

Islam's Universality and the *Risale-i Nur's* Method of Interpreting the Qur'an's Universality

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Abstract

Religion came together with the first man as a way of life, making it impossible to separate them. For to do so is opposed to the innate nature of things and gives rise to numerous complications for both the individual and society. As is shown by the purpose of the universe's creation looking to man and everything being centered on him, and the things told him by the book of the universe being supported by the scriptures, which are all essentially the same differing only in secondary matters, and instructors being sent to expound both 'books' and to hasten to man's assistance - as is shown by these, in consequence of God's mercy, every age He has called men to a religion-centered way of life, and He continues to do so. It is clear that Islam tried to throw light on in a general sort of way, is a universal message addressing all peoples and all ages. The subjects and general principles it comprises are sufficiently extensive to demonstrate this aspect of it. For it is universal not only in its primary source, the Qur'an, but also in Hadiths, which are based on revelation, and in the general principles derived from these two sources. The *Risale-i Nur*, one of the most important interpretations of Islam in modern times, lays considerable emphasis on Islam's universality, stressing particularly that contrarily to what is supposed. Just as the universe is sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy everyone, so the universal message possesses the same breadth and vitality and may address all minds and satisfy them; contrarily to other speech, it neglects nothing. Thus, this paper tried to describe the *Risale-i Nur's* Method of Interpreting the Qur'an on Islamic Universality.

Keywords: Religion, Islamic Universality, Interpretation, al-Qur'an, *Risale-i Nur*

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Abstrak

Agama datang bersama-sama dengan manusia pertama sebagai pandangan hidup (*way of life*), sehingga mustahil untuk memisahkan dua hal ini dalam kehidupan manusia. Walaupun pemisahan itu dilakukan, tentu bertentangan dengan fitrah manusia dan akan menimbulkan berbagai konflik individu dan masyarakat. Sebagaimana yang bisa dilihat dari tujuan penciptaan alam semesta bagi manusia dan semua hal telah digambarkan oleh “Kitab Alam Semesta” yang mendapat dukungan penjelasan dalam Kitab Suci. Pada dasarnya, antara keduanya tidaklah terdapat perbedaan kecuali hanya dalam beberapa hal sekunder saja. Untuk itu diperlukan interpretasi untuk bisa menjelaskan kedua ‘buku’ tersebut. Oleh karena itu, - sebagai konsekuensi dari rahmat Allah - setiap zaman telah dikirimkan utusan yang mengajarkan manusia tentang ajaran agama sebagai jalan hidup agar dapat membantu mempercepat pemahaman manusia akan pesan-pesan maupun risalah tersebut. Hal ini cukup jelas khususnya dalam Islam, sebagai salah satu agama yang menjelaskan dengan berbagai model metode tentang universalitas *risalah* tersebut untuk semua orang dan semua umur. Karena bersifat universal atau menyeluruh, intepretasi yang didasarkan pada wahyu, dan *common sense* itu tidak hanya bersumber dari sumber utama al-Qur’an, tetapi juga dari al-Hadits. Untuk itu, dibutuhkan suatu metode baru yang dapat secara universal dan komprehensif memberi penjelasan lebih tentang konsep-konsep tersebut. Diantara metode tersebut adalah *Risale-i Nur*, yang merupakan salah satu metode interpretasi yang paling penting dalam Islam pada saat ini, meletakkan penekanan pada universalitas Islam, terutama tentang apa yang sebaliknya dengan apa yang seharusnya. Seperti halnya pesan yang terdapat pada alam semesta yang cukup komprehensif bisa memuaskan pemahaman semua orang, sehingga pesan yang universal ini memiliki keluasan jangkauan yang tentunya sama. Bertolak dari hal tersebut, tulisan ini mencoba untuk menggambarkan metode *Risale-i Nur* dalam menafsirkan pandangan al-Qur’an tentang universalitas ajaran Islam.

Kata Kunci: Agama, Universalitas Islam, Penafsiran, al-Qur’an, *Risale-i Nur*

Introduction

Man and religion form an inseparable whole. Religion came together with the first man as a way of life, making it impossible to separate them. For to do so is opposed to the innate nature of things and gives rise to numerous complications for both the individual and society. As is shown by the purpose of the universe's creation looking to man and everything being centred on him, and the things told him by the book of the universe being supported by the scriptures, which are all essentially the same differing only in secondary matters, and instructors being sent to expound both 'books' and to hasten to man's assistance - as is shown by these, in consequence of God's mercy, every age He has called men to a religion-centred way of life, and He continues to do so.

With the verse, "*I only created man and jinn that they should worship Me,*"¹ Almighty God is saying that the true aim in the creation of conscious beings is worship. Creation, therefore, which in the Qur'an is constructed on worship, in Qur'anic commentaries is seen in terms of "recognizing and knowing," thus emphasizing the importance of the object of worship being known in the performance of worship.

Since, despite their differing in secondary matters, the sources and aims of all religions are the same, their fundamentals are also the same.² In every religion sent to humanity since Adam, such matters as belief in God, belief in the hereafter, the institution of prophethood, and existence of the angels have always been the same. Nevertheless it is a known fact that they have differed in a number of particulars. In Islam a matter that differs from previous religions is its being universal in a particular sense.

If we define universality³ in its meanings of "world-embracing," "concerning all humanity," and "on a world scale," as "a religion or political doctrine, or legal or economic system, or a philosophical teaching which answers humanity's expectations irrespective of time and place,"⁴ we see that Islam is the only system that fits the definition

¹ Qur'an, 51:56

² *Ibid.*

³ Hancerlioglu Orhan, *Türk Dili Sozluğu*, (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1995), 217.

⁴ Mahmud Kaya, "Islam'ın Evrenselliği Üzerine" in *Ebedi Risaleler I*, (Izmir: Isik Yayinlari, 1993), 301.

completely. Islam appeared claiming universality; its universality was demonstrated by the principles it put forward. This will be understood by anyone who refers to its sources and sees the general principles apparent in many matters from the generality in its address to the profundity of its contents, from the anthropocentric world it founded to its preserving its original form, from the sacredness of its source to its accepting all societies together with their own cultures so long as they are not opposed to its basic teachings.

Islam is a religion that has been perfected,⁵ and God's Messenger, at the centre of its dissemination, representation, and lawmaking, is its last prophet.⁶ He is the final solution for mankind, for whom there is no alternative.⁷ This means that he can answer mankind's needs in all matters till the end of time.

So that our subject should not remain merely theoretical, we shall attempt to throw light on it by discussing some of the matters mentioned above.

Islam's Universality in Respect of those it Addresses

Primarily, all religions address man. It is a fact, however, that religions other than Islam address not all mankind, but a particular people or limited regions. As the final religion, Islam was revealed complete and without deficiency for mankind, who advances towards its perfection. Moreover, it embraces all conscious creatures, including the jinn.⁸

The Qur'an frequently speaks of the previous prophets, and while relating their messages mentions their efforts to carry out their responsibilities towards their peoples and tribes. Thus, expressions

⁵ This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion (5:3).

⁶ Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets (33:40).

⁷ If anyone desires a religion other than Islam [submission to God] never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost [all spiritual good] (3:85).

⁸ The Qur'an's address encompasses the jinns as well as men. Usually the second person plural addresses men and jinn, while in the verse Soon shall We settle your affairs, of both your worlds (55:31), it mentions both. There is also a sura about the jinns. It is well-known that the Prophet met with jinns and that they believed in him. For details, see 72:1 and Qur'anic commentaries on the verse.

like "O my people!"⁹ and "O Children of Israel!"¹⁰ preponderate. But when it comes to Islam, in both the Qur'an¹¹ and in Hadith,¹² the address immediately becomes general and all mankind are called on with such expressions as "O men!" and "O sons of Adam!" In addition, the frequent use of words such as "[God's] servants,"¹³ "man,"¹⁴ and "worlds,"¹⁵ corroborate the universal dimension of the message.

Moreover, in numerous of its verses the Qur'an shows that it addresses all humanity and proclaims this to everyone in various ways. The following verses demonstrating this will spring to the mind of almost everyone who busies themselves with the Qur'an: *Say, "O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of God;"*¹⁶ *But you are truly a warner, and to every people a guide;*¹⁷ *We sent you not, but as a Mercy to all the Worlds;*¹⁸ *We have not sent you but as a universal [Messenger] to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them [against sin], but most men understand not;*¹⁹ *It is He Who has sent His Messenger with Guidance and the religion of Truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolators may detest it.*²⁰

Although at first glance, the verse *...the Mother of Cities and all around her*²¹ does not express this meaning, when studied carefully it is seen to display a universal aspect. It differs from others in its giving precedence to the places the religions appeared. For the phrase *and all around her* refers not to the immediate environs; it necessitates warning firstly *the Mother of Cities*, then all humanity. Almost

⁹ There are numerous such verses, for example: 2:54; 5:21; 6:78, 135; 7:59, 61, 65, 67, 73, 79, 85, 93; 10:71, 83; 11:28, 29, 30, 50, 51, 52, 61.

