

# Integration of Knowledge in Theory and Practice: The Contribution of Bediuzzaman Said Nuri

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## Introduction

Integration of knowledge in Islam is an intellectual and epistemological challenge. Indeed the first revelation of the Qur'an is "to read and write"<sup>1</sup> and the Prophet Muhammad continued its process until the revelation of the whole Qur'an was completed. Muslim scholars and thinkers espoused to develop man's intellectual efforts in the various ages.<sup>2</sup> The integration process of knowledge was revived in the twentieth century by several scholars and thinkers, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) being one of them. This approach argues that without integration of knowledge between religious sciences and modern sciences in accordance with the need of time, progress and development in the Muslim world is not possible. Such an approach is particularly compelling because it can eschew the accusation that Western

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<sup>1</sup> The theory of knowledge of Islam is reflected in several verses of the Qur'an including 96:1-5, 68:1-2, 55:1-3.

<sup>2</sup> The process of integration of knowledge had started, in fact, from the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on the basis of the Divine guidance. The first goal, initiated by him, for instance, was to change mind-sets, attitudes, behaviors and cultures of people of Arabia in order to establish a new universal civilization for the entire humanity. The goal of integration of knowledge has been pursued by the early as well as contemporary scholars and thinkers such as Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (450-505/1058-1111), Ibn Sina(), Ibn Rushd and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. They examined the Greek tradition and rejected the negative elements which were not in conformity with Islam and incorporated the positive elements which were in line with Shari'ah. This process gave birth to a new scholarship and a new civilization which combined Greek philosophy and logic with Islamic philosophy and tradition. In contemporary world, Sayyid Abu A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979/1321-1399), Shah Wali Allah (), Ism'ail R. al-Faruqi ( ), and Naqib al-Attas also examined the Western epistemological tradition and rejected those aspects which are not in conformity with Islam. However, the task of integration is by no means an eclectic mixing of classical Islam and modern western knowledge, but rather a systematic reorientation and restructuring of the entire field of human knowledge in accordance with a new set of criteria and categories, derived from, and based on, the Islamic worldview.

values are being imposed upon Islam. Muslim scholars who proposed the process of integration have faced resistance from traditionalists. The accusation is that they are not loyal to Islam and deny its heritage.

However, one of the highly influential intellectuals and reformers, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi greatly contributed to understanding the reformation of society and the necessity of the integration of knowledge. Many Islamic thinkers and activists were influenced all over the world by his intellectual effort. His ideas took shape in Turkey in influencing contemporary intellectuals. However, although he is well known for his scholarship and reformist work, his efforts at integration of knowledge<sup>3</sup> have not received the scholarly attention they deserved.

This article focuses on how Bediuzzaman Said Nuri employed the process of integration of knowledge to combine the religious sciences and modern sciences in a way that does not condone the contradiction. It examines the theoretical dimensions and practical application of the process of integration of knowledge. It also explores whether this approach can implement in reality or whether the only option for scholars who proposed this project is to discuss its theoretical dimension.

### **The Concept of Integration of Knowledge**

The process of integration of knowledge in Islam with regard to develop and generate human knowledge by proper educational method in harmony is not a new phenomenon. Among the classical Muslim scholars, relating the verses of the Qur'an to the situation with regard to the occasions of revelation of the verses (*asbab al-nuzul*) was widely accepted.<sup>4</sup> Verses were often linked to particular historical and situational events by references to the hadith literature and the sayings, doings and approvals of the Prophet. In our own age owing to the dominance of the western worldview, its aim is to critique, analyze and reformulate western academic disciplines in such a manner that revelation is reinstated in man's intellectual life and in fact becomes a basic source of knowledge. As for the discipline known as Islamic studies, the aim is to

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<sup>3</sup> It is fact that Bediuzzaman Said Nursi did not use the term „integration of knowledge“, but his methodological approaches used for education reformation are in the place of integration.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, (Brockelmann, Leiden:E.J.Bill, vol.8, 1904), 1-2, 5-6.

critically analyze the Islamic contributions to knowledge in their historical context and to make Islam relevant to the contemporary times. This endeavor is alternatively known as “contextualization” to differentiate it from the overall integration process, which is specially related to modern sciences. Context was not discounted entirely, but it was only applied to cases where two issues appeared to contradict each other. In such a case, the contradicted issue from modern sciences will be integrated or Islamized, based on the supposition of Islamic principles and values. However, on the whole, context should only be utilized when there appeared to be a contradiction between religious sciences and modern sciences in order to resolve the crisis of the Muslim mind by addressing the problem of establishing a proper relationship between western knowledge and Muslim intellectual tradition. Therefore, the aim of integration of knowledge is to provide the Muslim Ummah with guidance as well as a methodology to confront the contemporary challenges and to restructure Islam’s lost civilizational glory. This reflects an atomistic approach to the integration of knowledge, which was an important feature of classical Muslim scholars. The process of integration, later on, was influenced by the customs of the conquered lands.

Today, a number of scholars argue that the integration process should be implemented in social and human sciences in line with revealed knowledge in such a way that sheds light not only on the relevance to the present situation, but also in a way that defines universal principles. According to Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, “the barriers between religious and modern sciences must be broken down”. He is one of those rare individuals who were active in postulating ideas that provide the theoretical bases for integration of knowledge and in producing works that represent integration in practice.

