

# Nationalism in the Light of Said Nursi Badiuzzaman and His Framework for Social Solidarity

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## Abstract

For the past few centuries, the impact of nationalism had been discussed widely by scholars both in the Western and the Muslim world in various perspectives. Some authors claimed that nationalism had caused a lot of conflicts and wars among the nations. On the other hand, some others argued that nationalism was a binding force which stabilized the fragmented territories of nation-states with the sentiments of nationalism. This paper attempts at analyzing Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's approach towards the issue of nationalism. He did not merely criticize nationalism; he offered a better way through his approach to a sociology of Islam. Nursi explains and advocates for positive forms of social solidarity and cohesion that elevate a group of people to noble action, and provides the Islamic grounding for that position. Within the various conflicts afflicted around the world today, Nursi's ideas of nationalism and social solidarity are seen relevant and necessary in context.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Negative nationalism, Positive nationalism, Said Nursi Badiuzzaman, Islamic Nationhood, Social solidarity

## Introduction

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi was the prominent figure who contributed a lot to the development of the Muslim *ummah* through various religious reforms. The life of Nursi is divided into two main periods. The first period is called as the 'Old Said,' which accorded with the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. It was the period where the Muslim world was scattered geographically based on the spirit of nationalism. This scenario was one of the challenges faced by Muslims which turned them not only physically but also spiritually weak. The second period of his life is referred as the 'New Said'<sup>1</sup> which emerged following the Ottoman defeat in the First World War, and continued through the first four decades of the Turkish Republic. In the phase of 'New Said,' Nursi shifted his approach of reform from active political engagement to intellectual struggle by focusing more on writing activities. The 'New Said' brought the significant impact not only on himself but the whole Muslim community at large through his writing of *Risalah al-Nur* which he wrote during his exile to Western Anatolia. In his *Risalah al-Nur*, he focused more on contemplating the fundamental questions of life and tried to strengthen the faith of Turkish Muslims in facing the challenges posed by the new established regime after the founding of the Republic in 1923.

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<sup>1</sup>The last period of Said Nursi's life, that is, 'Third Said' was coincided with the Democrat Party era. This phase was a continuation of 'New Said' and combined with the characteristics of 'Old Said'. During this time, Democrat Party did not restrict the Nursi's movement. *Risalah al-Nur* was printed and widely read. In this phase, Nursi took an interest in the social life and developments in Turkey and the Muslim world at large. See Sukran Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi," in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi*; ed. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi' (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1.

*Risalah al-Nūr* was a great contribution of Nursi to develop Islamic personality, Islamic vision and Islamic awakening among the Turkish community in particular and the Muslim *ummah* in general. It was considered as Nursi's effort to encounter the misconception over the religion made by the enemy, to prove scientifically and rationally the truth of the Qur'ān, and to revitalize the faith of the Muslims. *Risalah al-Nūr* was also seen as a platform for Nursi to defend an Islamic faith against the secular ideologies including nationalism which posed a great impact on the Muslim *ummah*.

The ideology of nationalism was spread widely in the Muslim world during Nursi's lifetime and it was considered as an alternative to the *ummah* identity. Nationalism divided Muslims into various ethnic, linguistic, political, and territorial boundaries. Those boundaries are considered as the basis of nationalism, and the unity of Muslim *ummah* based on religious belief simply became irrelevant. The disunity among Muslim *ummah* is reflected into the divisions of Muslim countries into different nation states and their attraction to the Western ideology of nationalism. Nursi affirmed that this ideology of nationalism is not a new phenomenon but it has existed throughout the history since the early period of pre-Islamic Arabia. Islam rejected the form of tribalism in nationalism, and this rejection of nationalism has been mentioned in a Hadīth of the Prophet (SAW), "Islam has forbidden the national or tribal zealotry of the age of ignorance. There is no difference between an Abyssinian slave and a leader of *Quraish* once they have accepted Islam."<sup>2</sup>

It is at this juncture, Nursi tried to respond to the problem of nationalism in his own way of interpretation. Nursi's discussion of nationalism can be found in the third topic of the twenty sixth letter in *The Letters*. According to him, he wrote about nationalism 'in order to serve the Qur'ān and to defend against unfair attacks with regards to social life.'<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, Nursi discussed about the negative implications of nationalism and on the other hand he tried to reconcile nationalism with universal values of religion. In this sense, Nursi tried to expound the ideology of nationalism through its relationship with the universal values of rights, justice, equality, and mutual assistance-principles which are essential for maintaining peace and social stability and solidarity. Therefore, Nursi proposed a new approach to nationalism by dividing it into two categories; the negative and the positive nationalism.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, he clearly distinguished between the two.

