

# **The Theory and Practice of Faith and Reason In The Light Of Nursi's Perspective**

**Dr Vaffi Foday Sheriff**

*Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto - Nigeria.*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Reason is intractably tied to faith and vice-versa. Reason provides the avenue through which faith is analyzed. Both reason and faith also provide the foundation for the practice of Islam. It is against this background that the paper explores the fundamentals of reason and faith. The paper also examines the practical applications of reason and faith in the context of Nursi's perspectives. The paper concludes by analyzing the direct relevance of Nursi's perspectives in the context of Islam.

### **Conceptual Clarification on the Subject Matter**

Conceptual clarification is vital because of its importance in understanding dimensions of the subject-matter. Therefore, the clarification of the concept theory will be the first. Theory means a formal set of ideas that are intended to explain why something happens or exists. For instance, according to the theory of relativity, nothing can travel faster than light. It denotes the principles on which a particular subject is based. For instance, the theory and practice of language teaching. Theory can also be an opinion or idea that somebody believes is true but that is not proved. I have this theory that most people prefer being at work than to be at home. In theory people do say that a particularly statement is supposed to be true but may in fact be wrong or these machines should last for ten years or more, that sounds fine but have you really thought of it thoroughly?<sup>1</sup> That is why practice is an action rather than ideas or ordinary theory. In other words, theory means an activity or train regularity so that one can improve one's skill.<sup>2</sup> The concept of reason means to understand and have opinions, among others.<sup>3</sup> It simply means to form a judgment about a situation by considering the facts and using one's power to think in a logical way. Therefore, it is a way of finding an answer to a problem by using a person's power to think in a logical way. Besides, reason is a way to talk to somebody in order to persuade him to be more sensible<sup>4</sup>. In fact, the concept of reason is not a spiritual matter but is rational and related to practices. For this, reason is different from faith. But what faith is literally and technically? Faith is an English word which denotes *Iman* in Arabic. Literally, it means to know, to convince and to believe beyond the least shadow of doubt. Technically, faith means trust in something either in somebody's ability or knowledge. But, religiously faith is stronger than reasoning.<sup>5</sup> According to Nursi, faith is the acceptance of and assent to the truth.<sup>6</sup> Faith here is a true belief arising out of knowledge and conviction. Man knows and reposes unshakeable belief in the oneness and the uniqueness of Allah; in His attributes, in his law and revealed guidance and in the divine code of reward and punishment. This faith invariable leads man to a life of obedience and submission who is known as *Mumin*<sup>7</sup>

### **Sources of faith**

According to Nursi, faith is not gained only through knowledge, but the subtle faculties have their share of it too. When food enters the stomach, it is distributed in various ways to various parts of the body. Similarly, after matters of faith that come through knowledge are absorbed by the spirit, heart, inner heart, soul, and other subtle faculties, each receives its share according to its degree. If they do not receive their share, faith is deficient.<sup>8</sup>

Nursi explains that the main reasons for this is because to conquer the civilized, persuasion is the only thing which is required but not compulsion.

### **Islam, reason and science**

Looking at the relationship between Islam and true scientific advancement one can hardly see any contradiction, because the former is for positive progress and prosperity. It is in this respect, Nursi submits that Islam is the house and guide of Knowledge and the father of all true sciences.<sup>9</sup> This means that true reason is meant for the development of man and not for his destruction. It therefore gives hope and for human happiness. It is in this light Nursi once urged Turkish people and all Muslims never to lose hope in life. He said: "*And you are making a grievous error if you suppose in despair and hopelessness that the world is the world of progress for everyone and the Europeans, but the world of decline is only for the unhappy people of Islam.*"<sup>10</sup> According to Nursi, Muslims should be optimistic considering the changes that happen progressively in human history because time does not run in a straight line but moves in a circle, like the motion of the earth which comes with

different seasons such as spring and winter. Just as every winter is followed by spring and every night by morning, mankind also shall have a morning and spring.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Classification of Believers in Islamic thought**

According to Islamic point of view,<sup>12</sup> people are classified into groups, viz-those who have firm faith that makes them submit whole heartedly to Allah. They follow the way of Allah and devote their lives in seeking His pleasure by doing all that He likes and avoiding all that He dislikes. They are more concerned in their devotion than those seeking for wealth and glory. Such people are true Muslims<sup>13</sup>

The second group comprises those who have faith in Allah, His law and the Day of Resurrection but whose faith is not deep and strong enough to make them submit to Allah fully. They are therefore below the rank of true Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

The next group are those who do not possess faith at all. These people are rebels who have refused to acknowledge the Sovereignty of Allah over everything.