### **Bediuzzaman Said Nuri: A Profile**

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was born in the village of Nurs, in the province of Bitlis, in eastern Turkey, in 1877 into a respectable ‘Sayyid’s family’ known for its religious piety.<sup>5</sup> His father was ‘Sufi Mirza’ and his lineage, on both paternal and maternal sides, are traced to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be

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<sup>5</sup> The year was 1293 according to the Rumi calendar then in use in the Ottoman Empire, which is 1877.

upon you).<sup>6</sup> He began his education in Hizan at the age of nine.<sup>7</sup> He studied Tafsir al-Qur'an, al-Haith, al-Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, Usul al-Din (theology), and other subjects. After completing his formal education, he visited a number of places and realized that the establishment of a university is essential, not only for combating the widespread ignorance and backwardness of the community, but also for solving social and political problems of Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

The young Said was independent-minded and had sharp intellect with an inquisitive natural ability to investigate things, and to search serious questions to know the truth. He was a religiously disposed person from his childhood. This seems to reflect the influence of his family, especially of his devout father and mother.<sup>9</sup> His education was systematic but studied from various religious institutions and individuals. His early education was under the close supervision of his elder brother Molla Abdullah, but the mastery of his study was at the Bayezit Medrese under Seyh Mehmed Celali. That formed the foundation of his religious sciences on which his later thoughts and works would be based.<sup>10</sup> Molla Said embarked on a comprehensive study of all the Islamic sciences. These are considered as the 'thought of instrumental' for his intellectual contributions such as logic, Arabic grammar, sciences of Qur'anic exegesis, traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Islamic Jurisprudence, works on theology, and works on the four schools of thought.<sup>11</sup> He visited various religious institutions as well as famous Islamic scholars such as Bayezit Medrese under the supervision of Seyh Mehmed Celali, Siirt of Molla Fethullah, and finally returned to Bitlis and joined the Medrese of Seyh Emin.<sup>12</sup> He became known as an outstanding intellectual and scholar.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Edip, Esref, *Said Nursi, Hayati, Eserleri, Meslegi*, 17.trans. by Sukran Vahide, formerly Mary Weld, Sozler Publication.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>9</sup> Sahiner, N. Said Nursi, 46, 47, 53, 48 and 69, translated by Sukran VAHIDE, 4-5

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 52-53

<sup>11</sup> Tarihçe, 42-43, translated by Sukran VAHIDE, 21-22

<sup>12</sup> *Tarihçe*, 31; Sahiner, N. *Said Nursi*, 47-8. trans. by Sukran Vahide, formerly Mary Weld, Sozler Publication

<sup>13</sup> Sahiner, N. Said Nursi, 52-53, and see: <http://www.sozler.org/biography/contents/c1.htm>, *When I was ten years old, I had great pride in myself, which sometimes even took the form of boasting and self-praise; although I myself did not want to, I used to assume the air of*

The dream of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) inspired him to study the Qur'an and Sunnah.<sup>14</sup> He understood the meanings of the Qur'an from the bottom of his heart as the main source of the various fields of knowledge such as spiritual and material knowledge, natural, social and human sciences, religious and ethical sciences, origin and creation of the universe, economic and social transactions, the hermeneutical dimension of sciences, the source of human civilization and man's final destiny. He had extraordinary intelligence and power of memory and memorized, for instance, the entire bulk of work on the principles of jurisprudence of the four schools of Islam, written by Shafi'i scholar Ibnu al-Subki, the *Cem'ul-Cevami*.<sup>15</sup> He studied religious and spiritual sciences from the great scholars such as Seyhs of eastern Anatolia, Sayyid Nur Mohammad, Abdur Rahman Tagi, Seyh Fehim, Seyh Mehmed Kufrevi, Seyh Emin Efendi, Molla Fethullah and Seyh Fethullah Efendi.<sup>16</sup> He also studied modern sciences such as history, geography, mathematics, geology, physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy and philosophy for relevelizing Islam to modern life.<sup>17</sup> From the early childhood, Bediuzzaman Said exhibited an appreciation of Islamic principles and values of uprightness, decency and rectitude as well as a compassionate concern with the miscellaneous and multifarious problems of mankind.

### His Scholarship

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi began his intellectual life as a prolific writer who wrote *Risale-i-Nur*, books, articles, letters, and words for saving and strengthening belief in God and other aspects of belief. His writings disclosed erudition and scholarship, a deep understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah, and a critical awareness of the main stream of Western thought and history. The

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*one undertaking some great work and mighty act of heroism. I used to say to myself: 'You are not worth tuppence, what is the reason for this excessive showing-off and boasting, especially when it comes to courage?' I did not know, and used to wonder at it. Then, a month or two ago [1944] the question was answered: the Risale-i Nur was making itself felt before it was written: 'Although you were a seed like a common chip of wood, you had a presentiment of those fruits of Paradise as though they were actually your own property, and used to boast and praise yourself.'*

<sup>14</sup> Shiner, N. *Said Nursi*, 52. See; Sukran, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Sukran, 12

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 23, Sahiner, N. *Son Sahitler*, iii, 16-20.