### 1.1 The Negative Nationalism

Negative nationalism claims the superiority of nation over the other nations. It instils the feeling of being distinct and unique from other nations, while being proud of their own nation. This nationalistic sentiment usually leads to prejudice against other nations. In a sociological term, it encourages people to love and praise their own nation and regard others as disreputable enemies. It promotes self-glorification and feeling while no sympathy and intolerance towards others. Nursi stated, "The negative nationalism is being aroused by racist ambitions; and it is the cause of antipathy and mutual hostility."<sup>5</sup>

Nursi emphasized that Islam does not approve the sentiment of national pride. Islam acknowledges one's love towards the nation and country but totally rejects the sentiments of racial pride and prejudice. Nursi also condemned the principle of negative nationalism which approves invalid strategies to preserve its national interest. It obliges a person to support his nation whether it stands for right or wrong. In this sense, Nursi reminded that Islam advocates cooperation in acts of virtue and piety only; not in acts of sin and injustice.

Nursi strongly criticized the negative nationalism in his *Risalah al-Nūr* and argued that it is equivalent to racism; a sentiment which destroys the harmonious order of living in society. Racism produces

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<sup>2</sup>Bukhari: Ahkam, 4.

<sup>3</sup>Said Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief and Life*; trans., Huseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: The Light, Inc, 2007), 336-337.

<sup>4</sup>Nursi, *Sunuhat*, quoted in Ahmed Davutoglu "Badiuzzaman and the Politics of the Islamic Worlds in the 20th Century,"

[http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Bediuzzaman\\_and\\_the\\_Politics\\_of\\_the\\_20th\\_Century\\_198](http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Bediuzzaman_and_the_Politics_of_the_20th_Century_198)

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

the negative values of inequity, injustice and enmity among people.<sup>6</sup> Nursi regarded it as something, “Inauspicious, and harmful, it is nourished by devouring others, persists through hostility to others. It is the case of enmity and disturbance.”<sup>7</sup>

For him, nationalism or racism advocates discrimination and rivalry in society. In *The Letters*, he affirmed that the principles of nationalism and racism inflict tyranny toward other races. A ruler of racist leanings, according to Nursi, prefers those of the same race, and cannot act justly. This leads to mutual antagonism and discord which is obviously harmful to mankind. For instance, negative nationalism generates the spirit of dominating other nations. It forces nations to compete each other in affirming their superiority. In this sense, the survival of a nation depends on its ability to defend itself in the competition between nations. Unlike negative nationalism, Nursi affirmed that Islam advocates cooperation between nations for establishing the superiority of the will of God. All nations should mutually assist and contribute to each other for the command good. Islam also ensures equal rights and equal opportunities for all. Therefore, it contradicts to the spirit of the struggle for survival among nations as advocated by negative nationalism.

In relation to the spirit of dominating other nations, negative nationalism provokes an economic rivalry which leads to conflicts and even war among nations as the superior nations would exploit the resources of weaker nations. It stimulates the economic race among nations for the sake of material goal with no emphasis on moral obligations. Meanwhile Nursi reminded that in Islam, the economic system is based on social justice to obtain a good life of man, and it is integrated with moral and spiritual aspects of human life. The principle of social justice in Islam emphasizes on moral obligations, such as, cooperation, affection, and sympathetic towards others.

On the other aspect, Nursi claimed that negative nationalism gives priority to nation over religion, and this is not acceptable in Islam. In negative nationalism, people direct their loyalty towards their nation and country, and the loyalty to God or religious beliefs are subordinate to loyalty to the nation and country. The religious duty is also subjected to nationalistic duty. People are taught to sacrifice everything including their religious values for the sake of nation and country. In this sense, people’s attachment to religion is greatly diminished. Nursi strongly criticized this idea of negative nationalism which demands the undivided loyalty of the people to the nation and country to the extent that people obey their country more than obeying God, and follow the laws of the country instead of the laws of God. It is obvious that negative nationalism diverts the center of attention from religion to the nation and country. It separates religion from law and politics but Islam does separate between the two.