¹⁰ See, 2:40, 47, 122; 3:49; 5:72, 78; 17:2, 4, 101, 104; 20:8; 43:59; 61:6.

¹¹ See, 2:21, 168, 187, 221; 3:138; 4:1, 79, 105, 133, 165, 170, 174; 7:158; 9:3; 10:2, 23, 57, 104, 108; 14:1, 44, 52; 16:44; 22:1, 5, 49, 73; 31:33; 53:3, 5, 15; 49:13; 7:26, 27, 31, 35, 172; 17:70; 36:60.

¹² In numerous Hadiths and foremost his Farewell Sermon, God's Messenger discusses particular events in general terms, and intending everyone rather than individuals, says: "O you people!" "O Sons of Adam!", addressing all humanity.

¹³ See, Qur'an, 2:207; 3:15, 20, 30; 14:31; 15:39; 17:53; 25:63; 29:56; 34:9; 39:10, 16, 53; 40:31, 44; 43:68; 44:18; 50:8; 19:94

¹⁴ See, Qur'an, 2:187, 189, 221, 243; 3:4, 97, 138; 4:58, 79, 105, 165; 9:3; 10:2, 60, 99; 13:6; 14:1, 44, 52; 16:44; 17:60, 89, 106; 18:54.

¹⁵ Qur'an, 25:1.

¹⁶ Qur'an, 7:158

¹⁷ Qur'an, 13:7.

¹⁸ Qur'an, 21:107.

¹⁹ Qur'an, 34:27.

²⁰ Qur'an, 61:9.

everywhere in the Qur'an the word 'man' (who) expresses this generality, including the words that follow it. For example, in the verse, *Those in the heavens (man fi 'al-samâwât)*²² refers to all animate creatures in the heavens, and in *Those on the earth (man fi al-ard)*²³ all conscious creatures on the earth.

In fact, the verse is setting out a principle of communicating religion, and if we consider it from this point of view, we see that it is describing the natural progression of such a call. For first of all the Qur'an informed the Prophet that he should start from his close relatives,²⁴ and it is known historically that as a group it was to them that he first made the call. On considering it in respect of time and place, one cannot contradict this. For it is in the nature of things that ideas should concern and be presented to those close at hand.

The Qur'an's verses and the Prophet's words show that the religion addresses not only the Arabs, nor any particular time. As it addresses Abu Bakr so it addresses Abu Jahl, and as it speaks to 'Umar so it speaks to Abu Lahab. And as it was concerned with the Arabian Peninsula, so it addresses all the world from America to Russia and from Japan to Australia. The difference between them is that some respond to the call, identifying with it, while others stop up their ears as when it first appeared, disappearing down the labyrinths of racialism and obduracy, while others are deaf to it due to prejudice stemming from lack of knowledge.

Islam's Universality in Respect of its Sources

Everything produced by limited thought is doomed to grow old. No idea unable to renew itself, which does not labour to conform to the conditions of its age, is exempt from this. What underlies ideas untouched by the centuries is only pure revelation, or ideas that have benefited from the atmosphere of revelation in some way or another. Even the most pretentious principles produced by human intelligence become dulled by age, losing their originality. This is most probably the reason legal systems in our times have to be frequently changed.

²¹ Qur'an, 6:92.

²² See, Qur'an, 3:83; 10:66; 17:55; 19:93; 21:19; 22:18; 24:41; 27:65, 87; 30:26; 39:68; 55:29.

²³ See, Qur'an, 3:83; 10:66; 17:55; 19:93; 21:19; 22:18; 24:41; 27:65, 87; 30:26; 39:68; 55:29.

²⁴ Qur'an, 26:214.

Not only is Islam the only system uneroded by the course of time, it is also the focus of ever-increasing interest.²⁵ Its source being divine, it is under divine guarantee against corruption and change.²⁶ It is impossible to speak of God being bound by time -since He creates it- so it is impossible for the principles he has laid down to lose their value in the face of changing temporal conditions. For as the witness of all things,²⁷ just as He has knowledge of the situation when the principles were laid down, so He knows how things will develop over the period of their utilization.²⁸ As with His existence, His knowledge is without beginning or end. What could be more natural than the perpetual vitality of the principles put forward by a power that while creating sees their final point?

It is entirely natural that since the identity of the speaker, the situation in which his words were spoken, the position of the one addressed, and the atmosphere necessitating his words' utterance all have an effect on the speech's value, speech that has God's Word as its source and a religion represented by God's Messenger should encompass all times and express a universal value.

Islam cannot be defined in relation to its prophet, as with other religions.²⁹ It was sent by means of the trustworthy envoy³⁰ to the most trustworthy man by God, Who is All-Merciful and Compassionate.³¹ It was revealed by the One Who knows the inner secrets of the heavens and earth.³² In which case, in no way can it be corrupted or made futile.³³ All efforts to denigrate it from the day it appeared to the present have been fruitless; so too attempts to defame

²⁵ What underlies the non-universality of other religions is besides their not nurturing such an aim, the words of their scriptures. For these were once divine, but were mostly substituted by human words. That is to say, they were changed and corrupted.

²⁶ We have without doubt sent down the message, and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption] (15:9).

²⁷ Qur'an, 22:17; 34:47; 41:53; 58:6.

²⁸ A verse which approaches the question from the point of view of guidance: Is then who gives guidance to truth more worthy to be followed, or he who finds not guidance [himself] unless he is guided? (10:35)

²⁹ Orientalists' use of the term "Mohammedanism" is entirely ideological and the result of twisting the truth. The Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) position is important, but just as he is not the source of Islam, so the Qur'an was not the product of his thought. See, Qur'an, 16:44; 81:19-21; Muhammad A. Draz, *En Muhim Mesaj Kur'an*, (Izmir: Isik Yayinlari, 1994), 13.

³⁰ Qur'an, 81:21.

³¹ Qur'an, 41:1-6.

³² Qur'an, 25:4-6.

it in the present and future will not taint it, but on the contrary increase its vitality.

Islam's universality does not spring only from the Qur'an, its primary source; the Sunnah also holds a special place in this matter.³⁴ Similarly, the deductive methods derived from both these sources have been influential. In any case, in the final analysis its universality comes from revelation and thus has a single source.³⁵ Thus, since Islam as a whole proceeds from one source and is a system that is not static and lifeless but retains its vigour since the area outside the fundamental teachings is left open to men by that source, Islam is universal, not only in a number of respects, but as a whole.³⁶

Islam's Universality in Respect of its Preserving its Original Form

As a religion which began with the command to recite and with the oath of "*the pen and what it writes,*" Islam draws attention to the importance of both. Islam is also the only system which preserves Divine revelation in its original form, a natural consequence of the above two commands. Whatever the reasons, it cannot be said that the Torah and Gospels of today are the same as those revealed to Moses and Jesus.³⁷ The sensitivity shown both at the time of revelation and subsequently resulted in the Qur'an, Islam's source, preserving its original form, as though divinely preserved. That is to

³³ Those who reject the message when it comes to them [are not hidden from Us]. And indeed it is a Book of exalted power. * No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it; it is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise (41:41-2). Another verse indicating the unity of the Qur'an's source is Do they not consider the Qur'an [with care]? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy (4:82).

³⁴ For discussion of the universality of Divine messengership. See, Ramazan el-Buti, "Hz. Muhammed'in Risaletinin Evrenselligi," in *Ebedi Risalet I*, (Izmir: Isik Yayinlari, 1993), 311 ff.

³⁵ Qur'an, 53:2-4.

³⁶ For Islam's universality, see also, Kaya, "Islam'ın Evrenselligi Uzerine," in *Ebedi Risalet I*, 301 ff.

³⁷ The Qur'an mentions that the communities of the Torah and Gospels have from time to time corrupted the scriptures (See, Qur'an, 2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41) and changed them (see, 2:59, 181; 7:62; 48:15). The councils and similar events held throughout history demonstrate this. As Muhammad Hamidullah said, at the most these consist of biographical facts similar to the Prophet's biography. See, Hamidullah, *Kur'an-i Kerim Tarihi*, (Istanbul: IFAV, 1993), 20-21. It is for this reason that God's Messenger (PBUH) said that any passage from the Torah and Gospels should not be immediately affirmed or denied, for it might mean denying a truth or confirming an error, and that the best course was to refer the result to God. (See, Bukhari, Shahadat, 29; Tafsir Sura (2), 11; Abu Da'ud, 'Ilm, 2; Musnad, vi, 136.

say, every single one of its words is divine speech.