major scholarly work, the fruit of his life was *Risale-i-Nur*, ‘a masterly treatise on the concepts and principles of Islam for making Islam relevant to modern life and combating atheism and materialist philosophy.’<sup>18</sup> He began to write it in 1925 and completed in 1933 (eight years of his exilic life).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, in 1943, the latest issues such as “the fruits of Belief” and *Kurban Bayrami* or ‘*Eid al-Adha* (the feast of sacrifices) were written, while he was in Denizli prison.<sup>20</sup> His frequent arrests, court hearings, tiredness and travels from one place to another did not stop him from continuing his work on the interpretation of the Qur’an, writing books and his struggle of social change. The six-thousand-page *Risale-i-Nur* reflects the comprehensive meaning of the Qur’an and its relevance to man’s life, the purity and necessity of the age of the Prophet and man’s contemporary situation. He strongly dispelled the doubts voiced about Islam, replied to the oppositions and corrected the conceptual falsifications.<sup>21</sup>

The aim of his writing was to ensure the advancement and prosperity of Muslims, the Islamic world and their happiness in this world and the next, and that of all humanity.<sup>22</sup> The *Risale-i-Nur* is widely acclaimed and prescribed as a guide book for humanity throughout the world.

It became gradually clear to Bediuzzaman that the task he had set for himself required an organized and systematic method. His intention was to draw attention to the young academicians from the religious and modern science education and further train them in order to provide a new moral and intellectual leadership. He wanted to create an intellectual leadership that would be able to lead the nation without losing their identity in the modern context. Through reasoning and premonition, Bediuzzaman had foretold the resurgence of Islam and rise of the Islamic world, which began in the 1950s and continues at present with his noble contribution of *Risale-i-Nur*.<sup>23</sup> His

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Sukran, x

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, X

<sup>20</sup> Sukran, 280, see also Sualar, 196

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 48-49

<sup>22</sup> Sukran VAHIDE, *The Author of the Risale-i-Nur Collection Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Istanbul, Rehan Ofset, 2004), X.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, xii

emphasis was on the *Risale-i Nur*, on the truths of belief, the Divine Names and attributes and the Divine activity in the universe, the Divine existence and Unity, resurrection, prophethood, Divine Determining or destiny, and man's duties of worship.

With regard to the Qur'an, his emphasis was to understand it and to bring out its relevance to contemporary problems and concerns. The Qur'anic explanation is widely read and continues to make a significant impact on contemporary Islamic thinking worldwide.<sup>24</sup> All his understanding of Islam brought freshness to his approach and lent a wider appeal to his message. It is accepted widely by many that Bediuzzaman was successful in renewing and strengthening belief, as the emergence of a Regenerator of religion is promised in each century in a well-known hadith.<sup>25</sup>

In his treatise, he offers a new direction to renew the belief of a man, a way to reality (*haqiqat*), and the knowledge of God, which he describes as the highway of the Qur'an<sup>26</sup> and way of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). He provides a simple and easily understandable interpretation of the basic concepts and principles of Islam and avoids intricate terminologies. The book is widely popular even today and acclaimed as a guide book for understanding the Qur'an. Bediuzzaman states that "as time grows older, the Qur'an grows younger", which can ensure man's prosperity and happiness in this world and the next.

With regard to education reformation, Bediuzzaman realized that the task and the mission he set for himself required educational reforms. Within a short time of arriving in Istanbul on 19 Nov. 1908, Bediuzzaman set out ideas for educational reform which he then presented to Sultan Abdul Hamid.<sup>27</sup> His plan was to produce a kind of leadership that would be able to maneuver in political arena without losing their religious identity. He therefore, proposed to establish the *Medresetuz-Zehra* and restructure completely *medrese* education with an integrated approach for securing the future of Kurdistan, the unity of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, xiii

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, xii

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 390-391

the Empire and the entire Islamic world.<sup>28</sup> On a wider scale, the role of *Medresetuz-Zehra* was to unite the three traditions, namely, *medrese*, *mekteb* and *tekkes* through the process of integration.

In addition, all these matters discussed in the *Risale-i Nur* are set out as reasoned arguments and proved logically. The truths of belief are proved so clearly that even unbelievers can see their necessity.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to writing, Said had involved himself closely with social and political developments after the defeat of the Republican People's Party in the general elections of May 1950 in order to foresee the Islamic countries as a federation of "the United Islamic State."<sup>30</sup> The purpose of his struggle was to support '*hurriyet-i-Seri`ye*' (the freedom in accordance with *Shari`ah*) and to introduce the policies in order to strengthen education curriculum and develop relationship between Turkey and the rest of the Islamic world.<sup>31</sup> Bediuzzaman impressed on the Government the need to re-establish relations to regain the spirit of Islamic unity with three hundred and fifty million people of that time through the brotherhood of Islam. He also supported the signing of the Baghdad Pact and setting-up of CENTO in 1955 as an important step in establishing peace among Muslim countries. In connection with this Bediuzzaman strongly urged the Government to give a religious base to the Eastern University that was being planned by him that may play a central role in strengthening feelings of "Islamic nationhood" in the place of the divisive and harmful racialist nationalism of the former regime?<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sukran, 41-42

<sup>28</sup> Sahiran, N. *Said Nursi*, 85-87, Sukran, 43

<sup>29</sup> The main themes of *Risale-i-Nur* are: Tawhid, Risalah, Khilafah and Akhirah, God, man and universe and their relationship, man's position and the purpose of his creation on earth, freedom of religion, expression and fundamental human rights, enhancement of man's material and spiritual and moral aspects and criteria that guide him for achieving his happiness in this world and Hereafter, no hopelessness and despair, but the desire and enthusiasm to work continuously for the success of this world and Hereafter, education reforms and integration of revealed knowledge and human knowledge, reformation of mind, body and society, and socio-cultural-political change and struggle for self-dependent.