Nursi mentioned few examples of the manifestation of negative nationalism. For instance, the *Umayyad* government prioritized Arabs over others which offended other Muslims and frightened them. Besides, the *Umayyad* government also imposed tyranny towards other races, and this caused various problems in society.<sup>8</sup> In *The Words* Nursi stated that negative nationalism ‘flourished through harming others and is nourished through devouring others.’<sup>9</sup> Nursi also highlighted the impact of negative nationalism in Europe in which it led to a conflict between France and Germany, and resulted in the form of First World War. In addition, the fall of Ottoman Empire was also due to internal divisions along racial lines where many minority-based groups were formed especially among the Greeks and Armenians during the beginning of the state’s second constitutional period.<sup>10</sup> Nursi added that nationalism in the Muslim world provided the opportunity for the European powers to attack Muslims. He addressed the situation in Turkey in which the national integrity was challenged by hostility and enmity against the Arabs. He reminded the Turks saying that; “There is no reason for enmity towards our southern coreligionists from where the Qur’ān’s light and Islam’s radiance came to us, for such national conflicts only benefit Europe.

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<sup>6</sup>Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*; trans., Huseyin Akarsy, 380.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 338.

<sup>9</sup>Nursi, *The Words*; trans., S. Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2004), 745.

<sup>10</sup>Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 338.

Also, such feelings may cause enmity toward the Qur'ān and Islam which means treachery to all Muslims' worldly and otherworldly lives.”<sup>11</sup>

Some authors relate nationalism in Turkey with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 with its secular policies. From that period, people started to identify themselves by ethnic groups, and the religious identity as Muslims had been greatly diminished. In response to the issue of nationhood, Nursi took an integrative approach. He seemed to reconcile between the two identities. For him, national identity is significant and is part of Islamic identity.<sup>12</sup> He stated that; “with us Muslims, religion and nationhood are united.” At the same time, he claimed the nationality of the Turkish people is blended with Islam and inseparable from it. If they separate, they will be lost.<sup>13</sup> Nursi responded to the issue of religious zeal and national zeal in the following statement;

With us Muslims, religion and nationhood are united, although there is a theoretical, apparent and incidental difference between them. Indeed, religion is the life and spirit of the nation. When they are seen as different and separate from each other, religious zeal includes both the common people and upper classes. Whereas, national zeal is peculiar to one person out of a hundred, that is, to a person who is ready to sacrifice his personal benefits for the nation. Since this is the case, religious zeal must be the basis with regard to the rights of all people, while national zeal must serve it and to be its fortress.”<sup>14</sup>

Religious zeal and Islamic nationhood have completely fused in the Turks and Arabs, and may not now be separated. Islamic zeal is a luminous chain which is most strong and secure and is not born of this world. It is a support that is most firm and certain, and will not fail. It is an unassailable fortress that cannot be razed.”<sup>15</sup>

In this regard, Nursi emphasized on the significance of nationhood but reminded that it must be used in the positive manner in accordance with Islamic religious identity and not to claim its superiority over it. At the same time, Nursi reminded Muslims to be identified as Islamic nationhood instead of their national identity. Nursi believed that the nationhood of Muslims is only one, that is, Islamic nationhood. He stated, “Since in constitutionalism sovereignty belongs to the nation, the nation's existence has to be demonstrated, and our nation is only Islam. For the strongest bond of Arab, Turk, Kurd, Albanian, Circassian, and Laz, and their firmest nationhood, is nothing other than Islam.”<sup>16</sup>

Nursi condemned the Turkish nationalism for advocating irreligious value of disunity<sup>17</sup> and he stated how the Turkish nationalists attacked him and provoked their followers to be attached with the national zeal, “You are Turkish. God bless the Turks and they have many scholars in every field and people of perfection. Said is a Kurd. How can you reconcile cooperating with a non-Turk with your national zeal?”<sup>18</sup>

In response to this claim, Nursi emphasized on his good relationship with all Muslims and the Turkish Muslims in particular as they uphold the same religious belief, thus, belong to same Islamic nationhood.

Nursi obviously worried about the division of the Muslim nations and he concerned about the need for unity of Muslims. He wrote; “For the strongest bond of Arab, Circassian and Laz, and their firmest nationhood is nothing other than Islam.”<sup>19</sup> He was opposed to the idea of negative nationalism which

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 338-339.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 339.