History had certainly never previously witnessed the attention paid from the beginning of the Qur'anic revelation to its final verse to preserving the verses by writing, memorizing, and the practice of them in daily life. In addition, every year the verses so far revealed were repeated by the Prophet together with Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation, and this event, called *arza*, was repeated twice the year preceding the Prophet's death, disallowing even the slightest doubt concerning the sources of the religion that would address all mankind until the end of the world.

The same may be said about the preservation of the original form of Hadiths, the second source. Despite the initial prohibition on writing Hadiths, which stemmed from anxiety at their possible confusion with the Qur'an. This did not continue throughout the Prophet's mission and did not include everyone. The Hadiths were thus transmitted in two ways, through being memorized and being recorded in writing, and became the source of Islamic culture.

Learning by heart, a major means of transmitting culture at that time,³⁸ was employed to a maximum when it came to Hadiths. A result of this was the similarity between Hadiths which had been gathered together into collections independently and in different regions, with the use of the same words even, which demonstrates the extreme care of the people of the time and is truly striking.

It is a known fact that at certain times and for particular reasons new words were added to some Hadiths. But the specialist scholars of Hadith did not permit that these should be mixed in with the Prophet's words, and one should not forget the works they wrote, describing who had forged what and why.

Islam's Universality in Respect of the Principle of Equality

Any system claiming to be universal should contain principles ensuring absolute equality. For in the face of the great variety of cultures and physical differences, only those systems which are broad enough to address all humanity may be all-embracing and persist

³⁸ In pre-Islamic Arabian society, verbal culture based on memorizing was dominant rather than a written culture. The people's minds were therefore very alert and their ability to memorize what they heard, highly developed. This is proved by someone like 'Umar being able recite and declaim poetry for a whole day without stopping.

through time. Approaches which classify people, not according to colour and social prejudices, but according to their worth in God's sight,³⁹ may offer hope to people and fulfil their expectations. It should not be forgotten however, that this classification is not binding legally.⁴⁰

It is unthinkable that understandings which address a particular people or idea,⁴¹ classify people according to their colours, insist on the superiority of their own school of thought and look on people as servants or even slaves, should be long-term or should bring life to all the earth.

The Qur'an states that the Muslim should tell the truth, even if it is against himself. Significant evidence for its universality is its requiring that justice should be carried out whatever the circumstances; its recalling Divine knowledge and the hereafter in the face of possible wrong conduct; and its carrying out absolute justice in the true meaning, not only apparently.

Significant too from the point of view of corroborating this approach of the Qur'anic aim of carrying out justice, which has an important place in the implementation of the principle of equality, was the Prophet's recalling the absolute justice of the hereafter to those who misled judges by offering powerful evidence in a case.

As the propagator of a religion which addresses all humanity, and put forward general principles in its injunctions and favours such methods as independent judgements (*ijtihâd*), analogy (*qiyâs*), 'urf, *maşlahat*, *ḡarûrât*, and considers everyone as equal before the law as the teeth of a comb, and establishes equality between people in practice, God's Messenger (PBUH) proclaimed that class differences or nationalism and racialism should not lead to inequality, and that neither was the non-Arab superior to the Arab, and vice versa, nor was the red-skin superior to the blackskin, and vice versa. When the daughter of one of the notables stole something and tried

³⁹ See, Qur'an, 49:13.

⁴⁰ According to the principles of Islam, it is only in respect of taqwa (piety or fear of God) that a person may be granted superiority over others, and taqwa is not a concept which is applicable in law. That is, for the greater part, its consequences look to the hereafter. It is therefore unthinkable that a person should have a privileged position before the law because of his taqwa.

⁴¹ Those who say they are beloved of God and are His "sons" (See, Qur'an, 5:18) and for this reason claim to be different and superior to other people, and therefore only call certain races and peoples to religion - such people cannot claim to be universal.

to use the Prophet's close associates to get preferential treatment, it was none other than the Prophet himself who responded angrily, informing them that even if his own daughter Fatima had committed the crime, he would not have hesitated to inflict the necessary penalty. Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) showed that the law could not be compromised whoever the criminal. He considered the presence of privileged persons in society to be an obstruction to justice, and said that one reason previous communities had perished was the widespread privilege accorded to their members.

The primacy of the law is fundamental and God's Messenger (PBUH) always observed this principle. For example, on one occasion his staff touched a man who used to make people laugh with his jokes, and the man was upset. On the Companion requesting 'retaliation' (*qasaṣ*), God's Messenger complied. However, since the place on his body the staff had touched had been unclothed, he wanted the Prophet to open his garment.

Equality is thus not merely hypothetical; the necessary principles were provided for its practice and it was insisted that the law be supreme. In this way, examples from daily life were provided for subsequent generations. This demonstrates clearly that the religion would not be wiped out by the passage of time like other systems, but would continue to bring happiness to people in every age.

Moreover, the following general principles demonstrate how progressive Islam is in the question of universality: only the perpetrator of a crime being punished for a crime,⁴² everyone being considered innocent until proved guilty,⁴³ and public rights being defended rather than the rights of the criminal.⁴⁴ This will be understood more clearly if compared with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,⁴⁵ which came on the agenda towards the end of

⁴² Five times the Qur'an states that no one can be held answerable for another's crime: No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another. (See, 6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38).

⁴³ "Innocent until proved guilty" is a principle of Islamic law which was put on the statute books (Mecelle) [19th century Turkey - Tr.]

⁴⁴ Dissuasion is the chief aim of the penalties put forward by Islamic law, and the cleansing of society of criminals. It is for this reason that in 'retaliation,' with the exception of the parents' pardon, the penalties are generally applied on the side of the perpetrator of the crime, and another substitute not recognized.

⁴⁵ The Agreement comprises 30 articles and covers such basic rights as freedom, equality, law, right of ownership, freedom of conscience, thought, ideas, and religion,

the first half of the 20th century and was proclaimed on 10th December, 1948, having been signed by a number of countries. In fact, a comparison of the Declaration with the Farewell Sermon⁴⁶ of God's Messenger (PBUH) will be sufficient to give an idea of Islam's profundity. While the former is only in the form of recommendations, the latter has the vigour to be applied in life. Furthermore, if considered from the point of view of applicability, in the so-called civilized countries today even these rights are violated from time to time, while in the age of the Prophet they were applied promptly, the Prophet himself furnishing the best example. The most striking examples in the Farewell Sermon are the abolition of usury and interest and blood feuds, and the good treatment of slaves.⁴⁷

Islam's Universality in Respect of Contents

Everything "green or withered" has a place in the Qur'an;⁴⁸ it is "a Book explaining all things."⁴⁹ However, everything having a place in it, does not mean that everything is explained in detail. For God has bestowed on man, His addressee, the power and intelligence to solve the matters it alludes to, wanting him to employ the knowledge passed down from generation to generation in understanding the Book. Moreover, He sent His Messenger as a guide to men, in order to explain the truth and dispel misunderstandings, and He charged him with communicating, expounding, illustrating, and explaining the message. Thus, with its source, which came in

social security, and the right to free elections and to be elected. Turkey accepted the Agreement through the law no. 3/9119 passed 6th April 1949. It was published in the Resmi Gazete No: 7217 on 27th May 1949, and was recommended to be taught and explained in schools and other educational establishments.

⁴⁶ In respect of time and place, the Farewell Sermon addressed the 7th century Arabs. But by virtue of the universality of its injunctions, it transcends time and place, showing that it addresses all times and all places. God's Messenger (PBUH) used a general form of address, saying: "O men! O people!" and sets forth universal principles concerning usury and interest, blood feuds, human rights, and general ethics.

⁴⁷ The abolition of slavery too was not only recommended and enjoined; practices ingrained in pre-Islamic society were uprooted and abolished in a way that was feasible. A striking example was the Prophet marrying the freed slave Zayd to the aristocratic Zaynab, and when the marriage failed he himself taking her as a wife on Divine instructions. Another example is Zayd's son Usama being appointed to lead a group among whom were prominent Companions.

⁴⁸ See, Qur'an, 6:59.

⁴⁹ See, Qur'an, 16:89; 17:12.

summary form, the religion acquired a broad scope on being reflected in daily life.