<sup>30</sup> Sukran, 332

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 332

<sup>32</sup> Sukran, 331, 553

### **Integration of Knowledge: Theoretical Dimensions and Practical Contributions of Bediuzzaman**

Several Muslim reformers and intellectuals, in the past, especially during the nineteenth century, struggled to revealed knowledge and scientific knowledge. Some of them are Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979), Muhammad Abduh (1845-1905) and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898). They believed that there should be a combination of revealed knowledge and human knowledge through adding western sciences to the existing curriculum of Islamic disciplines. They viewed that western sciences are necessary in developing Muslim society and would not cause any harm to Islamic values. Two types of education systems – religious stream and conventional stream – exist in the Muslim world, which produce dual citizens. The religious stream of education particularly was worse and was desperately in need of reformation.

As one of the contemporary reformers, Bediuzzaman felt that the whole system of education must be reoriented and integrated in accordance with the demand of time and necessity of society. In his view, in the course of time, the *medrese* syllabuses had become narrow and sterile with modern developments in science being rejected altogether. As a result, at the beginning of the twentieth century, *medreses* were producing '*ulama* who believed, together with the Europeans, that there was a clash and contradiction between certain 'externals' of Islam and certain matters of science (for instance, the belief that the Earth is round). This false idea had caused feelings of hopelessness and despair, and had shut the door of progress and civilization. He argues that "Islam is the master and guide of the sciences, and the chief and father of all true knowledge."<sup>33</sup> For integration of knowledge, his view is that religious subjects are taught in the new secular schools (*mektebs*) and that the positive sciences are taught in the religious schools (*medreses*). He argues that if the students are taught in this method, those in the secular schools will be protected from being away from religion, while those in the religious schools, from bigotry.<sup>34</sup> The main purpose of learning of science is to understand the Qur'an and prove its truths. Thus the Quranic miraculousness should become

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.sozler.org/biography/contents/c2.htm>

<sup>34</sup> Sahinar, N. Said Nursi, 75-77, see also Sukran Vahide, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 29-30

the guide, teacher and master for the entire humanity.<sup>35</sup> According to him, the process of integration means “to critically analyze the modern sciences, to identify differences and to incorporate them into curriculum of the Muslim universities within the framework of Islam. It is a process of critical evaluation as distinct from blind imitation, a process of sifting, filtering and reconstruction as distinct from wholesale rejection of Western thought. The aim is to critically appraise and reformulate social sciences within the framework of Islam for securing the future of Kurdistan, unity of the Empire and establishing centre for education for the eastern Islamic world.”<sup>36</sup>

It is interesting to note that Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s concept of integration of knowledge and its characteristics, given in the 1918s, are similar to those popularized it in the academic circles and propounded in the mid-1930 by Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi in his book *T’limat*.<sup>37</sup> According to Mawdudi, it means “to critically analyze the Western humanities and sciences” and “to recast them in accordance with the teachings of Islam”.<sup>38</sup> Its aim is to Islamize knowledge and to reform the existing educational system within the framework of Islam and also to transform present Muslim society into a truly Islamic society through educational reforms.<sup>39</sup> In 1982, the late Ism’ail R. al-Faruqi also proposed a similar concept of Islamization and integration of human knowledge in his book, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*.<sup>40</sup> According to him, the integration of knowledge is “to reorient systematically and restructure the entire field of human knowledge in accordance with a new set of criteria and categories, derived from, and based on the Islamic worldview.”<sup>41</sup> The aim is to evaluate critically the current

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<sup>35</sup> Sukran, 31 8

<sup>36</sup> Sukran, 43

<sup>37</sup> Mawdudi, *Ta’limat*, (Delhi: Markazi Maktab Islami, 1995), 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 17-18. See also Moten, A. Rashid, *Islamization of Knowledge in Theory and Practice: The Contribution of Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi*, (published by *Islamic Studies*, Islamabad, Pakistan, vol.43, Number 2, 2004), 257.

<sup>39</sup> Moten, A. Rashid, *Islamization of Knowledge in Theory and Practice: The Contribution of Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi*, (published by *Islamic Studies*, Islamabad, Pakistan, vol.43, Number 2, 2004)272.

<sup>40</sup> Ism’ail R. al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*, (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 15.

secular-religious duality of the educational system in Muslim societies and the lack of clear vision to guide and direct Muslim action and reformulate the existing educational system within the framework of Islam.<sup>42</sup>

However, in the 1918s, the concept of integration of knowledge and reform of the existing educational system were proposed by Bediuzaman Said Nursi through his writings and speeches which motivated Caliph Abdul Hamid to integrate religious sciences to modern sciences. His famous book, *Risale-i-Nur* shows that his whole life struggle was to establish one stream of educational system through the process of the integration of knowledge between science and religion. The main purpose of his initiative was to produce a sincere and committed Muslim citizen in order to get away from the crisis of the Muslim mind and to develop science and technology in the Muslim world.