<sup>14</sup>Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*; edited by S. Vahide, (Istanbul: Sozler Nesriyat, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1996), 46.

<sup>15</sup>Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*; trans., Huseyin Akarsy, 338- 339.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 406-408.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 405.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

considers cultural affiliation as to be the basis. Therefore, Nursi emphasized that the culture of Islam is different as it is founded on divine guidance. All Muslims residing in any geographical territory express their cultural affiliation to the universal Islamic culture; and not the culture of their respective or political nationality. In this sense, the culture of Muslim community is different from other cultures since its nucleons are based on the religious beliefs.

There are few evidences of Nursi's call for Muslim nations to be united by religious identity. For instance, in his sermon delivered at *Umayyad* Mosque in 1911, Nursi addressed the need for unity among the Turks and Arabs as a response to a crucial conflict between the two nations upon the political issues. Nursi reminded that Muslims in Turkey and the Middle East should not be influenced by the idea of negative nationalism advocated by the West. The true nationality or nationhood of both Turks and Arabs was Islam. He said;

The foundation and spirit of our true nationhood is Islam. And in so far as they have carried the standard of the Ottoman caliphate and Turkish army in the name of that nationhood, the two true brothers of Arab and Turks, who are like the shell and citadel of the nationhood of Islam, are the sentries of that sacred citadel. Thus, through the bond of this sacred nationhood, all the people of Islam are like a single tribe. Like the members of a tribe, the groups of Islam are bound and connected to one another through Islamic brotherhood. They assist one another morally and if, necessary, materially. It is as if all the groups of Islam are bound to each other with a luminous chain.<sup>20</sup>

Nursi strongly emphasized that all Muslim ethnic groups belong to the common nationhood of Islam, thus, considered members of Islamic nationhood. He consistently addressed that Islamic nationhood to be the basis of unity among different ethnic group of Muslims. In contrast to negative nationalism, Islamic nationhood is able to establish a social harmony not only within various ethnic Muslim nations only but also with other religious groups.

In contrast to Islamic nationhood, Nursi claimed that the principle of people's relationship in the Western civilization was based on nationalism or racism. He stated 'the present-day civilization considers the bond between communities to be racism and negative nationalism'<sup>21</sup> and this principle could not provide equality and justice within society. Nursi wrote:

and since the benefits are insufficient to meet all needs, their mark is that everyone tussles and jostles over them. The mark of conflict is contention, and their mark of racialism, aggression, since it thrives on devouring others. Thus, it is because of these principles of civilization that despite all its virtues, it has provided a sort of superficial happiness for only twenty percent of mankind and cast eighty percent into distress and poverty.<sup>22</sup>

Negative nationalism, according to Nursi, has caused the problem of social, political and economic injustice in society. He argued that disunity and injustice led to antagonism among people and antagonism in return led to weakness which prevents the progress in society. Nursi proclaimed that 'the mark of negative nationalism and racialism is ghastly clashes, disastrous collisions, and their result, annihilation.'<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Nursi emphasized that in order for a society to be able to function justly and to progress, the members need to be united. He urged people to apply the values of right, justice, and mutual assistance to ensure social stability.

In short, Nursi identified ignorance, poverty, and conflict as the three main obstacles to human happiness; and he related negative nationalism as one of the main causes of conflict among the Muslims.

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<sup>20</sup>Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 38-40.

<sup>21</sup>Nursi, *The Words*, 420.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 745.

Therefore, in order to overcome this conflict, Muslims should unite under the umbrella of Islam. Nursi believed that Muslim unity was a religious obligation and one of the means for a social change.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. The Positive Nationalism

Nursi approached the idea of positive nationalism in different manner from the Western perspective of nationalism which is based on the spirit of competition or racial conflicts. He tried to identify the positive aspects of nationalism which could bring about the universal values necessary for social solidarity. In other words, Nursi tried to tune the negative connotation of nationalism by implementing it for positive purposes. He described positive nationalism as a natural feeling of human beings as a protection when their group members are threatened particularly by the European powers. It is the bond of unity among people of different groups, therefore, Nursi was more concerned on societal unity when he described about positive nationalism. Nursi described positive nationalism as the cause of mutual recognition and assistance. It “arises from an inner need of social life; it is aroused through compassion for one’s fellow men, and is the cause of mutual assistance and solidarity; it ensures a beneficial strength; and it is a means for further strengthening Islamic brotherhood.”<sup>25</sup>