#### **Significance of Reason and proof in Islam according to Nursi.**

In *Risale-Inur*, Nursi stated that he knew by an experience that man always seeks renewal<sup>15</sup> and that Islam allows it as it is founded on reality and proof which are in conformity with reason and wisdom.<sup>16</sup>

Nursi affirms that Muslims consider everything through reason and thought by saying that:

*We Muslims who are students of the Qur'an following the proof. We approach the truth of belief through reason,....And we do not abandon proof for blind imitation of the clergy like some followers of other religions. Thus, in the future when reason, science, and technology prevail, the Qur'an will surely then rule...* Nursi was aware of the significance of reason, especially the value of science in human activities not only in the present time but also in the future. This can be noticed when he says thus in his feeling stressing that *For sure, at the end of time, mankind will pour into science and technology it will obtain all its power from science. Power and dominion will pass to the hands of science.*<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Nursi gave special place to reason and science considering that in the future it is truth and not force, proof instead of sophistry, and reason instead of nature that will be the focus.<sup>19</sup> In addition to this, he predicted that in the future there will be positive changes in the world.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Differences between Islam and Belief according to Nursi**

According to Nursi, the differences between Islam and belief have never been clear to scholars of his time. They have been frequently discussed by scholars without reaching a final solution. There are scholars who said that Islam -and faith are the same, while others have said that they are not the same but that one cannot have one without the other.<sup>21</sup> But Nursi tried to give the differences between Islam and faith when he says that Islam is a preference, while belief is a conviction. To put it in another way, Islam is submission while faith is acceptance of and assent to the truth.<sup>22</sup> Nursi gave some examples to fortify his arguments by saying that long ago he saw certain irreligious people who fervently supported the injunctions of the Qur'an. That was to say, by taking the part of the truth, such people were in one respect Muslim, and were called "irreligious Muslims". He warns certain believers who do not evince support for the injunctions of the Qur'an nor take the part of them, and they earn the epithet "non Muslim believers."<sup>23</sup> But the question here is that can belief without Islam be the means of salvation?

In answering this question, Nursi affirms that neither can Islam without belief be a means of salvation, nor can belief without Islam be a means.<sup>24</sup> Using his method of analyzing questions of faith, he solves mysteries of religion through the Qur'an. For him "All praise and bounty is Allah's through the grace of the Qur'anic miraculousness. The *Risale Inur* has shown the fruits of the religion of Islam and results of the Qur'anic truths in such a way that even if someone without religion does not understand them, he cannot be unsympathetic towards them, and they have demonstrated proofs of belief and Islam in such a powerful fashion that if even a non-Muslim understands them, he is sure to assent to them.<sup>25</sup> Yes, the words show that the fruits of belief and Islam are as delectable as the fruits of the Tuba- tree of Paradise, and that their results are as agreeable as the pleasures of happiness in this world and the next. They therefore induce in those who see them and know them a feeling of infinite partiality of support, and surrender.<sup>26</sup> Talking about the invocations of Shah Naqashb and he says: *In accordance with that we live, in accordance with it we shall die, and in accordance with it shall we be raised up on tomorrow*<sup>27</sup> Nursi also said that he had experienced an infinite feeling of partiality. If the whole world were given him, he would not sacrifice a single truth of belief. It causes him extreme distress to imagine the reverse of a single truth for a minute even. Were the whole world given to him, his soul would renounce it without hesitation for the existence of a single truth of belief. He felt an infinite strength of belief when he said: *We believe in what you have sent through the prophet, and we believe in what you have revealed through the Book, and we assent to it. I consider the opposite of any of the truths of belief to be rationally impossible, and I look at the people of misguidance as infinitely foolish and crazy*<sup>28</sup> But, is patience Islamically a part of faith?

### **Patience as a Pillar of Faith**

In interpretation of the verse, *Allah is with those patiently persevere*<sup>29</sup> Nursi mentioned that Almighty Allah's grace and favour are with the patient and question of patience is three fold;

The first, is to patiently persevere in refraining from sin. This patience is *taqwa* and manifests the meaning of the verse, *Allah is with those who fear Him and restrain themselves*.

