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# Wisdom, Prophecy, and the Guidance of Humanity

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## **WISDOM, PROPHECY, AND THE GUIDANCE OF HUMANITY: POPE JOHN XXIII AND BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI**

Leo D. Lefebure\*

**Abstract:** While there are major differences between their respective religious paths and personal lives, there are also important areas of convergence between the beliefs and practices of Pope John XXIII (formerly Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli) and Said Nursi. Both saw a world of massive injustice, inequality and violence; both saw humans on their own as unable to meet these challenges; and both found resources to guide humanity in the wisdom of their respective religious traditions. Both worked tirelessly to actualise the promise of peace of their particular religious paths. Both believed in religious freedom. Roncalli knew and respected Muslims from his years serving as a papal envoy in Sofia, Bulgaria, and in Istanbul. As Pope John XXIII, he changed Catholic teaching by affirming for the first time in Catholic history the right of religious freedom. Nursi interpreted the Islamic heritage of prophecy and wisdom in relation to the challenges of his context. Pope John and Nursi drew lessons from the prophets of their traditions to guide contemporary believers. Both stand as beacons of hope for humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nursi and Pope John appreciated the deep anxieties of their contemporaries over the many threats and uncertainties of modern life; both knew the havoc that can be brought by unchecked human passions. Submission to God as the one sure path to peace was at the very centre of Nursi's understanding of Islam and human life. It was also central to Pope John's understanding of Christian discipleship.

**Keywords:** *Catholic social teaching; (Pope) John XXIII (Angelo Roncalli); Nursi, Said; prophecy; Vatican Council II; Wisdom (Chokmah, hikmah, Sophia)*

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi believes God's wisdom is manifest throughout creation, but humans often fail to recognise it. To address human ignorance and sinfulness, God has sent prophets with a message that reveals God's power, mercy and compassion, and calls humans to faith and submission. In this conviction, Nursi is similar to important aspects of biblical and Catholic traditions. The Bible includes wisdom and prophecy. The wisdom tradition acknowledges God's wisdom embedded in creation and reflects on the demand for justice embedded in the order of creation as a challenge to all humans. The prophetic tradition sets

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forth principles for social justice that address the social, economic and political order of its time, with ramifications for the present world. Both the sapiential and prophetic traditions inform the Catholic tradition of social teaching, which applies biblical principles to contemporary life. The wisdom tradition provides Catholics with a basis for dialogue with all humans; the prophetic tradition provides Catholics with an important point of contact with Jews and Muslims. Christians and Muslims acknowledge the biblical heritage as a gift of God to guide humanity. One of the most pressing challenges for Muslims and Christians is how to present the critical wisdom of the prophetic tradition to the entire human community in the contemporary world.

Two of the most influential figures who took up this challenge in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (1881-1963), who became Pope John XXIII on 28 October 1958, and his nearly exact contemporary, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (ca. 1877-1960).<sup>1</sup> These leaders lived through the same period of history, including the traumas of two world wars and collapse of governments in their native lands. They faced analogous challenges and interpreted the prophetic and sapiential heritage of their respective traditions in a rapidly changing world.

In interpreting this legacy, Pope John and Nursi discerned and responded to the needs of their times in their particular contexts. I will begin by noting aspects of the lives of Angelo Roncalli and Nursi that informed their writings. I will examine the biblical heritage of prophecy and wisdom, and its impact on the Catholic Church. Then I will discuss the teachings in the Qur'ān and *Risale-i Nur* in relation to the biblical and later Catholic traditions. I will close by exploring the intertwining of prophetic and sapiential teachings by Pope John, and the relation of his teachings to Nursi.