The Qur'an's chief aim is to convey universal ethical principles to men so that they may be perfected. For a society made up of thoroughly mature people will solve all the problems confronting it; its members will modify their conduct accordingly. Although few verses were revealed related to legislation,⁵⁰ clear evidence that Islam retains its vigour in every age and can continue to exist in its original form are its administering the law through consultation,⁵¹ basing agreements on mutual acceptance,⁵² preserving the balance of justice,⁵³ preserving this balance without compromising justice even in the face of the wrongdoing and excesses of others,⁵⁴ and its allowing a broad scope of action through institutions such as independent judgements of the law (*ijtihâd*), analogy, application of discretion in legal decisions (*istihsân*), exceptions (*istitsnâ'*), *sadd dharâ'i*. That is to say, Islam does not consist of knowledge limited to the pages of books as is supposed; as is shown through the matters we have discussed, it comprises knowledge that is virtually limitless. In any event, is the Qur'an not a book that is perpetually new, addressing the different people of every age in accordance with its multilayered meanings?

Ethical principles, family relations, belief, worship, social relations, information about previous communities, cosmic events, and matters pertaining to the hereafter are all universal questions that concern everyone in every age. A point some people today find it difficult to grasp is that the Qur'an does not change with changes of time and place, but comprises subjects which are topical in all eras. For it is the work of God, Who is not restricted by time and

⁵⁰ Very few misdemeanours -murder, adultery, slander, and anarchy- are mentioned in the Qur'an, which fosters a gradual approach, and related to this, lays down only a few penalties. It is understood from this that the Qur'an's aim is not to create misdemeanours and those who perpetrate them, but to reduce them to the minimum. The penalties it cites moreover, aim inspite of everything to dissuade from crime those whose natures are being corrupted.

⁵¹ See, Qur'an, 3:159; 42:38; 2:233.

⁵² Qur'an, 2:233, 282; 4:29, 58; 16:90; 49:9.

⁵³ Qur'an, 5:8; 42:15.

⁵⁴ A verse related to the subject: O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just; that is next to piety; and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all you do (5:8).

space, and sees all time and all space simultaneously, and knows them. The One Who sent it is not within time so that the message He sent should not be universal. Since the message is the same as when it was first sent, it is God Himself, Who is transcendent, Who speaks to us in the Qur'an.

While philosophers have striven throughout the centuries to grasp universal truths, Islam offers clear knowledge, and gives unerring messages not only about the life of this world but also about that of the next. Numerous questions which at various times thinkers have looked on as absolute truth, have in time lost their relevance, and attention has been focussed on other questions, seen as absolute truth in their place. For instance, in one period rationalism was considered to be the only doctrine, while in another it was intuitionism. However, both approaches are the products of extremes, and in the view of Islam's principles neither are the sole truth. Both are partially true, but absolute truth cannot be reached either by the intellect alone, or by intuition; a middle way has to be found by employing both the intellect and intuition and the senses. In fact, if the Divinely bestowed bounties of intellect, thought, emotion, and the heart had been used in the way required by the Qur'an, the conclusions reached by thinkers would have been very different and would have passed into history as fluctuations of the same line. In any event, the opportunity has still not been lost.

Despite being universal in the matters it comprises, Islam has been the object of certain accusations. However, these are related to the law and its penalties, and may be debated in the appropriate circumstances and replied to; their solutions are clear. Accusations such as these are the product of a certain culture, and not universal, and include historical interpretations which do not recognize the right to life even.

The questions Islamic law foresees give precedence to dissuasion, and aim to protect and purify of crime not the accused but society. Those who today find Islam's legal sanctions unpracticable are disregarding the crime and the situation of those affected by it, and appear to defend the criminal in questions of belated justice, whose effect has been forgotten, as though it was something new. Whereas if the incident is considered while still fresh -for that is the general opinion of those involved in similar incidents- it will be a question of exemplary punishments beyond that which Islam foresees. When considered in unbiased fashion, the certain conclusion

will be to give the guilty their deserts without delay, a result of which is the protection of the community.

The *Risale-i Nur's* Method of Interpreting The Qur'an's Universality

Since, as is well known, the *Risale-i Nur* is one of the most important interpretations of Islam in the present day, it should contain new approaches in the question of Islam's universality, and so it does. However this is not only in sections allotted to universality; the question is touched on in almost every subject it deals with and particularly in discussions connected with the Qur'an. Employing methods of persuasion peculiar to itself, it treats Islam's universality in a natural way which avoids compulsion.

Bediuzzaman's definition of the Qur'an⁵⁵ alone reflects a universal approach. He looks on the universe as a totality,⁵⁶ and the Qur'an as a missive sent for those who do not comprehend the tongues of the physical world,⁵⁷ that is, as an interpreter of the book of the universe.⁵⁸

If considered from the point of view of the subjects dealt with in the *Risale-i Nur*, it is seen that they are to a great extent identical with the subjects the Qur'an deals with and address individuals directly. Questions related to belief, which are given precedence, are clearly relevant for everyone at all times and therefore cannot be thought of as addressing any particular historical period. When considered from this point of view, it is seen that the parts called *The Treatise on Nature*, *The Fruits of Belief*, and *Resurrection and the Hereafter*, as well as the sections on prophethood, all form good examples.

In virtually every matter, the *Risale-i Nur* directs attention to the Qur'an, the source of religion and its most important constituent, and focusses on it. For instance, Bediuzzaman says: "Our nationhood is a body; its spirit is Islam and its intellect the Qur'an and belief."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ For Bediuzzaman's definition [not included here], see: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1996), 366-7 / *The Words* [Eng. trans.], (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, New Edn. 1998), 376-8. For similar definitions, see, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1995), 10-11; *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, [Turk. trans: Abdulmecid Nursi] (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1994), 230.

⁵⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler*, 103 / *The Words*, 116.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-7 / *The Words*, 49-50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 366 / *The Words*, 376.

⁵⁹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Munazarat*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), 99.

He says “The books of the interpreters of the Law (the *mujtahids*) should show the Qur’an like glass as though they were [merely] means; they should not deputize for it or overshadow it,”⁶⁰ indicating that works written to expound the Qur’an should not obscure it. In his view, the awakening of Muslims and their adhering to the Qur’an was the only solution for their problems.⁶¹ For only the Qur’an can solve the talisman of the universe, of which it is the interpreter.⁶²

Bediuzzaman’s discussions are not limited to the Qur’an; in places he uses general expressions, referring to Islam as a whole. For example: “Islam is like the sun; it cannot be extinguished by blowing on it. It is like daytime; it cannot become the night by closing one’s eyes. The one who closes his eyes, makes it nighttime only for himself.”⁶³ By saying this, he is not limiting the attribution of universality to the Qur’an; he is applying it to religion as a whole, and drawing attention to Islam’s perpetual vitality. In his view, those who suppose it not to be living, are not those who search but cannot find, but those who make the world a prison for themselves because they close their eyes to the truth.

Subjects related to universality in various parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, particularly in the Twenty-Fifth Word and *Isyârât al-I’jâz*, are concerned mostly with the source of religion, the profundity of its contents, the impossibility of contesting it, the superior excellence of its text, its addressing everyone in all ages, its style, its persuasiveness, and the relationship of the Qur’an and the universe.

The Qur’an’s Universality in Respect of its Source

Islam’s sources are the Qur’an and *Sunna*, and principles derived from these. Thus, the two former, and foremost the Qur’an, form its basis. In addition to expounding Islam’s universality in the general meaning, the *Risale-i Nur* focusses particularly on the first two sources, drawing attention to the Qur’an, and to the Qur’an’s source in particular. For example, “The expositions of the Qur’an cannot be attributed to man’s partial knowledge, and particularly the knowledge of one unlettered. They rest rather on a compre-

⁶⁰ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sunûhat*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), 44.

⁶¹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Tarihçe-i Hayati*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), 140.

⁶² Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler*, 403.

⁶³ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Munâzarât*, 9.

hensive knowledge and are the word of One Who is able to see all things together and observe in one moment all truths between pre-eternity and post-eternity."⁶⁴ "The Qur'an is the word of One Who sees at the same instant all time and all within it."⁶⁵ "The Qur'an is a pre-eternal address."⁶⁶ "Whose speech could it be ... apart from the Maker Who adorns this world with antique arts ?⁶⁷ To suppose it to be the word of the Prophet is to be utterly mistaken.⁶⁸ In this way Bediuzzaman emphasizes the relationship between the word and the One Who says it.

Bediuzzaman points out that the Qur'an affords importance to things in relation to their value. In saying "The Qur'an is the word of One Who sees at the same instant all time and all within it,"⁶⁹ he is emphasizing the comprehensive knowledge of the One Who sent the Qur'an, as well as the comprehensiveness of His speech.