The second; is patience in the face of calamity. This is to place one's trust in Allah and to submit to Him. It is to be honoured by the manifestation of these verse *the patient*<sup>31</sup> and *Allah loves who put their truth in Him*<sup>32</sup>

Impatience amounts to complaining about Allah and criticizing His actions, accusing His mercy, and doubting His wisdom. For sure, man is weak and powerless, weeps complainingly at the blows of misfortune, but his complaint must be to Him, not about Him. It should resemble Jacob's (upon whom be peace) words; He said: *I only complain of my distraction and anguish to Allah* That is to say, he should complain to Allah, not lament saying what have I done that this should have happened to me as though complaining to other human beings about Allah.<sup>34</sup>

The third type of patience is perseverance in worship, which raises a person to the station of being beloved by Allah. It urges him towards perfect worship, of Allah and servitude of Him, which is the most devoted station.<sup>35</sup>

According to Nursi, it is important to understand this world and man's spirit within the world and the nature and value of religion within man and how the world is a prison if there is no true religion and that without religion man becomes the most miserable of creatures.<sup>36</sup>

## **II. FAITH AND SCIENCE**

Nursi discussed matter by confirming that the universe is not empty but full of matter as by which transmits electricity, heat and light. He stressed that it is established by science and philosophy that this infinite space is not an endless vacuum, but filled with matter. Some matter fills space which is the bond of the laws of the lofty bodies like the laws of attraction and repulsion, and is the transmitter and diffuser of the forces in matter like light, heat and electricity.<sup>37</sup> According to Nursi, the origin-of atoms is the matter which frequently changes its form.<sup>38</sup> He discloses that the seven heavens among others are made from this matter.<sup>39</sup> Nursi Tientions. That the Qur'an recognised that there are particles which are far smaller than an atom.<sup>40</sup> Adem Tatli has summarized Nursi's understanding of matter.<sup>41</sup>

## **III. SPOTLIGHT ON SCIENTIFIC ISSUES**

Although Nursi did a lot to defend Islamic faith and spirituality, he recognizes science as a part of the faith notwithstanding the fact that many scholars have commented on his works from scientific point of view.<sup>42</sup> From Islamic perspective, he states that biological beings are not the work of nature and chance as is imagined, but the work of a creator possessing knowledge, will and power.<sup>43</sup>

## **IV. HUMAN REASON IN SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS**

It has been noticed by Muslim scholars such as Abdur Rahim, Chandhary that science really has very modest objectives. This can be seen in two ways: First is the approximate nature of the science.<sup>44</sup> Second, is the ongoing nature of scientific research. The science does not provide all the answers only certain answers can be provided for practically an infinite number of enquiries. The answers that are obtained from the science are only approximate in nature. Certain models like the quantum electrodynamics, provide stunning accuracy, but this is so only within the frame work of our-' measurement systems that have limited capabilities.

### **Superiority of faith**

It has been noted that scientific approach does not deal with metaphysical enquiries. Thus having discovered the phenomenon of gravity the science is content without asking why the law of gravity is the way it is, and is it so determined by a necessity Being<sup>46</sup> that planned and executed the creation of things and laws. These questions are genuinely out of the scope of the science, though they are not out of scope of human enquiry. In this context, the Qur'an proposes scientific approach to learn about the universe<sup>47</sup> and it helps the metaphysical enquiry by declaring that everything and every being in the heaven and the earth celebrates Allah's praises. Therefore everything that we find out via the science is actually a pointer necessary being that Allah is. Indeed, the Qur'an declares that the natural phenomena are the signs<sup>49</sup> of Allah. Therefore if any person wants to understand this world, and man's spirit within the world, and the nature and value of religion for man and how the world is a prison if there is no true religion, and that without religion man becomes the most miserable of creature in this world he has to understand the message of the Qur'an<sup>50</sup> This should be in accordance with piety and sincerity. It simply means that to curb one's fleshly desires and to strengthen the spiritual potential through prayers to Allah and doing good deeds for humanity.<sup>51</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Faith and reason are not only intertwined but also fulfill the same objective. This is the central thrust of the paper. However, it would still be interesting to highlight that the theory and practice of reason and faith in the light of Nursi's perspective gain an important place in Islamic philosophy and theological debate among Muslim scholars such as Qadi Abd Jabbar (-415 A.H), Imam Al-Ghazali (-505 AH) or Ibn Rushd (-595 AH). It was simply because reason is the faculty of identifying entities through person's senses and way of acquiring knowledge. But, reason to Nursi's understanding has scope and limitation, while faith is the gate way for adventure in meta physics, therefore, he feels that a sensible person is he who takes what is pleasant and clear and leaves what is distressing.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Nursi's view on theory and practice of reason and faith are much inspired by the spirit of the Qur'an and conceptualized in the area of Islamic theology similarly to what Abu Al Hasan al- Ash'ari (260- 324) did in issues of science of *Ilmu-al-kalam*. Though the ultimate aim of Nursi was to save faith in front of subtle attacks of materialism, naturalism and atheism, or the materialist approach to scientific advances in his time. For Nursi, Islamic science does not reject research methodologies including observation, critics, and experiment. Indeed, the Qur'an calls Muslim scholars to adopt these methodologies of thought, but it draws scholar's attention to the fact that there is no dichotomy between science and religion, rather true progress and happiness for mankind can, and will, only be achieved in the way of the Qur'an that accommodates both faith and reasoning.