For Nursi, it is necessary to love the fellow members to ensure the internal strength of brotherhood.<sup>26</sup> The possession of sentiments of belonging to a certain group, according to Nursi, was a natural phenomenon. It is acceptable as long as there is no claim of superiority over nations and no loyalty of nation over religion. Positive nationalism is only a single aspect of Islamic unity. It enables Muslims to gather and unite among themselves.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, positive nationalism served Islam for unity but not to replace it. Nursi highlighted the application of positive nationalism in the defense of a Muslim country. A Muslim country had been able to maintain its existence despite its relatively small number of population and despite European hostility due the willingness and readiness of the Muslim soldiers to sacrifice their lives and fight against the European imperialist powers with the conviction that if they die, they die as martyrs; if they live, they live as defenders of Islam. Nursi believed that there is no other nationalistic zeal that can substitute this.<sup>28</sup>

In a positive nationalism, Nursi seemed to stress on the dynamics of social relationship and social solidarity which eventually contribute to not only the social stability but also the political power. In this sense, people must not be individualistic because individualism was one of the main reasons for the downfall of society. People should bind together by unifying force of religion. When people have emotional attachment to a group, they will not become selfish but act in collective interest. Nursi reminded people not to focus on their own personal benefits but to consider other fellow beings at the same time. In his view, a person who only cares about his personal benefits has abandoned his humanity.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the positive nationalism in the discourse of Nursi can be considered as the dynamic power for social cohesion. The absent of this sentiment would lead to a social disintegration.

Like al-Afghani in his idea of *Pan Islamism* and Abduh who were known with their idea of necessity of Islamic solidarity, Nursi also strongly advocated it in similar voice. He shared the similar concern to prevent the fragmentation of the Muslim world. For Nursi, the need for social solidarity is not a political agenda but it is a religious obligation. This claim is supported by his interpretation of the Qur’anic

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<sup>24</sup>Colin Turner, and Hasan Horkuc, *Said Nursi* (London: I. B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2009), 96.

<sup>25</sup>Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, 381; Nursi, *Sunuvat*, quoted in Ahmed Davutoglu, “Badiuzzaman and the Politics of the Islamic World in the 20th Century,” [http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Badiuzzaman\\_and\\_the\\_Politics\\_of\\_the\\_20th\\_Century\\_198](http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Badiuzzaman_and_the_Politics_of_the_20th_Century_198)

<sup>26</sup>Nursi, *The Letters*, 380-381.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 338-339.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 341

<sup>29</sup>Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 41, 42, 45.

verse; “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other.”<sup>30</sup> Nursi interpreted the verse that God has created different people, nations, and the tribes so that they should know one another and have relations on social life. They should assist and acknowledge one another and should not regard each other as stranger as well as not be hostile towards each other.<sup>31</sup> The division into groups and tribes, according to Nursi, is not meant for mutual hostility but it should lead to mutual assistance. He drew an analogy between the divisions of people into different nations with the division of army into different ranks. The division of army into different ranks is not for a hostile competition but it is for serving the common objective of safety and protection of the nation. Similarly, the division of Islamic society into different groups of nations is not meant for hostile competition but it is for knowing each other and serving the same objective of worship God. They are all united under the same God, the same Prophet (SAW) the same scripture, and the same direction of *qiblah*<sup>32</sup>

In short, Nursi tried to reconcile sentiments of nationalism with the religious identity. He affirmed that the nationhood of Muslims should be based on their religion, Islam. Nursi used the term ‘nation’ (*millet*) and nationhood (*miliyet*) in accordance with their Arabic meanings. In Arabic, the *millet* denotes a religion and membership of it, and today it is also replaced with the word *ummah*. For Nursi, nationhood is a body, its spirit is Islam, and its intellect is the Qur’ān.<sup>33</sup> Nursi advocated the idea of Islamic nationhood which makes Islam as the basis of unity among all nations.