In many places Bediuzzaman mentions the all-embracing nature of divine knowledge, and says the following about the Qur'an, which proceeds from it:

"The Qur'an cannot be compared with other words and speech. This is because speech is of different categories, and in regard to superiority, power, beauty and fineness, has four sources: one is the speaker, another is the person addressed, another is the purpose, and another is the form. Its source is not only the form as literary people have wrongly shown. So in speech one should consider, 'Who said it? To whom did they say it? Why did they say it? In what form did they say it?' One should not consider the words only and stop there. Since speech draws its strength and beauty from these four sources, if the Qur'an's sources are studied carefully, the degree of its eloquence, superiority, and beauty will be understood. Indeed, since speech looks to the speaker, if it is command or prohibition, it comprises also the speaker's will and power in accordance with his position. Then it eliminates resistance; it has an effect like physical electricity and increases in proportion to the speech's superiority and power."⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler*, 436 / *The Words*, 450.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 267 / *The Words*, 275.

⁶⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdag Lahikası*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), ii, 89.

⁶⁷ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler*, 397 / *The Words*, 409.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 187 / *The Words*, 202.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 267 / *The Words*, 275.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 430 / *The Words*, 443.

Bediuzzaman says that since the Qur'an's laws and principles have come from pre-eternity, they will go to post-eternity. They are not doomed to grow old and die like the laws of civilization. They always retain their youth and vigour. So that they are not merely abstract, Bediuzzaman illustrates these statements with examples, demonstrating that they express the truth and are not merely baseless assertions.⁷¹

"The Qur'an is an unending, inexhaustible treasury. In addition to submitting to and accepting its established and incontestible matters, each age also receives its share of its hidden truths, in the form of a supplement; it cannot trespass on the share of another which is concealed. Yes, that is to say, as time passes more of the All-Wise Qur'an's truths are unfolded. Not, God forbid! causing doubt concerning the outer Qur'anic truths which previous generations have expounded. For belief in them is necessary; they are established, definite, fundamental, and basic."⁷²

The following also points out its source:

"Also, all the classes of mankind from the most stupid and lowly to the cleverest and most learned taking their full share of the Qur'an's instruction and their understanding its profoundest truths, and all branches of scholars like the great interpreters of the Greater *Shari'a* in particular, and hundreds of Islamic sciences and branches of knowledge, and the brilliant and exacting scholars of theology and the principles of religion extracting from the Qur'an all the needs and answers for their own sciences, - this is a stamp confirming that the Qur'an is a source of truth and mine of reality."⁷³

Bediuzzaman also says that the Qur'an cannot be judged 'objectively,' and he wrote the Twenty-Sixth Letter in order to dispel all possible sorts of doubts about it. Containing numerous proofs

⁷¹ He points out, for example, the social advantages of trade being licit and usury and interest being prohibited, both injunctions of the Qur'an, and the fact that governments today have not successfully solved these matters, which are solved by the Qur'an, despite all the resources they have at their disposal. He notes too the Qur'anic prescriptions concerning polygamy and women's inheritance, emphasizing the superiority of the principles put forward by the Qur'an in securing social equilibrium. See, *Ibid.*, 408ff. / *The Words*, 421ff.

⁷² Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1993), 388 / Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Letters-1928-1932*, [Eng. trans.] (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2nd Edn. 1997), 455-6.

⁷³ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler*, 448 / *The Words*, 462-3.

that the Qur'an can only be the Word of God, the letter convinces both the heart and mind.⁷⁴

The Qur'an's Universality in Respect of those its Addressees

The Qur'an addresses conscious beings, the most important of whom is man. As we stated before, it is God Who speaks in it, Who creates and has disposal over all things. Nevertheless, it is a discourse on the level of human understanding, not above it. Bediuzzaman calls this, which has been expressed differently at different times, divine condescension to the minds of men,⁷⁵ drawing attention to this characteristic of divine speech. Since Almighty God does not load burdens on man greater than he can bear,⁷⁶ He did not act differently in the scriptures He sent, and spoke in a way men can understand. However, although this speech is apparently in the clear, simple style known as *sehl-i mumteni*, on closer investigation it is seen to possess a superior quality which is impossible to imitate. This characteristic is one of its aspects of miraculousness.

When studying this manner of address of the Qur'an, Bediuzzaman says that it addresses everyone separately, all classes of men, all professions, all temperaments, and all the centuries, and he offers various verses as examples. Both the Twenty-Fifth Word, which he began with the lines, "*While there is a perpetual miracle like the Qur'an, searching for further proof appears to my mind as superfluous; While there is a proof of reality like the Qur'an, would silencing those who deny it weigh heavily on my heart?*", and *Isharat al-I'jaz*, which he began with the intention of its being a comprehensive commentary and hoped would form a model for future commentaries, are full of such examples.

Bediuzzaman particularly draws attention to the Qur'an's source and emphasizes its powerful manner of expression. Giving verses as examples, he shows that the most advanced people as regards intellectual development benefit from the verses which address the least advanced, and that the Qur'anic stories, which are apparently only historical tales, have a powerful effect on the elite just as they affect those with simple minds.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 309ff. / *Letters*, 365ff.

⁷⁵ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Muhakemat*, (Istanbul: Sozler Yayınevi, 1977), 40.

⁷⁶ Qur'an, 2:286; 6:105; 7:43; 23:62; 65:7.

⁷⁷ Nursi, *Sozler*, 452 / *The Words*, 466.

Saying: "... the passage of time, nor the great changes have damaged its valuable truths and fine styles, or caused it to age, or desiccated it, or made it lose its value, or extinguished its beauty,"⁷⁸ Bediuzzaman points out the Qur'an's living quality, and states that its laws "are always young and strong,"⁷⁹ and thus makes its superiority felt to a greater extent as the ages pass.⁸⁰

With statements like "Since the Qur'an is a pre-eternal address, and sitting above and beyond the centuries, which, layer upon layer, are all different, addresses and instructs all of mankind lined up within them, certainly it will include and intend numerous meanings according to those varying understandings, and will make allusions to what it intends,"⁸¹ Bediuzzaman frequently emphasizes that the Qur'an addresses everyone, all classes of men and all the centuries separately. Since he gives a fair amount of space to this, we shall discuss it separately.

The Qur'an Addresses Everyone

The Qur'an addresses all conscious beings, so they all must be able to benefit from it, and so they do. Contrarily to human speech, the differences in styles and manner of exposition address everyone's minds.

Bediuzzaman mentions that the Qur'an was revealed with seven 'readings' (*qirâ'ât*),⁸² and points out its perpetual youth, saying: "[The Qur'an] preserves its freshness and youth every age as though newly revealed."⁸³ He says too that the Qur'an's letters send forth shoots according to the time they are recited,⁸⁴ emphasizing the superiority and vitality of the divine discourse.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 433 / *The Words*, 446.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 408 / *The Words*, 421.

⁸⁰ Bediuzzaman draws attention to the Qur'an's youth saying, "Man's works and laws grow old like man, they change and are changed. But the rulings and laws of the Qur'an are so firm and well-founded that they increase in strength as the centuries pass." *Ibid.*, 407 / *The Words*, 419-420)

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 395 / *The Words*, 407.

⁸² Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Lem'alar*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1996) 69 / *The Flashes Collection*, [Eng. trans.], (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1995), 102.

⁸³ Nursi, *Sozler*, 407 / *The Words*, 419.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 346-7 / *The Words*, 356-7

Bediuzzaman says too that people receive effulgence from the Qur'an according to their capacities,⁸⁵ and that they understand the Qur'an's miraculousness to the extent of their own knowledge.⁸⁶ So too, "the Qur'an's meanings satisfy ears like mountains in the same way that with the same words they teach and satisfy tiny simple minds, like a fly,"⁸⁷ and "a brilliant philosopher like Ibn Sina may study the same lessons side by side with an ordinary reciter, and they both receive their instruction."⁸⁸ And pointing out that everyone benefits from the Qur'an to the maximum degree despite their wishes and expectations being different, he says that this demonstrates both man's impotence and the excellence of the Qur'an's manner of exposition.⁸⁹

All Social Classes

By nature and temperament each person differs from the next, so the understanding of all of them and their comprehension differ too. The natural consequence of this is that each class differs in its understanding of any text, as they differ in their attitudes. Taking into account these natural differences, God Almighty addresses every class and temperament in a style comprehensible to each, thus demonstrating the superiority of the universal message.

On examining the *Risale-i Nur* from this angle, we see that Bediuzzaman says: "The All-Wise Qur'an has a different kind of miraculousness corresponding to the understanding of each class,"⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, [Turk. trans. Abdulmecid Nursi] (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), 239.