As conceived by Bediuzzaman, integration of knowledge aims to resolving the problem of education in order to develop a healthy interaction between Western knowledge and Islamic heritage. His intention is to abolish the dualism in Muslim education in order to provide a sound and ideologically-oriented methodology to confront the contemporary challenges. For promoting integration of knowledge between religious sciences and modern sciences, Bediuzzaman proposed successfully an outline as a petition setting out his ideas for educational reform in the Eastern Provinces.<sup>43</sup> He realized that without Sultan's support, it is not possible to reform education. He also felt that the prime duty of the Caliph of the Muslims was to show closer and more constructive concern for the question of education and the *'ulama* institution, since this was the basis of the revitalization of Islam and of the Islamic world. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi suggested the following outline for integration of knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>43</sup> The text was later printed in *The East and Kurdistan Gazette*, dated 19 November, 1908. See Sagman, Ali Riza, in *Son Sahitler*, iv, 294-5, trans. by Sükran Vahide.

<sup>44</sup> It is fact that Bediuzzaman Said Nursi developed integrated approach to teach religious and modern sciences side by side and did not use the term 'integration of knowledge', but the frame work and approaches mentioned by him can be considered as the process of the integration of modern sciences and religious sciences.

1. To examine the reasons for the divergences and differences between various branches of the education system in order to build a true civilization.<sup>45</sup>
2. To analyze critically medrese education (traditional religious schools) and restructure completely its curriculum in order to integrate the modern education into the corpus of Islamic legacy by amending, reinterpreting and adapting its components on the basis of the Islamic worldview and its characteristics.<sup>46</sup>
3. To merge the three main branches of the education system –the *medreses* or traditional religious schools, the *mektebs* or new secular schools and *Sufi* schools – for making one stream of education.<sup>47</sup>
4. To incorporate the three dimensional elements into curriculum of educational institutions, which are material dimension, spiritual dimension and moral dimension.
5. To use three languages as the medium of instruction, called “tri-lingual” with Arabic being compulsory and emphasis given to native language.<sup>48</sup>
6. To value Islam as the master and guide of sciences and the father of all true knowledge in order to make closer Ulama (Islamic scholars) with Europeans who believe that there is a clash and contradiction between externals of Islam and certain matters of science.<sup>49</sup>
7. To emphasize establishing the university of “*Madresetiu’z Zehra* where the religious sciences and modern sciences would be taught side by side and “combined them”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sukran, 49.

<sup>46</sup> The purpose of this proposal is to democratize the madrasha education system and its diversification. See also: Bediuzzaman, *Munazarat*, (trans. by Sükran Vahide, p.43, Istanbul, Sozler Nesriyat San, 2004), 71

<sup>47</sup> Bediuzzaman, *Munazarat*, (trans. by Sükran Vahide, p.43, Istanbul, Sozler Nesriyat San, 2004), 71

<sup>48</sup> Three languages are Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish. See: Sukran, 43. (from *Munazarat*, translated by Sukran, 71).

<sup>49</sup> Sukran, 44, (Bediuzzaman, *Munazarat*, trans. by Sükran Vahide, Istanbul, Sozler Nesriyat San, 2004, 71).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 44. (Bediuzzaman, *Munazarat*, trans. by Sukran Vahide, Istanbul, Sozler Nesriyat San, 2004, 71)

8. It is also necessary to formulate new measures to meet the demands of the times, and to remove the false ideas, which caused feelings of hopelessness and despair and shutting the door of progress and civilization.<sup>51</sup>

Emphasizing religion and science, Bediuzzaman urges critical evaluation and assessment of both the religious and science education. He also argues that after studying critically the historical background of the whole system, if the traditional Muslim scholarship is found inadequate or erring from the vantage point of the Qur'an and Sunnah and their relevance to the problems of the present age, it should be duly modified. For strengthening his argument, he explains that "the religious sciences are the light of the conscience and modern sciences are the light of the reason".<sup>52</sup> His emphasis was to make one stream of the education system that leads to the real progress of the nation and community.<sup>53</sup> It is noticeable that for integration of knowledge, Bediuzzaman emphasizes the assessment of religious sciences as well as modern sciences.

Wholesale rejection of modern science or wholesale glorification of traditional Islamic scholarship is a wrong perception. Rationally-educated scholars consider traditionally-trained ones as an ignorant and unreliable and unable to discover and demonstrate the relevance of this heritage to the current problem. The traditionally-trained scholars regard the former as weak in beliefs and as incapable to understand classical literatures.<sup>55</sup> His reformation aims to facilitate the restructuring of life and institutions of the provinces, which would strengthen the unity of the ummah.<sup>56</sup> It would also save Islam from bigotry, racism, prejudice, superstitions, and false beliefs. It would also be a means of understanding the relationship and purpose of science and religion. He assumes that this integration would "open the door to spreading the beneficial aspects of constitutionalism."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>52</sup> Sukran, 44, see also *Munazarat*, 72

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 47-49.

<sup>55</sup> Sukran, 49.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 48-49.

<sup>57</sup> [http://www.sozler.org/symposium/2/symp\\_mubayd.htm](http://www.sozler.org/symposium/2/symp_mubayd.htm).