## THE LIVES OF POPE JOHN XXIII AND BEDIÜZZAMAN SAID NURSI

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli and Said Nursi grew up in devoutly religious families in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, deeply rooted in their respective traditions. Roncalli grew up in a family of farmers who were sharecroppers in Lombardy, Italy, where he knew a very simple, humble life. In 1870, just 11 years before Roncalli was born, the First Vatican Council issued the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, which reflected on the “twofold order of knowledge” of natural reason based on creation and divine faith, which responds to supernatural revelation; in the same year, the papacy lost the last remnants of the Papal States; in the wake of this trauma, Pope Leo XIII lived as a self-proclaimed “prisoner of the Vatican.” When Roncalli was ten years old, Pope Leo issued an epoch-making encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (literally, “Of New Things,” but usually translated as *The Condition of the Working Class*), which is the charter

<sup>1</sup> Said Nursi's birth has been variously dated from 1876 to 1878. His biographer Sükran Vahide places the date in 1877. Sükran Vahide, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: The Author of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Istabul Ofset Basim, 1992), 3; Sükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 353, n. 1. Colin Turner and Hasan Horkuc accept the date of 1876. *Said Nursi, Makers of Islamic Civilization* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009). Ian Markham and Suendam Birinci Pirim place the date in 1878. *An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 3-4.

for papal social teaching and would strongly shape Roncalli's later teaching as Pope John XXIII. The tradition of papal teaching on economic justice is the most powerful application of ancient prophetic principles to the modern world in Catholic thought. Roncalli studied for the priesthood and earned a doctorate in church history, which he taught for a short time. During World War I, he was a sergeant in the Italian army, working as a chaplain and stretcher-bearer; he saw the horrors of combat and learned first-hand how violent the modern world can be.

Nursi was born just a few years prior to Roncalli, in analogous circumstances in the humble village of Nurs near Lake Van in eastern Anatolia. He came to maturity amid the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. Like the young Roncalli, Nursi immersed himself in the study of his religious tradition, exploring the Qur'ān, wisdom of the Islamic tradition and discoveries of modern science. Nursi distinguished himself to such an extent that he received the accolade "Bediüzzaman" ("Wonder of the World"). Though neither Roncalli nor Nursi would pursue a professional, long-term academic career, their early studies laid the foundation for their later work, and both knew the principles of social justice of their traditions.

Prior to World War I, Nursi was much more of a prominent public figure than Roncalli. Nursi was involved in disputes at the end of the Ottoman Empire, advocating for the ability of Jews and Christians to participate in leadership positions such as governor in a predominantly Islamic society.<sup>2</sup> In World War I, when Roncalli had the rank of a sergeant, Nursi was a regimental commander and helped assist civilians, including Armenian Christians, when they were in danger. In the wake of World War I and collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal sought Nursi's support by offering him the position of Minister of Religious Affairs for the eastern portions of Turkey, but Nursi refused the offer and withdrew from public life. Nursi went through a deep spiritual crisis in these years, and he described this period as the transformation from the "old Said" to the "new Said." In the succeeding decades, Nursi was repeatedly harassed by Turkish authorities, but continued to interpret the Qur'ān for all who were interested.

Prior to World War I, Roncalli did not have any prominent public role comparable to Nursi. However, about the same time that Nursi was declining Atatürk's offer and withdrawing from public life, Roncalli's life changed dramatically when, on 17 February 1925, he was summoned to meet with Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, the Secretary of State of the Holy See, who informed him that he was being sent as the apostolic visitor to Bulgaria. Surprised by this news, Roncalli protested that he did not know anything about Bulgaria and was not a diplomat. The cardinal overrode his objections, assuring him this transfer was a mission assigned him by Pope Pius XI. Gasparri expressed his deep concern over the conflicts in Bulgaria: "But everyone seems to be fighting with everyone else, the Moslems with the Orthodox, the Greek Catholics with the Latins, and the Latins with each other. Could you go there and find out what is really happening?"<sup>3</sup> While the challenge was daunting, Roncalli accepted it whole-heartedly as the will of God for him. Pope Pius XI decided Roncalli should be consecrated as an archbishop

<sup>2</sup> Vahide, *Nursi*, 89-91.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century*, abridged ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 55.

before he departed for his mission. The motto of his episcopacy, and later of his papacy, was *Obedientia et Pax* (Obedience and Peace). For him, the path to peace led through obedience to the will of God. It would be a hallmark of Roncalli's life before and after becoming Pope that he sought to understand people who differed from him and build bridges of understanding and acceptance.