⁸⁶ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 403 / *Letters*, 474.

⁸⁷ Nursi, *Sozler*, 390 / *The Words*, 402.

⁸⁸ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 188 / *Letters*, 229-30.

⁸⁹ The following passage related to this is most interesting: "It is well-known that the Qur'an of Mighty Stature was revealed not only for a single age, but for all ages. Similarly, it addresses not a single level of men, but all levels. Also, it is directed not to just one class, but to all classes. In consequence of this, everyone, every level, and all times may receive their share from the Qur'an's truths in accordance with their understandings and capacities, and so they do receive a share. However, mankind varies in respect of degree, men differ in their tastes, and they do not conform to each other in their inclinations, appreciation, pleasures, and natures. For example, something which one group considers admirable is opposed to the tastes of another group. A thing which one people leans towards another people is disgusted at. It is because of this that the Holy Qur'an is not specific in verses mentioning the punishment of sins or reward of good deeds; it has left them general so that everyone may understand them according to their own taste." Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 39-40.

⁹⁰ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 181 / *Letters*, 221.

and “the Holy Qur’an is a heavenly repast at which the thousands of different levels of minds, intellects, hearts, and spirits find their nourishment.”⁹¹ He says: “All classes of men ... [receive] their full share of the Qur’an’s instruction,”⁹² emphasizing that it is a timeless address encompassing all the levels of men.⁹³

As with all questions, Bediuzzaman prefers to illustrate his assertions with examples rather than making categorical statements. In connection with the present subject he explains that the Qur’an possesses a sort of miraculousness in the face of everyone from the masters of rhetoric and eloquence to the orators and poets, and that although it pleases all, none has been able to imitate it. Its styles have not aged with the passage of time nor lost anything of their freshness. He says, moreover, that the Qur’an addresses all classes from the class of soothsayers and diviners of the Unseen to that of historians and anthropologists. He says that the Qur’an demonstrates the miraculousness of its mysterious verses, which perpetually roll like the sea, before all classes from those preoccupied with sociology and politics to those advanced in knowledge of God and cosmic truths, to the followers of the paths of Sufism and sainthood. “The ordinary people even, who only listen to the Qur’an understanding a little of its meaning, confirm that it does not resemble any other book. They say: ‘The Qur’an is either inferior to all the other books we have heard, which not even an enemy could claim -just as it is impossible- or it is superior to all of them and is thus a miracle.’”⁹⁴

Bediuzzaman continues his classification down to the common people, whom he calls “the listening class,” for they only listen to the Qur’an and understand its miraculousness by means of their ears. They say: “The Qur’an which I hear does not resemble any other books, so it must either be inferior to all of them, or superior. That it is inferior, no one can say, nor has said, nor even the Devil can say it. So it must be superior to all of them.” In the face of ‘the seeing class,’ that is to say, in the face of the uneducated common people, or of materialists whose minds see no further than their eyes,” the Qur’an has an aspect of miraculousness which may be seen with the eyes.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Nursi, *Sozler*, 390 / *The Words*, 402.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 448 / *The Words*, 462.

⁹³ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sunuhat*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), 20.

⁹⁴ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 181 / *Letters*, 221.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 405-6 / *Letters*, 474-5.

Not leaving the question on the theoretical level but giving practical examples, Bediuzzaman lays emphasis on the fact that despite the Qur'an's teachings being not different but the same for everyone, every person and every class receive their share, thus pointing out the Qur'an's superiority in this matter.⁹⁶

All Historical Ages

It is a known fact that the Qur'an was not addressing only Arab society of the 7th century, but that it is calling out to all conscious beings that will live as long as the world exists and recognizes no limitation in this respect. On considering it from this point of view, we observe that the *Risale-i Nur* says that the Qur'an has a different address for everyone, as those it addresses, and that its words concern everyone. Bediuzzaman repeatedly stresses that the Qur'an addresses the people of every century,⁹⁷ and that every century receives its share from the Qur'an,⁹⁸ and that the Qur'an is a mercy to all the centuries.⁹⁹

Bediuzzaman says "the All-Wise Qur'an is every century turned directly towards all the classes of humanity, and addresses each particularly."¹⁰⁰ But he does not restrict this to the Qur'an, he draws attention also to authentic Hadiths, which are as important in expounding the Qur'an as the Qur'an is itself.¹⁰¹ Similarly, he says of the Prophet (PBUH) "his address is so elevated and powerful that all the centuries heed it. Yes, all the centuries hear the echo of his voice,"¹⁰² pointing out that in his position of communicating the Qur'an, laying down the law, and representing it, he too addresses every age.

Bediuzzaman describes as follows the Prophet's (PBUH) position, whom, he says, was through his prayer and worship the means of the creation and realization of man's happiness: "See! That Being is the leader of mankind. The globe of the earth, not only the

⁹⁶ Bediuzzaman gives two examples for this [not included here, see]: *Sozler*, 412-3 / *The Words*, 425-6. For a discussion related to Hz. Zaynab, see, *Mektubat*, 28-9 / *Letters*, 46-7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 412, 734 / *The Words*, 424, 768; *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 11, 44, 50.

⁹⁸ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 388 / *Letters*, 356; *Emirdag Lahikası*, i, 33.

⁹⁹ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 120.

¹⁰⁰ Nursi, *Sozler*, 412 / *The Words*, 424.

¹⁰¹ Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 17.

¹⁰² Nursi, *Mektubat*, 194 / *Letters*, 233.

Arabian Peninsula, is his mosque. While his congregation does not consist only of the people of his own time, but the people of every century from the time of Adam to the end of the world. They have formed rows behind him and are saying 'Amen!' to his prayer. But it is not only that congregation which declares 'Amen!' to his prayer; it is the earth and the heavens and all beings. That is: 'Accept his prayer, O our Sustainer! We too are supplicating. We too seek what he is seeking!'"¹⁰³

Having described the Prophet's attributes and mentioned his point of support, Bediuzzaman explains the profundity of his message like this:

"Muhammad the Arabian (Upon whom be blessings and peace) proclaimed his message over the heads of men and jinn in the name of the World of the Unseen, turned to the Manifest World; he addressed the peoples and nations waiting beyond the centuries of the future; he called out to all jinn and men; he made all places and all times hear. Yes, we too hear! ... And his address is so elevated and powerful that all the centuries heed it. Yes, all the centuries hear the echo of his voice."¹⁰⁴

Bediuzzaman also makes the following observation concerning this question, in respect of its being an evidence of the prophethood of God's Messenger (PBUH):

"Even the most ordinary person, or a child even, cannot oppose the majority concerning some trivial matter, even if it is among a small community, and have the courage to lie; human nature does not allow it. And so, if one who possessed great dignity, and concerning a universal message among a most intractable and numerous people, spoke of things the intellect could not on its own grasp, and proclaimed and spread them to the whole world with the utmost seriousness despite being unlettered, does it not point to his truthfulness? Does it not prove that the matter was from God?"¹⁰⁵

This approach of Bediuzzaman must have influenced those around him, for one of his students called Mehmed, wrote the following in connection with it:

"While taking instruction from the Qur'an of Mighty Stature and reading the verse from *Sura Luqman: Whoever submits his whole self to God*

¹⁰³ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 194 / *Letters*, 233.

¹⁰⁵ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 108.

and is a doer of good, has grasped indeed the most trustworthy handhold (31:22), my heart and spirit involuntarily fixed on the most profound and elevated meaning of this sacred verse. Just as it spoke firstly with the pure age of Muhammad (PBUH), and with all ages, so it certainly looks to the present age..."¹⁰⁶

Bediuzzaman says that the Qur'an is a book which illuminates all times and guides all men, and that as demanded by eloquence, it does not use specious arguments in self-evident matters, and prefers conciseness in subjects which are unnecessary for everyone. As an example, he says that its duty is not to speak of the sun's nature, but of its functions, which comprise wondrous things like illuminating the world, being a centre for the world's order, and its pivot.¹⁰⁷

It is a manifestation of Divine determining that the *Risale-i Nur*, which follows a Qur'anic line in its method, has a similar destiny. For everyone reads it from the most learned to the most lowly and receives their share according to their degree.¹⁰⁸ In a letter signed by Bediuzzaman's students Tahiri, Zubeyr, Sungur, Ziya, Ceylan, and Bayram describing the difference and depth of the Qur'anic understanding in the instruction they had received from their Master,¹⁰⁹ this question is mentioned and has commendably passed into history. Bediuzzaman mentions it in various contexts, and points out the superiority of his works, which he mostly does not attribute to himself.¹¹⁰

The Qur'an's Universality in Respect of its Contents

Proceeding from Divine knowledge and addressing all men in every age, the Qur'an's contents also show that it is universal. When the *Risale-i Nur* is considered from this angle, it is seen that for the most part it draws attention to the Qur'an's meanings,¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Nur'un İlk Kapısı*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), 170.