On a wider scale, the *Medresetü'z-Zehra* would unite the three traditions in the education system by representing “the most superior *mekteb* by the reason, the very best *medrese* by the heart, and the most sacred *zawiye* by the conscience”.<sup>58</sup> As a result of its unique value for the Islamic world, it would in time gain financial independence by reason of the donations and pious bequests, it would receive by religion. Both will produce high qualitative intellectuals.<sup>59</sup> During his time, there were three main branches of educational institutions, namely, the *medreses* or traditional religious schools, the *mektebs* or new secular schools, and the *tekkes* or Sufi disciplines, existed in society.<sup>60</sup> The heart of Bediuzzaman’s proposals lay in reconciling the three main branches into one. The embodiment of this rapprochement was the *Medresetü'z-Zehra*. Bediuzzaman attached the greatest importance to establishing this university where the religious sciences and modern sciences would be taught side by side.<sup>61</sup> While the role the *Medresetü'z-Zehra* was seen by Bediuzzaman as vital for securing the future of Kurdistan and unity of the Empire as well as acting as an important centre for the eastern Islamic world.<sup>62</sup> The general principles represented were applicable to all *medrese*. Several of the conditions, which Bediuzzaman considered essential, were mentioned in the petition: the *Medresetü'z-Zehra* and its two sister establishments should be known by the familiar name of *medrese* and the instruction should be in a language known by potential students.<sup>63</sup> In another work, *Münâzarat*, Bediuzzaman wishes for Islam to function like a consultative council, that is to say, through the mutual consultation (*shura*) of “the three divisions of the army of Islamic education”, those of the *medreses*, the *mektebs*, and the *tekkes*, so that “each would complete the deficiencies of the other”. His aim was for the *Medresetü'z-Zehra* to be an embodiment of this.<sup>64</sup> Another proposal given by him is to restructure *medrese* education completely in line with the demand of times and necessity of society. These consisted of what might be described

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<sup>58</sup> Sukran, 44

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 43

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 43

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 43

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 43

<sup>64</sup> *Münâzarat*, 76, trans. by Sükran Vahide, 43

as the democratization of the *medrese* system, and its diversification so that “the rule of the division of labor” could be applied.<sup>65</sup>

For preventing a blind imitation and exchanging public ideas and opinions, Bediuzzaman observed that there were Muslims who blindly imitated previous scholars and teachings of Islam without knowing the relevance of the issues, while another groups accepted and followed blindly the Western values and ideologies such as secularism and materialism without verification. In order to overcome this situation, Bediuzzaman proposed to have a discussion between students and Ulama and exchange their ideas and opinions in accordance with the needs of society. He believed that there was “scholastic despotism”, and “an offspring of political despotism”, which has opened the way to blind imitation (*taqlid*), and barred the way to searching for the truth.<sup>66</sup> In order to solve the problems of the modern age, he proposed two scientific and practical methods. One is that “constitutionalism among the ‘*ulama*” should be established “in the ‘*ulama* state.” The second is that the prevalent ideas should be emerged through the debate and exchange of ideas between students of varying disciplines. Bediuzzaman predicted that this would provide a strong stimulation and incentive for progress and development. Thus, “just as public opinion predominates in the state, so too should the prevailing opinions of the ‘*ulama* be müfti, and the prevailing opinions of the students be master and teacher.”<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, for establishing one stream of education, Bediuzzaman became a member of *Dar al-Hikmatl Islami*, established by the Caliph, for motivating the government as well as intellectuals. The aim of this body was to find solutions for problems confronting the Islamic world, to answer in a scholarly manner the attacks of oppositions, to combat those who attempted to discredit the religion of Islam. Hence, it was to serve the Muslim people of Turkey, answering questions, informing those concerning internal and external dangers, and generally meeting their religious needs with various publications. Most of the members of the body were prominent ‘*ulama*, and were divided into three major areas such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and

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<sup>65</sup> Shukran, 44-45.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid,45.

theology (*kalam*).<sup>68</sup> However, in November 1922, *Dar al-Hikmah* was closed. The situation did not allow for the full accomplishment of its aims.<sup>69</sup>

### **Establishing the University with Integrated Approach**

Bediuzzaman was aware of the problem of education during his lifetime. He therefore, strongly felt that without identifying shortcomings and revamping the existing educational system, it was impossible to change the mindsets of the Ummah and develop the nation. He realized that the entire system of education must be reformed. For reformation, he proposed educational reforms at all levels – elementary, secondary and tertiary. His emphasis was to establish *Medresetu'z-Zehra* in the form of a university for integration of knowledge where the religious sciences and modern sciences would be taught side by side.<sup>70</sup> His emphasis was also to restructure completely medrese education with modern approach. This consists of what might be described as the democratization of the medrese system.<sup>71</sup> He observed that there was a contradiction and clash between certain externals of Islam and certain matters of science. This false idea, to him, had caused feelings of hopelessness and despair and shut the door of *ijtihād* as well progress and civilizational development.<sup>72</sup> The existing dualism in education, its divergence into religious and secular education must be abolished, which produces dual citizen with hatred and distrust between ulama and scientists because ulama believed that there are basic differences between two systems.<sup>73</sup> He exemplifies that the sciences of religion are the light of the conscience, and the modern sciences are the light of the mind. The truth is manifested and reflected through the combination of the two. “The students' endeavor will take flight on those two wings”. When they are separated, it leads to bigotry in the one, and doubts and skepticism in the other.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Bediüzzaman Kürdî'nin Fihriste-i Makasadı ve Efkarının Programı, *Volkan* Nos. 83-4, in *Asar-i Bedi'îye*, 374, trans. by Sükran Vahide

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.cis-ca.org/voices/n/Nursi.htm>

<sup>69</sup> Albayrak, Sadık. *Son Devrin İslam Akademisi, Dar-ül Hikmet-il İslamiye*, İstanbul 1973, 7-9.