Roncalli arrived in Sofia shortly after a terrorist bomb attack and prior to an earthquake that devastated many lives. For Christmas of 1928 he visited Istanbul, where he spoke of "the mysterious world of Islam in which there are new stirrings whose direction is in the hands of God."<sup>4</sup> He was concerned about the decline in influence of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and the secularising policies of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He could not have known at that time how important Istanbul would be in his later career.

Roncalli's years in Bulgaria were difficult because of tensions between the Orthodox and Catholic communities. Many viewed this assignment as a form of exile and marginalisation. In 1935, he was promoted and transferred to Istanbul to serve as the Apostolic Delegate in Turkey and Greece. On arrival, he had to report to the police, who viewed him with suspicion. The city governor initially treated him coolly, but Roncalli's warmth and charm soon established a more friendly relationship. He sought to unify the diverse Catholic community, and reached out to the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Photius II, seeking better relations.

During the same years that Nursi was experiencing difficulties with the Turkish government, Roncalli's relations with the Turkish authorities were also strained because of Ataturk's secularising policies. To make things worse, the Turkish government did not officially recognise Roncalli as a papal diplomat. A month after he arrived, the authorities forbade publication of the Catholic weekly newspaper, *La Vita Cattolica* ("Catholic Life"). The Turkish government also closed most Catholic schools, making it much more difficult to obtain a Catholic education. Ataturk forbade distinctive Muslim clothing, and he proceeded also to ban any distinctive Christian garb, including soutanes and religious habits. Thus, Roncalli could not wear his usual clerical attire, but his reaction was mild, and he tried to keep things in perspective: "What does it matter whether we wear the soutane or trousers as long as we proclaim the word of God?"<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Nursi refused to stop wearing the traditional Islamic head cover, since he viewed this as an important expression of the Islamic way of life.

The wisdom of their respective traditions gave Nursi and Roncalli a way of responding to mistreatment without striking back in anger. Roncalli based his approach to the Turkish government on the example of Jesus, stating: "Above all, I wish to render good for evil, and in all things try to prefer the Gospel truth to the cunning of human politics."<sup>6</sup> When Nursi was mistreated by the government, he hoped:

If this ill-treatment, distress, and oppression inflicted on me by 'the worldly' is for my faulty soul, I forgive it. Perhaps my soul will be reformed by means of it and perhaps it will be

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 74.

atonement for its sins. I have experienced many of the good things in this guest-house of the world; if I experience a little of its trials, I shall still offer thanks.<sup>7</sup>

Nursi reflects on his exile by the Turkish government as a time of blessing from God that allowed him to write *The Words*: “The All-Compassionate and Wise Creator turned the exile into mercy; He transformed the solitude on the mountain, which was unsafe and exposed to factors that would harm sincerity, into a retreat in the safe and sincere mountains of Barla.”<sup>8</sup>

Both figures exemplify the prophetic demand for justice, especially regarding those who are most threatened and vulnerable. Roncalli was in Greece when World War II began. Becoming aware of the threats to Jews in south-eastern Europe, he worked to provide transit visas through the Apostolic Delegation and approved the forging of simulated baptismal certificates to protect Jews from the Nazis. His involvement in helping Jews escape the Nazi horror contributed to his later interest in improving interreligious relations when he was Pope. During World War I, Nursi used his position as a regimental commander to assist Armenian Christian civilians when they were being threatened in wartime.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1950s, the Turkish government changed its policies, and Nursi was able to live with fewer restrictions. He continued to dictate the writings of the *Risale-i Nur*. In 1950, Nursi was in contact with Pope Pius XII, the immediate predecessor of Pope John XXIII. Nursi gave permission to Selahaddin Celebi to send some of Nursi’s writings to Pope Pius XII, and Nursi received a hand-written note of thanks in response, dated 22 February 1951.<sup>10</sup> In 1953, Nursi visited the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul, hoping for greater cooperation between Christians and Muslims.