#### 4. Nursi’s Views on Social Solidarity

The conflicts and disagreements between the nations are primarily due to the lack of universal principles necessary for social solidarity, such as, enmity, injustice, and hostility manifested in negative nationalism. Therefore, Nursi emphasized on the necessity of social solidarity to overcome the problem of nationalism. Nursi emphasized that upholding solidarity among Muslims is a religious obligation and an essential duty. The concept of social solidarity for Nursi carries a sense of responsibility and co- operation towards each member in a society. A person who lacks this feeling, according to Nursi, is more lifeless than a stone. He added that a person who only cares about his personal benefits has abandoned his humanity because man is by nature connected to his fellow beings and must consider them.<sup>34</sup> Nursi’s discussion on the issue of social solidarity is very significant as it is not confined to political and economic integration only but encompasses all aspects of life.

According to Nursi, social solidarity is the source of strength. Therefore, he tried to unite different schools of thought and various ethnic groups in the Muslim world. The fundamental principle of solidarity is to acknowledge one another and work for a common goal. Nursi believed that the social solidarity can be obtained first through the personality transformation of the Muslims to the Islamic model of the early Muslim community in Madinah during the Prophet’s (SAW) lifetime.<sup>35</sup> Once the personality has been transformed, Muslims will be able to achieve power in economic, political and military affairs. For Nursi, the basic step of personality transformation is strengthening faith of Muslims. In this sense, Nursi gave much emphasis on the significance of faith and religious basis in the process of social solidarity. He said, “Man’s personal life can continue only through the point of support and point of assistance that proceed from belief, so too, can his social life endure only through the mutual consultation enjoined by *shari‘ah*”<sup>36</sup>

Based on his statement, Nursi observed the problem of the Muslims was from within, that is, the weakness of faith. Therefore, the first step to overcome it is purifying faith on the basis of Qur’ān and

<sup>30</sup>Al-Qur’ān al-Hujurāt 49: 13.

<sup>31</sup>Nursi, *The Letters*, 337.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>M. A. Khaja, “Nationalism in the Writings of Iqbal and said Nursi: A Comparative Study of their Perspectives,” *A Social Science Journal* 11, no. 1, (2018): 49-62.

<sup>34</sup>Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 41, 42, 45.

<sup>35</sup>Elmira Akhmetova, “Ideas of Muslim Unity at the Age of Nationalism: A Comparative Study of the Concept of the *Ummah* in the Writings of Musa Jārullāh and Said Nursi,” *Islam and Civilizational Review* 4 (4), (2013): 615-633.

<sup>36</sup>Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 48.

*Sunnah* as well as adhering to the principles of *shari'ah*. As a result of social solidarity, Muslims would be able to practice a mutual consultation or *shūra* which Nursi described as the key to happiness as well as progress in Islamic social life.<sup>37</sup>

Nursi mentioned few sicknesses of Muslims in his *Damascus Sermon*; such as, the rise of despair and hopelessness in social life; the death of truthfulness in social and political life; love of enmity; not knowing the luminous bonds that bind the believers to one another; and restricting endeavor to what is personally beneficial. Nursi believed that the Muslims can only be united by eliminating all these sicknesses.<sup>38</sup>

Besides their internal weaknesses, Muslims also faced an outside challenge of the European domination; and Nursi stressed that the only force that could survive Muslims from the European domination is their unity as an Islamic *ummah* in identity. Nursi stated, "Against these terrible forces of destruction, only and solely the Islamic unity surrounding the truths of the Qur'ān can endure. And it is the only way to save this land from the occupation of foreigners and this nation from falling into anarchy, and the means to save mankind from these dangers."<sup>39</sup>

In addition to rescue Muslims from the European domination, Nursi also believed that the unity of Muslims under the common banner of Islam would also rescue Muslims from economic and social backwardness as well as from the conflict afflicted among the followers of different school of thought. Nursi argued that the necessary for social solidarity had been frequently mentioned in both Qur'ānic verses and the Hadīth, therefore, it is one of key factors for the strength of the *ummah* at various affairs of life. It is obvious that Nursi highlighted the issue of social solidarity as response to various conflicts within the Muslim world ranging over the social, economic, political and legal issues.