¹⁰⁷ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 233.

¹⁰⁸ If the past is considered from this point of view, from the time it was written to the present, with those who left aside the plough in the field and those pushing pens in universities uniting in the *Risale-i Nur* and benefiting from it to a great degree, it presents a colourful and living history.

¹⁰⁹ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 7.

¹¹⁰ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, (Istanbul: Envar Nesriyat, 1991), 249.

¹¹¹ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 6, 11; *Sozler*, 395 / *The Words*, 407.

discussions,¹¹² words,¹¹³ the universality and comprehensiveness of its knowledge,¹¹⁴ to the facts that as the Qur'an itself says, everything "dry and fresh" is found in it,¹¹⁵ only these are as either flowers or buds,¹¹⁶ for everything is taught in relation to its value,¹¹⁷ that from beginning to end the Qur'an is a treasury of knowledge of the Unseen,¹¹⁸ universal principles are concealed behind numerous minor events,¹¹⁹ all its contents are to be found in every one of its *suras*,¹²⁰ every one of its verses is like a shining star,¹²¹ every part of it comprises three propositions,¹²² and every letter of it even signifies important truths.¹²³

Bediuzzaman says that even the 'disjointed letters' at the start of certain *suras* convey important messages.¹²⁴ Because there is no relation between them, they cannot be compared with other parts of the Qur'an. For as the scholars of literature know, the power, distinction, beauty, and fineness of a piece are not afforded by only the subject, but by the four elements of the speaker, the one addressed, the aim, and the subject. These should therefore be considered in order to understand the power and degree of a piece.¹²⁵ And since the Qur'an is pre-eternal, it addresses all levels of humanity and all sorts of worshippers; it is therefore natural that it should contain numerous degrees, different meanings, and universal principles.¹²⁶

¹¹² Nursi, *Sozler*, 396 / *The Words*, 407-8.

¹¹³ Bediuzzaman lays considerable stress on the comprehensiveness of the Qur'an's words, illustrating it with examples, from the heavens and earth originally being joined together before being rent asunder to the sun revolving in its orbit; from the salvation of the blessed to the affirmation of Divine unity, and from that to the narrative stories of the Qur'an. One is the following [not included here, see]: *Sozler*, 391-2 / *The Words*, 402-3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 396 / *The Words*, 407.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 252 / *The Words*, 260. This is expressed with almost identical words in Qur'an 6:59.

¹¹⁶ Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 112.

¹¹⁷ Nursi, *Sozler*, 267 / *The Words*, 275.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 405 / *The Words*, 418.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 246 / *The Words*, 253.

¹²⁰ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 93.

¹²¹ Nursi, *Sozler*, 139 / *The Words*, 151-2.

¹²² Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 68.

¹²³ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 395 / *Letters*, 462.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 390 / *Letters*, 457.

¹²⁵ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 234.

¹²⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 298 / *The Rays Collection* [Eng. trans.] (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1998), 323.

Bediuzzaman says that absolute reality cannot be comprehended by limited minds and that a universal view such as that of the Qur'an is necessary to do this. The Qur'an always preserves its balance despite mentioning all sorts of subjects. Even works which have benefited from the Qur'an have not succeeded in doing this. For like treasures found in the ocean, their authors describe only those they happen upon, whereas the Qur'an sets forth the whole treasury. This is significant evidence for its loftiness and miraculousness.¹²⁷

Just as the *Risale-i Nur* explains that the Qur'an comprises true sciences and speaks with the people of every age, so it describes the necessary characteristics of those who will expound it. It says in order for reality to be expressed clearly and thus for his work to be a true commentary, while expounding the Qur'an a commentator should not be over-influenced by his own way and temperament, and his own whims should not intrude. And it is essential in order to extract the Qur'an's truths, which become apparent by discovering its meanings, the commentator is deeply learned, an expert in all the sciences, with far-reaching ideas, penetrating insight, and complete sincerity. He should also possess an elevated genius, be capable of profound interpretation, and have a sacred power.¹²⁸

The Superiority of the Qur'anic Text

Proceeding from Divine knowledge and having been passed down the generations completely unchanged, the Qur'an is incomparably superior to other speech. This is natural. When the *Risale-i Nur* is considered from this point of view, it is seen to contain extremely interesting observations concerning this: the Qur'an is eternal in the complete form in which it was revealed,¹²⁹ and from the authentic ordering of its verses¹³⁰ to its word-order,¹³¹ and from its balance and proportion, as though it was revealed all at once¹³² to its inimitable quality.¹³³

¹²⁷ Nursi, *Sozler*, 439-40 / *The Words*, 453-4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 750.

¹²⁹ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 39.

¹³⁰ Nursi, *Sozler*, 138 / *The Words*, 151.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 379-80 / *The Words*, 390.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 414 / *The Words*, 427.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 404 / *The Words*, 416.

Bediuzzaman says that the Qur'an is superior to all other speech and writings,¹³⁴ that it resembles other speech,¹³⁵ but is not and cannot be human speech.¹³⁶ He mentions the instances of wisdom in this,¹³⁷ and says that it is not possible to imitate the Qur'an¹³⁸ or produce anything similar.¹³⁹ Moreover, the Qur'an protects itself and perpetuates its sovereignty,¹⁴¹ and its miraculousness prevents its being corrupted.¹⁴²

Bediuzzaman says that the Qur'an's superiority is established despite its resembling man's speech and that it challenges those who oppose it,¹⁴³ but it does this in order to taunt them¹⁴⁴ for it is not possible to dispute it,¹⁴⁵ or to produce anything similar to it.¹⁴⁶ Bediuzzaman puts forward the reasons¹⁴⁷ and the consequences¹⁴⁸ of this, and cites history as the witness to the impossibility of opposing the Qur'an's miraculousness, which stems from its superior qualities, and of producing its like. Since those who challenged it were unable to produce anything similar to it, despite the Qur'an's taunts, the idolators took to their swords and violent methods. As Bediuzzaman said: "Since it was impossible to dispute the Qur'an by word, they were compelled to combat it by force." In reply to the question, How do we know it was not successfully disputed?, he points out the elevated miraculousness of its eloquence, saying:

"If it had been possible to dispute it, most certainly it would have been attempted. For it was a question of honour and pride, and life and property were at stake. If it had been attempted, numerous people would have supported such an attempt. For those who obstinately oppose the truth have always been many. And if many people had supported it, they surely would have found fame. For insignificant contests, even, attracted the wonder of people and found fame in

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 133 / *The Words*, 146.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 185 / *The Words*, 199.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 186 / *The Words*, 201.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 186 / *The Words*, 201.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 404 / *The Words*, 416.

¹³⁹ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 176; *Sozler*, 735 / *The Words*, 769.

¹⁴¹ Nursi, *Sozler*, 730 / *The Words*, 764.

¹⁴² Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 81.

¹⁴³ Nursi, *Sozler*, 384 / *The Words*, 394-5; *Mektubat*, 182 / *Letters*, 221-2.

¹⁴⁴ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 183.

¹⁴⁵ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 182 / *Letters*, 221-2.

¹⁴⁶ Nursi, *Sozler*, 430ff. / *The Words*, 443ff.

¹⁴⁷ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 185-6 / *Letters*, 224-6.

¹⁴⁸ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 179.

stories and tales. So an extraordinary contest and event such as that would never have remained secret. The most ugly and infamous things against Islam have been passed down and become famous, but apart from one or two stories about Musaylima the Liar, no such thing has been related. Musaylima was very eloquent, but when compared with the exposition of the Qur'an, which possesses infinite beauty, his words passed into the chronicles as nonsense."¹⁴⁹

Saying that the value and eloquence of speech are known by learning from whom it comes, and to whom, and why, Nursi draws attention to the Qur'an's source, emphasizing that it is a miracle and beyond the power of men.¹⁵⁰

The Qur'an's Universality in Respect of its Style

In addition to the profundity of its contents and superiority of its manner of exposition, the style the Qur'an uses is noteworthy. In various places, the *Risale-i Nur* indicates its style,¹⁵¹ emphasizing with its styles looking primarily to those it addresses¹⁵² that the Qur'an is beyond human power. And it illustrates this point with examples. In its discourse, the Qur'an takes the most direct path,¹⁵³ and besides showing the sea in a pitcher,¹⁵⁴ with examples that everyone can understand¹⁵⁵ it simplifies its truths for ordinary people,¹⁵⁶ taking

¹⁴⁹ Nursi, *Sozler*, 369 / *The Words*, 379.