During these years, Roncalli came to greater prominence, serving as the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice from 1953 until he was elected Pope on 28 October 1958. Pope John XXIII reached out to persons across the world, seeking to build bridges of understanding and friendship. As pope, he became a figure beloved all over the world and played a role in mediating the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. In the wake of the missile crisis, Pope John reflected on the challenges facing humanity and in March 1963 issued what was in effect his final testament, the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (“Peace on Earth”). Nursi’s lasting legacy lies in large measure in the work that he said came “through” him, the reflections on the Qur’ān, the *Risale-i Nur*. The writings of these two men are among the treasures of 20<sup>th</sup>-century religious literature.

In many respects, the trajectories of the two lives move in opposite directions. Roncalli was not a public figure when he was young; Nursi was far more prominent in political life in the Ottoman Empire than young Roncalli ever was in Italy. After World War I, as Nursi withdrew from public life and went through the transformation from the “old Said” to the “new Said,” Roncalli was beginning a diplomatic career. Both figures experienced the restrictions on religious life in Turkey imposed by Atatürk. Roncalli was viewed with suspicion by the Turkish

<sup>7</sup> Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Letters 1928-1932 From the Risale-i Nur Collection*, vol. 2, trans. Sükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Ofset, 1997), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 66-67.

<sup>9</sup> Vahide, *Nursi*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> Vahide, *Nursi*, 343-44; Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 316.

police, and Nursi was repeatedly harassed by the Turkish authorities and spent much of his life under house arrest or in prison. Through all the vicissitudes of their lives, Pope John and Nursi drew deeply on the prophecy and wisdom of their respective traditions not only for personal support, but also for guidance for all humans.

## **BIBLICAL PROPHECY AND WISDOM AND THE CATHOLIC TRADITION**

In Christianity and Islam, God is the ultimate source of all wisdom and true prophecy; prophets speak on behalf of God and claim the authority of their message comes not from their own insights but from God. In both traditions, the guidance God gives humans through prophets is intimately related to the wisdom of God in creation, which is in principle open to all humans. Muslims and Christians look to prophets for guidance in interpreting the will of God; Muslims and Christians also value the wisdom of God in creation, and many Muslims and Christians believe humans can discern something of God's will from reflection on creation. In the Bible, the two diverse forms of divine guidance of humanity intertwine; the wisdom teachers and prophets of ancient Israel converge and diverge in important respects. These two trajectories intertwine in the presentation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and throughout the later Christian tradition, including the teaching of Pope John XXIII. The Islamic tradition values wisdom and prophets highly, and the Qur'ān recognises that divine revelation was given to prophets in ancient Israel and to Jesus of Nazareth. Nursi relates the teachings of the Qur'ān to the Book of the Universe.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Prophecy and Wisdom in the Bible***

In the Bible prophets speak in the name of God on the basis of a special call; biblical teachers of wisdom appeal to the order of God manifest in creation that, at least in principle, is open to all humans. The later sapiential books, which are in the Catholic and Byzantine Orthodox Bibles but not in the Jewish or Protestant Bibles, correlate the prophetic witness with the wisdom God implanted in creation.

The prophets of Israel were forceful, charismatic figures who repeatedly challenged religious and political leaders in the name of God. Prophets received a special call from God, as did Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3), Samuel at the shrine in Shiloh (1 Sam 3:4-21), Isaiah in the temple in Jerusalem (Is 6:1-13) or Jeremiah in Anathoth (Jer 1:4-19). The prophets of ancient Israel challenged the wealthy of their time to be honest in dealing with the poor. They challenged the powerful to be just in dealing with those less powerful. They challenged those who trusted in military weapons to relinquish that faith and instead trust in God. Hosea attacks the abuse of material wealth: "With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction" (Hos 8:4). Hosea accuses those who practice injustice: "A trader, in whose hands

<sup>11</sup> Sami `Afifi Hijazi, "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Ideas on the Qur'an and the Book of the Universe," in *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur: Fourth International Symposium on Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözler Nesriyat Ticaret ve Sanayi, 2000), 439-452.

are false balances, he loves to oppress” (Hos 12:7). Warning those who seek safety in military alliances, Hosea instructs the people to seek forgiveness and pray for mercy (Hos 14:3). The prophet Joel passionately implores his hearers to renounce violence: “Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears” (Joel 3:10).