## ENDNOTES

- [1]. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, Oxford University Press 2000, p. 1241
- [2]. Ibid, p.912
- [3]. Ibid, p.973
- [4]. Ibid, p.973
- [5]. Ibid, p. 418
- [6]. Bediuzzaman said Nursi, letters 1928-1932, Sozler publications, New edition 2010, Istanbul, p.50.
- [7]. Maududi Towards Understanding Islam, p.29.
- [8]. Ibid, p.382.
- [9]. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Muhakemat, p. 18
- [10]. Tarihce- I hayat, p.80
- [11]. Tarihce-I Hayat, p.80
- [12]. See Maududi, Ibid, p.40
- [13]. Ibid, p.40
- [14]. Ibid, p.40
- [15]. Sunahat, Sozler yayinevi, Istanbul, 1977, p.18
- [16]. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Muhakemat, Sozler yayinevi, Istanbul 1977, p.35
- [17]. Bediuzzaman said Nursi, Tarihce - lhayati, Sinan Matbaasi, Istanbul, 1960, p.77
- [18]. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Sozler p.275
- [19]. Nursi, Bediuzzaman said Muhakemat, p.32
- [20]. Bediuzzaman said Nursi, Tarihce I Hayat, p.79
- [21]. Bediuzzaman said Nursi, letters 1928-1932, Sozler publications, Istanbul, New edition, 2010. P.50
- [22]. Ibid, p.50
- [23]. Ibid, p. 50-51.
- [24]. Ibid, p.51
- [25]. Ibid, p.51
- [26]. Ibid, P.51
- [27]. Ibid, p.51
- [28]. Ibid, p.51
- [29]. Surtatu al-Baqarat: 153,
- [30]. Al-Baqart: 194
- [31]. Al-Imran; 146
- [32]. Al-Imran; 159 '
- [33]. Yousef: 86
- [34]. Bediuzzaman said Nursi, letters 1928-1932, Sozler publications Istanbul, 2010, p.326
- [35]. Ibid, p.326
- [36]. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, The Short Words on Life, Belief and Worship, Sozler publications, Istanbul, 2006, P.50
- [37]. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi Lem'alar, p. 321
- [38]. Ibid, p.322; see again Adem Tatli. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, the Representative of Contemporary Islamic Thinkers: His Approach to Science and Technology, in (Panel 1 on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi); The Idea of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in the Thirtieth year since his Death and their place in Islamic thought, Sozler publications Istanbul, 1993 p.121
- [39]. Bediuzzaman said Nursi, Lem'alar p.60
- [40]. Ibid, p.,323
- [41]. Adem Tatli, Ibid. P.122
- [42]. Ibid, p.95
- [43]. Ibid.
- [44]. Abdur Rahim Choudhary, Dance of the particles; a confidence of science and Peace to life in a Multi-cultural world; the Risale -Inur's Approach, Seven International symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 3-5 act. 2004. Published by NESIL, Istanbul 2004, p.53.
- [45]. Ibid.
- [46]. To read more about this terme, go back to Risale- inur collection in the 30<sup>th</sup> word, First Aim.

- [47]. Qur'an 32:27 and 22:46  
[48]. Qur'an 24: 41 and 17:44  
[49]. Qur'an 3:190  
[50]. Beduizzaman Said Nursi, the eighth word. From the Risale Inur collection, Sozler Publications 2008 edition, p.50  
[51]. See Osman Nuri Topbas, Ikhlas and Taqwa: Sincerity and piety, ERKAM Publications, 2009, p.9.  
[52]. Beduizzaman Said Nursi, Man and Universe. From the Risale- Inur collection Sozler publications, Istanbul, 1993, p.12