¹⁵⁰ The following passage related to this is particularly noteworthy: "For the Qur'an is the speech and address of the Sustainer of all the worlds and Creator of the whole universe and a dialogue in no way hinting of imitation and artificiality. It is addressed to the one sent in the name of all men, indeed of all beings, the most famous and renowned of mankind, the strength and breadth of whose belief gave rise to mighty Islam and raised its owner to the level of 'the distance of two bow-strings' and returned him as the addressee of the Eternally Besought One. It describes and explains the matters concerning happiness in this world and the next, the results of the creation of the universe, and the dominical purposes within it. It expounds also the belief of the one it addresses, which was the highest and most extensive, and bore all the truths of Islam. It turns and shows every side of the huge universe like a map, a clock, or a house, and teaches and describes it in the manner of the Craftsman Who made them - to produce the like of this Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition is not possible; the degree of its miraculousness cannot be attained to." *Ibid.*, 449 / *The Words*, 463.

¹⁵¹ Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 128-9 / *The Flashes Collection*, 176; *Sozler*, 374ff., 380ff. / *The Words*, 384ff., 391ff.

¹⁵² Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 170, 209.

¹⁵³ Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Nursi, *Sozler*, 401 / *The Words*, 413.

¹⁵⁵ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 206, 210, 211, 219.

¹⁵⁶ Nursi, *Sozler*, 247 / *The Words*, 255.

into consideration the level and understanding of those it addresses.¹⁵⁷ However, while explaining that the meanings intended by God Almighty in the Qur'an are the truth,¹⁵⁸ the *Risale-i Nur* points out that an omission even may be as eloquent as a word.¹⁵⁹

Bediuzzaman says that the way shown by the Qur'an is a direct way¹⁶⁰ which aims to banish over-familiarity with both the outside world and with oneself.¹⁶¹ He discusses too the reasons for its jumping from one subject to another.¹⁶² So too, he says that the Qur'an directs people's minds to the truths of the outer and inner worlds,¹⁶³ and that it does not speak of the sun for the sun itself,¹⁶⁴ but that it expresses its purpose by sometimes sufficing with one of the many aims of a thing.¹⁶⁵

Bediuzzaman notes the richness of the Qur'an and says that its verses cannot be restricted to having only one or two meanings.¹⁶⁶ The phrases at the ends of verses comprise universal laws,¹⁶⁷ illustrating the Qur'an's richness of style. Similarly, he says that let alone wearying those it addresses, the repetitions in the Qur'an increase longing on every occasion, yet despite its being revealed at different times for different reasons, it possesses a congruity and mutual proportion as though it had been revealed all at once for a single reason.

Bediuzzaman says that the comparison between other speech and the Qur'an is the comparison between the reflections of the stars in fragments of glass and the stars themselves, and whatever the literary degree, men's words cannot be compared with the Qur'an. For despite peoples and governments from every corner of the globe having benefited from the Qur'an since the time it was revealed, it has not lost an iota of its freshness and newness.¹⁶⁸ He points out the extraordinary qualities of the Qur'an's style saying: "the Qur'an's style

¹⁵⁷ Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 12.

¹⁵⁸ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 68.

¹⁵⁹ Nursi, *Sunuhat*, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 70.

¹⁶¹ Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 43.

¹⁶² Nursi, *Mektubat*, 316ff. / *Letters*, 374ff.

¹⁶³ Nursi, *Muhakemat*, 43.

¹⁶⁴ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 205 / *Letters*, 245.

¹⁶⁵ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 184.

¹⁶⁶ Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 34 / *The Flashes Collection*, 51.

¹⁶⁷ Nursi, *Isaratu'l-I'caz*, 189.

¹⁶⁸ Nursi, *Sozler*, 447 / *The Words*, 461.

is both strange, and original, and wonderful, and convincing. It has imitated nothing and no one. And no one has been able to imitate it. Its style has always preserved the freshness, youth, and singularity it possessed when it was first revealed and continues to preserve it,"¹⁶⁹ noting that there is no end to its mysteries. He similarly points out the extraordinary qualities of its words, and the fact that just as they do not oppress the simple minds of children, so they do not appear trivial to the intelligent. Need for the Qur'an has closed the doors of boredom and weariness.

Bediuzzaman says that Qur'an "leaves some matters in brief form, and some it speaks of in a simple and superficial way that is easy in the general view, does not wound general feelings, nor weary or tax the minds of ordinary people." He illustrates this with examples. He shows too how the same words address everyone in a simple style which is as fluent as it is straightforward.

The Qur'an's Universality in Respect of the Relationship between itself and the Universe

Although it may appear at first glance that the relationship between the Qur'an and the universe is unconnected to universality, in Bediuzzaman's approach it is connected, for his approach looks on the Qur'an and the universe as a totality. To be able to advance in worship of God, the Qur'an and the universe, which are two missives sent by God, should be looked on together as two universal tongues expounding each other.

Bediuzzaman frequently mentions the Qur'an's way of looking at the universe,¹⁷⁰ and emphasizes that its aim is to describe the universe's Maker in the way he calls "*mana-ye harfi*,"¹⁷¹ or 'looking at beings for the meanings they signify.' He describes the Qur'an as the universe's articulate tongue,¹⁷² and says that "the Qur'an reads the universe in the mighty mosque of the universe,"¹⁷³ and "recites the verses written on the pages of the universe by the pen of power."¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 374 / *The Words*, 384.

¹⁷⁰ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 234.

¹⁷¹ Nursi, *Sozler*, 131 / *The Words*, 145

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 695 / *The Words*, 728.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 33 / *The Words*, 44.

¹⁷⁴ Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 128 / *The Flashes Collection*, 176.

Bediuzzaman considers the Qur'an's injunctions to be related to the universe,¹⁷⁵ and says about the Qur'an, which he describes as "both remembrance of God, and thought,"¹⁷⁶ that "according to the testimony of its living truths, it is the spirit of the universe's life and the intellect of its consciousness,"¹⁷⁷ and is both a book of wisdom, and a book of the *Shari'a*, and a book of prayer.¹⁷⁸

Bediuzzaman compares the world to a clock:

"A clock appears to be constant, but its inside is in perpetual upheaval through the motion of its parts... In just the same way, together with its apparent stability, this world, which is a huge clock of Divine power, is perpetually revolving within upheaval and change, transience and evanescence. Indeed, since time has entered the world, night and day are like a two-headed hand counting the seconds of that huge clock. The years are like a hand counting its minutes, while the centuries count its hours."¹⁷⁹

Thus, he looks on the universe with all its parts and particles as worshippers competing in their worship in the rows of the cosmic mosque.¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

It is clear that Islam, which we have discussed from several angles and tried to throw light on in a general sort of way, is a universal message addressing all peoples and all ages. The subjects and general principles it comprises are sufficiently extensive to demonstrate this aspect of it. For it is universal not only in its primary source, the Qur'an, but also in Hadiths, which are based on revelation, and in the general principles derived from these two sources.

The *Risale-i Nur*, one of the most important interpretations of Islam in modern times, lays considerable emphasis on Islam's universality, stressing particularly that contrarily to what is supposed, it addresses separately everyone, the followers of every way, and all historical ages. This universalist approach of Bediuzzaman makes

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 310 / *The Flashes Collection*, 402.

¹⁷⁶ Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, 128.

¹⁷⁷ Nursi, *Sozler*, 110 / *The Words*, 123.

¹⁷⁸ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 204 / *Letters*, 244.

¹⁷⁹ Nursi, *Sozler*, 437 / *The Words*, 450.

¹⁸⁰ Nursi, *Mektubat*, 393-5 / *Letters*, 461-3.

itself felt in almost every question he deals with, in a way that is unique and original among the works of Islamic scholars. The One Who creates the book of the universe faultlessly and in perfect order, sent His Word, which interprets His works, in the same faultless order and perfection, and afforded it the capacity to answer the needs of all people so long as the former book continues in existence. Just as the universe is sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy everyone, so the universal message possesses the same breadth and vitality and may address all minds and satisfy them; contrarily to other speech, it neglects nothing.

Yes, Islam is universal in a way that cannot be encompassed by historical conditions. Whatever the reason for their emergence, all tendencies which appear with the intention of squeezing it into the confines of history, do not create universality as is supposed, they on the contrary make it historical. It should not be forgotten that God Almighty, Who sent Islam as a universal message, created both those who embark on such endeavors and the brains they use in them. While He bestowed on the former a virtually limitless superiority of expression, for it is based on His pre-eternal knowledge, He gave the latter a field of action limited by historical conditions. Is it possible that the limited should encompass and comprehend the unlimited, and thus drag the universal into its own historical field, so as to obtain universal principles?[]

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