The important point to be noted in Nursi's discussion on social solidarity is that it is not confined to Muslims alone but also addresses foreigners. Nursi encouraged a form of relationship with foreign socio-political groups should be on the basis of respect with a mutual need for freedom and co-operation.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Nursi extended his idea of social solidarity to all religious groups of people as he believed that not only Islam but other religions also opposed the ideologies of nationalism, secularism, and atheism. For him social solidarity is a fundamental issue which concerns all religious group of people particularly Muslims and Christian as he discussed at a large extent. He claimed, "Believers should now unite, not only with their Muslim fellow-believers but with truly religious and pious Christians, disregarding questions of dispute and not arguing over them, for absolute disbelief is on the attack."<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, he urged Muslims to co-operate peacefully in achieving social stability. As a practical manifestation of his idea, Nursi himself had initiated contacts with Christian leaders by sending copies of *Risalat al- Nūr* to the Pope in Rome, and he received a **positive response**. Moreover, Nursi also took an opportunity to visit Athenagoras the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Istanbul during his stay in Istanbul in 1953 in order to co-operate with the Christians against the issue of atheism.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Muhammad Ajmal, "Globalization and the Thought of Unity in Diversity of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi in the Light of His Magnum Opus Risalah al- Nur," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 135-153.

<sup>38</sup>S. J. Thomas Michael, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-Operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," *The Muslim World* LXXXIX, no 3-4 (July-October 1999): 325.

<sup>39</sup>Nursi, *The Letters*, quoted in A. Berghout, "The Concept of Imān Tahqiqi as a Founding Element in the Process of Muslim Unity," Paper presented at the *Two-Day Seminar on Badiuzzaman Said Nursi: A Contemporary Approach to Realizing Muslim Unity* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), 2005)

<sup>40</sup>Nursi, *The Letters*

<sup>41</sup>Nursi, *Emirdag Lahikası*, 1: 265. Quoted in S. J. Thomas Michel, *Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 325.

[http://groups.creighton.edu/sjdialogue/documents/articles/michel\\_muslim\\_christian\\_dialogue.htm](http://groups.creighton.edu/sjdialogue/documents/articles/michel_muslim_christian_dialogue.htm)

<sup>42</sup>Sukran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 241-242, 317



Nursi had built a good relationship based on respect and co-operation with the Christians. He advocated Christian-Muslim dialogue to resolve the conflicts and worked on the common goals. For Nursi, both Muslims and Christians faced the same kind of challenges in terms of lack of religious values in affairs of life which he termed it as 'aggressive atheism.'<sup>43</sup> Irreligiosity, according to Nursi, is a great challenge resulted from the modern civilization. It is devoid of God's consciousness and man creates his own philosophy of life irrespective of God's guidance. Nursi acknowledged the doctrinal fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity; however, his advocacy on co-operation is based on calling people to have a same vision of life on the basis of God's wills. He criticized both Muslim and Christian societies, which are very much influenced by the secular principles of the *Enlightenment* which focused on the freedom of man in determining the affairs of life, reduces religious faith to a personal sphere, and removes religion and God's guidance in the spheres of social, political, economic, legal, cultural, educational, and other systems of life. The alienation of spiritual and moral values advocated by the principles of *Enlightenment* would not only endanger both Muslims and Christians but also create enmity between them. He said, "It is essential that missionaries, pious Christians as well as Muslims (Nurcus), be extremely careful, for with the idea of defending itself against the attacks of the religions of Islam and Christianity."<sup>44</sup>

By referring to the Qur'ānic term 'People of the Book,' Nursi reminded Muslims and Christians that they are the communities founded on faith in God, therefore, they should have a common mission to bear witness to Divine values in the midst of modern civilization and to establish God-centered societies. Nursi believed that the factor that prevents us from establishing God-centered society is not the other groups of people but rather the dark sides of our own selves to dominate and control each other. For this reason, both Islam and Christianity stress on the need for repentance as the key for personal and societal transformation. By stressing the common weakness, Nursi's idea could be relevant to overcome the conflicts between Muslims and Christians in contemporary times. Nursi was serious in the idea building of social solidarity among Muslim-Christian relationship. In his support of the Baghdad Pact,<sup>45</sup> he emphasized on the advantage of the pact was not only that Turks would gain four hundred million brothers and sisters among Muslim peoples, but that international accord would also gain for Muslim Turks the friendship of eight hundred million Christians.<sup>46</sup> This scenario, according to Nursi, would be a step towards a general reconciliation between the two communities of faith. Nursi was confident that Muslims and Christians together can built a true civilization on the basis of God's will in which justice, human dignity and other universal values should be preserved. This is possible if they seek to ground their mutual relationship on love as he stated, "It is love and loving that render people's social life secure and lead to happiness. It is these which are most worthy of love and being loved. The time for enmity and hostility is finished."<sup>47</sup>