<sup>70</sup> Sukran WAHIDE, 43

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 43

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 44

<sup>73</sup> *Muhakemat*, 8, trans. By Sukran, 44.

<sup>74</sup> *Munazarat*, İstanbul 1977, 72, trans. By Sukran, 44.

To him, the ignorance is the root cause of sicknesses afflicting the Islamic world like backwardness, poverty, and conflict. The future sovereignty of nation would not lie in the sword, but in science. His emphasis was on the courage of belief, reason, and science as the Europeans are victorious through this.<sup>75</sup> He commented: “You must forge your swords out of the substance of science, industry, and the solidarity of Qur’anic wisdom.”<sup>76</sup>

His observation was that the existing educational system is the failure of achieving of the goal. He therefore, viewed that the existing syllabus of medrese and university do not meet the needs of students in Turkey for professional knowledge that would enable them to achieve the personal advancement and material gains. He also opined that the structures of the syllabus and curriculum of medrese and university must be rebuilt in consonance with the requirements of Islam and make it in a way that would must be adjusted with the requirements of the modern age. The aim of his proposal was to produce a kind of leadership that would be able to lead the nation and society in every aspect of life according to the teachings of Islam. Islam as a complete way of life promotes Muslims to be united with the peace of mind and body. For establishing the university, he suggested the following:

1. Medresetuz-Zahra would unite the three traditions in the educational system by representing the most superior *mekteb* by the reason, the best religious medrese by heart and the most sacred *zawiye*<sup>77</sup> by the conscience. As a result of its unique value for the Islamic world, it would in time gain financial independence by reason, high moral quality by the revelation and spiritual enhancement by the self-criticism and self-awareness.<sup>78</sup>
2. Religious subjects should be taught in the new secular schools (mektebs) and that the positive sciences are taught in the religious schools (medreses).
3. The purpose of this integration is to understand science from the Qur’anic perspective in order to prove its truths and reality. Understanding the Qur’an should be the main aim and purpose of learning science and object

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<sup>75</sup> *Divan-i Harb-i Orfi*, Istanbul 1990, 28 trans. By Professor Dr. Adem Tatli

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* , 54

<sup>77</sup> *Zawiye* means spiritual teachings.

<sup>78</sup> *Munazarat*, 74, trans. By Sukran, 44.

of life. Thus the Qur'anic miraculousness should become the guide, teacher and master for entire humanity.<sup>80</sup>

4. According to his observation, in contemporary universities where the natural, physical, mathematical, technological, social and human sciences are taught, the religious and spiritual aspects are ignored. As a result, they produced dual citizens in society who become either anarchists, or intellectuals who hold personal interests above everything and try to secure them in the shortest way.
5. Medrese education would transform from being “single faculty institutions” into “multi-faculty” institutions; and to put it into practice, “the role of division of labor” was in accordance with wisdom and the laws of creation.<sup>81</sup> The failure of its practice, to his opinion, in previous centuries, had led to despotism and the exploitation of learning in the medreses, which had headed them towards destruction.<sup>82</sup>
6. He stresses the need for specialization of the subject for which students have an aptitude and studying further subjects in so far as they would complement the main subject in order to gain a sufficient depth and penetrate the subject as required.<sup>83</sup>
7. Arabic as the language of the Qur'an should be introduced as a compulsory subject for understanding the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In a multi-racial society, his proposal was to use three languages, Arabic, Turkish, and Kurdish, with Arabic compulsory, Turkish necessary, and Kurdish optional.
8. The instrumental sciences should not only be emphasized, but the sacred sciences or religious sciences should also be incorporated in the syllabus.
9. In educational institutions, teachers should be experts in their respective languages and fields as well as role models and practicing Muslims with a

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<sup>80</sup> Sukran, 31

<sup>81</sup> Sukran, 45, (Bediuzzaman, *Munazarat*, (trans. by Sükran Vahide, Istanbul, Sozler Nesriyat San, 2004, 71)

<sup>82</sup> *Muhakemat*, 46-46, trans. By Sukran, 45.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 45,47.

sound understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah. It is a fact that the success of this university depends on the effective role of teachers and their contributions with their full commitments and sincerity to Islam.

10. Graduates of *Medresetuz-Zahra* and other state universities should have equal rights and opportunities regardless of languages, tribes, and nationalities in the fields of employments.
11. The teacher training schools should be established and trained teachers would teach at *Medresetuz-Zahra* and other educational institutions for a certain period. So that the order and progress of the one should pass to the other, and the virtue and religion of the other pass to the first.<sup>84</sup>
12. He advised his nation to incorporate 'the Risale-i Nur Collection' into the syllabus in all educational establishments of middle and higher level and to propagate its benefits through the electronic media such as the radio and television. Such a move would also be a means of uniting the nation of Turkey particularly and the Islamic world in general, (God willing). He commented:

I tell you certainly in accordance with numerous indications and my own firm conviction that in the near future this country and nation and its government will have extreme need of works like the *Risale-i Nur* before the world of Islam and the rest of the world, and though presenting it will demonstrate its existence, honor, pride, and historical glory.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Munazarat, 125-9. As he said: "As I have worked for the reality of the Risale-i Nur, so too have I worked for a full fifty-five years for a university in the centre of the Eastern Provinces, which lie between India, Arabia, Iran, Caucasia, and Turkestan, which would be both a university, and a modern school, and a *medrese*, in the style of al-Azhar University and bear the meaning of the *Medresetu'z-Zehra*..."

