Book Reviews

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This volume is an example for the recently flourishing genre of collections of conference papers on Said Nursi and/or Fethullah Gülen from authors with quite different backgrounds. Although not explicitly stated, this book is based on contributions to a workshop organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture (İstanbul İlim ve Kültür Vakfı) in November 2006.1 The respective organization is dedicated to the propagation of the ideas of Said Nursi and its leadership tries to keep aloof from the disputes which have driven the followers of Said Nursi apart since the 1980s. As in similar cases, the background of the contributors is quite heterogeneous. Several are members of the Nurcu movement, others are scholars from the field of Islamic studies, a third group consists of Christian and Jewish theologians and philosophers. The objective of both the conference and the volume is not only to deepen the understanding of Said Nursi in its historical context but to present his ideas on a par with those of Western philosophers and theologians.

The contributions of the members of the Nurcu movement consist of summaries of Said Nursi’s opinions on particular issues usually based on quotations from _Risale-i Nur_, the Collected Works of Said Nursi (Şükran Vahide: “Proof of the Resurrection of the Dead: Said Nursi’s Approach” 42-52; Bilal Kuşpınar: “Death in Nursi’s Thought” 53-68; Cüneyt M. Şimşek: “The Problem of Animal Pain: Said Nursi’s Approach” 111-134; id.: “Justice and Balance in Creation: Said Nursi’s Analysis” 227-240). The respective articles may be helpful for reference. However, the authors do not bother much to embed Said Nursi’s deliberations in the context of the development of religious ideas.

The Christian and Jewish theologians either follow a similar approach or they compare the ideas of Said Nursi with Western thinkers (Ian Markham: “Living Life in the Light of Death: A Conversation with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi” 19-28; Thomas Michel S.J.: “The Resurrection of the Dead and Final Judgment in the

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Thought of Said Nursi” 29-40; id.: “God’s Justice in Relation to Natural Disasters” 219-226; W. Mark Richardson: “Resurrection in the Writings of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: Comparative Reflections with Christian Theology” 83-98; Leo D. Lefebure: “The Resurrection of the Dead: Said Nursi and Jürgen Moltmann” 99-110; Gareth Jones: “Landscapes of Melancholy: Said Nursi, Dante Alighieri and the Contexts of Modernism” 159-180; David R. Law: “Reflections of Prayer and Social Justice in the Thought of Thomas Merton and Said Nursi” 197-218; Ian Kaplow: “Nursi’s Compassion and Kant’s Categorical Imperative: Justice and Ethics in Building a Better World” 241-255). Since most of the latter know neither Turkish nor Arabic, their contributions are based on English translations. Moreover most of the comparisons appear quite strained. Although the internalization of norms is a central point in the thought of Said Nursi, the similarity to Kant’s categorical imperative is flawed: The basis of the latter is that laws are made by man, Said Nursi does not question the validity of the revealed law. He stresses the importance of the internalization of norms last but not least because Islamic law is no longer upheld by the state. This may facilitate the adaption to a secular order, but this is not the primary intention. Whereas a reasonable biographical sketch may at least broaden the reader’s horizon (Lefebure) the epistemic value of the contribution suffers considerably when T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are added to a comparison between Said Nursi and Dante (Jones). A disappointing aspect of Michel’s contributions is that he seems to feel obliged to present in a positive light teachings of Said Nursi which he apparently considers problematic or untenable (33-37: springtime as proof for resurrection; 226: on natural disasters as divine punishment).

However, among the contributions of theologians and philosophers, Lucinda Mosher’s article deserves to be singled out, because she points out a deficit in the existing literature on Said Nursi by diligently analyzing the structure of Said Nursi’s early Arabic treatise Lā sīyyamā (“Lā Siyyamā: Nursi’s Treatise on al-Hashr in Mathnawi al-Nuriye” 69-82). Since in both the Nurcu discourse and in analyses of his works by outsiders, attention has been primarily paid to single statements, the composition of Said Nursi’s epistles has hitherto been neglected.

Among the scholars from the field of Islamic studies, only Eric Ormsby has chosen to compare Said Nursi to another author (“Two Epistles of Consolation: Al-Shahid al-Thani and Said Nursi on Theodicy” 147-158). His comparison of Zayn al-Din al-ʿĀmilī’s Musakkin al-fuʿād ʿinda l-faqd al-ḥibba wa-l-awlād with Said Nursi’s reflections on the death of children makes more sense than the strained comparisons with Western authors due to a certain common ground of the argumentation. Dale Eickelman’s contribution (“Justice, Morality, and Modernity: What Makes the Risale-i Nur Modern?” 135-146) suffers from the...