For Nursi, the enemy of both Islam and Christianity is not seeking for and submitting to Divine guidance. Therefore, Muslims and Christians who are committed to the true teachings of religions are having the common task, namely, affirming a Divinely-guided lifestyle in the modern age. Nursi stated, "Muslims should unite not only with their fellow-believers, but also with the truly pious Christians."<sup>48</sup>

On one hand, Nursi acknowledged the benefits brought by the European societies and on the other hand he condemned their irreligious values. He said:

Europe is two. One follows the sciences with serve justice and right and activities beneficial for the life of society through the inspiration it has received from true Christianity. This first Europe

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<sup>43</sup>S. J. Thomas Michel, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-Operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," 325-335.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>The Baghdad Pact was signed in February 1955 between Turkey and Iraq, and was subsequently joined by Pakistan, Iran and Britain

<sup>46</sup>S. J. Thomas Michel, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Co-Operation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," retrieved from [http://groups.creighton.edu/sjdialogue/documents/articles/michel\\_muslim\\_christian\\_dialogue.htm](http://groups.creighton.edu/sjdialogue/documents/articles/michel_muslim_christian_dialogue.htm)

<sup>47</sup>Nursi, *The Damascus Sermon*, 49-50.

<sup>48</sup>Lem'alar, *Sincerity and Brotherhood* (Istanbul: 1991), 146 quoted in Thomas Michel, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," 327.

I am not addressing. Rather, I am addressing the second, corrupt Europe which, through the darkness of the philosophy of naturalism that considered evils of civilization to be its virtues, has driven humankind to vice and misguidance.<sup>49</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The problem with Muslims in the Muslim world today is that they followed the standard principles of nationalism as advocated by the Western perspective. They condemned one another and defended their own group of people. This anti-religion nationalism is proven to be harmful for the well-being of the Muslim nations. Muslims would be divided and become weak, thus, giving an opportunity to enemies of Islam to attack and empower them. Nursi's thought on negative nationalism posed various lessons to our contemporary lives. In response to the issue of nationalism, Nursi drew a clear line between the negative and positive nationalism in terms of their principles and application. Although nationalism is considered a dangerous ideology which leads to the disunity of the people and eventually brings about a destruction of society, Nursi argued that it would not give harm if it was understood as the unity of Muslims as the *ummah* under one umbrella of Islam. Muslims are bound together not by racial, linguistic, or geographical ties, but by their religious belief and communal brotherhood as Islam is a universal religion.

In combatting anti-religion nationalism, Nursi urged Muslims regardless of their nationalities to be united. He believed that social unity or solidarity would ensure stability in society. The scenario which hindered the stability of society observed by Nursi during his time, such as, despotism practiced by Muslim rulers and their opposition to *shari'ah* as the supreme law was still becomes the relevant factor during this contemporary period of time. Therefore, Muslims should play a significant role in upholding unity as advocated by Nursi.

It is significant to note that Nursi has promoted co-existence not only among the Muslims but also with other religious groups particularly Christians. His ideas are grounded by an authentic Qur'ānic framework keeping its major core principles in focus. In doing so, he applied holistic and integrative approaches. In our opinion, the idea of social solidarity of Nursi which across the boundaries of one's religious community is very relevant to be practiced today since many conflicts between nations around the world occur today and lead to destruction. Nursi's idea should also be acknowledged since he presented a distinct approach compared to other thinkers. He advocated a new opinion that the task of criticism against the secular principles of modernity should be carried out together by Muslims and Christians.

In addition, Nursi did not only pose his ideas and thoughts theoretically but he translated them into practice. The principles of mercy, love, justice, compassion, and respect were not only abstract ideas for Nursi but were manifested through his own actions and continued to be practiced by millions of his followers. Nursi obviously urged Muslims back to the core principles of the Qur'ān based on Islamic worldview. Although there were many social-political conflicts during his time, he never sacrificed his Qur'ānic principles, and this attitude has made him known as a devout Muslim practice and an influential Muslim thinker in both Muslim and the Western world.

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<sup>49</sup>Lem'alar, *Sincerity and Brotherhood* (Istanbul: 1991), 111 quoted in Thomas Michel, "Muslin-Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," 328.

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