<sup>85</sup> *Emirdag Lahikasi*, i, 72, trans. By Professor Dr. Adem Tatli.

"Like al-Azhar University is a universal medrese in Africa, however much larger Asia is than Africa, Asia should have a place of learning, an Islamic university which is that much bigger, so that negative racialism should not corrupt the Muslim peoples, for example, the nations of Arabia, India, Caucasia, Iran, Turkistan, and Kurdistan. And so that it may be the means to a total unfolding of Islamic nationhood, which is true, positive, and sacred nationhood, and of the fundamental rule of the Qur'an: Indeed the believers are brothers." (*Emirdag Lahikasi*, ii, 195, trans. By Professor Dr. Adem Tatli).

It is interesting to note that the “expected model university” visualized by Bediuzzaman should be established like al-Azhar University. However, the model of his university is found with its aim, organizational structures, syllabus, and pattern in the 20th century in many Muslim countries, including the well-managed International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Established in 1983, the mission of this university is the

integration of knowledge between religious sciences and modern sciences with the vision of Islamization of human knowledge. This is a comprehensive institutions of higher learning in which all branches of knowledge are taught with the Islamic principles and values and the philosophy of knowledge.<sup>86</sup>

This is a fully residential university open to students from all-over the world. Students and teachers expected to observe Islamic obligations in everyday life. Abrabic and revealed knowledge courses are taught. The university offers major and minor courses for students of various disciplines. For instance, economics students can take Islamic subjects as minor courses and Islamic studies students can take economics as a minor course. At IIUM, all professional courses are taught in English, but students are required to reach the level of advanced Arabic proficiency. IIUM has also well-established “Research Centre” which promotes researchers to publish scholarly, innovative and scientific research. IIUM aims to produce an ideologically-sound and internationally-qualified Islamic leadership from the “Garden of Knowledge” and Virtue”.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

What does Bediuzzaman’s approach tell us about integration of religious and modern sciences for yielding one stream of educational system in the Muslim world? There is no doubt that integration of knowledge project is an important tool in reconciling the gap between scientists and religious scholars and

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<sup>86</sup> M. Kamal Hassan, “International Islamic University at Kuala Lumpur”, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 211. See also Abdul Rashid Moten, *Islamization of Knowledge in Theory and Practice: The Contribution of Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi*, in *Islamic Studies*, (Islamabad: vol. 43, number:2, 2004), 263.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 263.

breaking down their mystification approaches. For many Muslims, it is very important because the inevitability and indispensability of knowledge cannot be denied. However, the struggle for integration of knowledge is the outcome of the realization of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and other Muslim scholars that the existing dual educational system is not beneficial and fruitful for Muslim nation, but a dangerous malaise and tool for disuniting the ummah. It is a fact that thousands of university and college graduates in Muslim society are not aware of religious and ethical values, Islamic heritage (*turath*) and culture. The existing trend among Muslim intellectuals is that the West is a centre for knowledge. They are unaware that the body of this secular knowledge reflects the Western values, culture and historical experience, which emphasize only material and worldly gains and success. They are also unaware of the total denial of revelation as a source of guidance and knowledge for entire humanity. It is undeniable that the present education system in the Muslim world is based on the Western secular worldview, which makes it difficult for Muslim intellectuals to get out from the crisis of mind.

In the nineteenth century, the concept of integration was developed by concerned Muslim scholars, popularized in the academic circles of the Muslim world and incorporated into the curriculum of the Islamic universities. In mid-1930, Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi called for Islamization of Knowledge and the reform of existing educational system and wrote books and articles for the transformation of present Muslim society into a truly Islamic society through education reforms.<sup>88</sup> In 1982, the late Ism'ail R. al Faruqi proposed the Islamization and integration of knowledge project for reforming the existing educational system. Its cause was taken by the US-based International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). Several Islamic universities were established for the same purpose including International Islamic University Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>89</sup>

In the 1910s, the concept of integration of knowledge and reform of the existing education system were proposed by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi through his writings and speeches which motivated the then Caliph Abdul Hamid for

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<sup>88</sup> Moten, A. Rashid, *Islamization of Knowledge in Theory and Practice: The Contribution of Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdadi*, (published by *Islamic Studies*, Islamabad, Pakistan, vol.43, Number 2, 2004)272.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 272

integrating religious sciences into modern sciences. His famous book *Risale-i-Nur* shows that his whole life struggle was to establish one stream of education system on the basis of integration of knowledge framework between science and religion. The main purpose of his initiative was to produce sincere and committed Muslim citizens in order to get away from the crisis of the Muslim mind and to develop science and technology in the Muslim world.

For the integration of knowledge, Bediuzzaman should be credited for prescribing the reforms of the education system and for producing writings which embody integration in practice. His intellectuality, creativity, clarity of thought and systematic approach is presenting the Islamic social, economic, ethical and political system have attracted the attention of many Muslim intellectuals all over the world. His ideas about integration of knowledge and the reforms of education appear in playing a remarkable role in shaping the Muslim mind. These ideas, however, are yet to receive their due recognition.