 159.


164 Universality negates all concepts outside itself. Objectively, there has never been any state or ideology whose sovereignty was total or universal. Totality here is subjective. They appeared to be universal to those who lived under them. Claims to conceptual sovereignty of the whole world have always been false. See, Arnold Toynbee, Tarih Bilinci (A Study of History) [trans.] (İstanbul: 1978), ii, 296. For debates as to whether Islam and other divine religions presented their messages to their own members with a mutually competing pluralist universalist conception, see, Mevlüt Uyanık, “Çağdaş İslam Düışüncesinde Tarihsellik ve Evrensellik Sorunu,” in Uyanık (ed.), Kur’ân’ın Tarihsel ve Evrensel Okunuşu (Ankara: 1999), 125ff.

165 Gellner, Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion, 143.

166 Nursî, Emirdağ Lahikası, ii, 17.

167 Nursî, İctimai Reçeteler, ii, 42-55, 72.