Amos is excoriating in his denunciation of economic injustice (Am 2:6-7). Jeremiah warns people not to trust in the building of the Temple in Jerusalem or the sheer performance of rituals apart from ethical behaviour; prayer cannot be separated from just actions, especially toward the poor (Jer 7:1-4). Jeremiah promises, if the people amend their ways, God will dwell with them (Jer 7:5-7).

The wisdom tradition complements the prophetic heritage in the Bible. The wisdom tradition of ancient Israel is represented in the Hebrew Bible by the books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, as well as by various Psalms and wisdom tales like that of Joseph in Genesis. This tradition reaches back to the earliest times of ancient Israel, with roots in the families and clans, where each generation imparted the wisdom of life to the younger generation. *Chokmah* originally referred to the skill of learning to do something, especially how to navigate through the challenges of life. Wisdom was the practical sense of how to get along and get ahead, how to be virtuous and successful at the same time.

The wisdom tradition of ancient Israel was part of a broad, cosmopolitan culture of sages that extended throughout the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> From Egypt to Mesopotamia, teachers of wisdom reflected on the order of justice embedded in the universe and formulated precepts for humans to flourish in virtue.<sup>13</sup> Sages in Israel recognised the wisdom of their counterparts in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and drew freely upon their perspectives. Open to the truth and discernment of other religious traditions, the wisdom teachers of the Bible acknowledged an international, interreligious and intercultural community of discourse: since the wisdom implanted in creation is universal and universally accessible, sages from different religious backgrounds could find points of contact and exchange.<sup>14</sup> The Wisdom of Solomon rejected idolatry, but defended in principle that all humans can know God: “For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wis 13:5).

In principle, wisdom is open to all those who seek diligently for understanding through discipline. Michael Fox notes the universal implications of Wisdom:

Israel does not have a monopoly on wisdom. Since the transcendental wisdom pervades all of God’s ‘habitable world,’ the learning of the nations, insofar as it conforms to the ethical

<sup>12</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1992); James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981); Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, William Johnston Wiseman, eds., *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 51-210; Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of the Empires* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008); Leo G. Purdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Jon Levenson, *The Universal Horizon of Jewish Particularism* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1985). See also G. E. Bryce, *A Legacy of Wisdom: The Egyptian Contribution to the Wisdom of Israel* (Lewisburg/London: Bucknell University/Associated University, 1979).



standards of Proverbs, is genuine wisdom or, we may say, Wisdom's voice. This viewpoint is shared by 1 Kgs 5:10-11, for the comparison of Solomon's wisdom to the wisdom of renowned foreigners presupposes the validity of the latter. Wisdom, in its essence rather than in its infinite particulars, is God's gift to humanity, and Israel partakes in this cosmopolitan wisdom.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Jesus, Prophecy, and Wisdom in Catholic Tradition***

The wisdom tradition and prophetic heritage shaped the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church, establishing the context for Pope John XXIII. In some passages of the canonical gospels, Jesus teaches as an eschatological prophet, but he also teaches in the style of the earlier Jewish wisdom teachers and New Testament authors interpret him as the incarnation of Sophia.<sup>16</sup> The Sermon on the Mount in particular is filled with wisdom sayings and teaches sapiential lessons regarding the proper use of wealth, donations to the poor, upright character, humility, choosing the right treasure, living one day at a time, not judging others and following one master. Many of Jesus' parables present the consequences of wise and foolish behaviour. Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving to God for revealing wisdom to infants also evokes Sophia. Jesus' invitation, "Take my yoke upon you," echoes earlier the invitation of Ben Sira teachers to accept the yoke of Sophia (Sir 51:26). According to Matthew, Jesus saw himself as a physician (Mt 9:11-12). The teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain share many of the assumptions about wisdom of the Jewish and Greco-Roman Hellenistic world, including the concern with reflection as "preventive ethical therapy."<sup>17</sup>

The early Church reflects on the sapiential and prophetic traditions without making a clear, systematic distinction between the orders of natural knowledge and supernatural faith. In about 1230, Philip the Chancellor made a systematic distinction between nature and grace; Thomas Aquinas used this distinction to reflect comprehensively on the entire structure of Catholic theology. In 1870, the First Vatican Council invoked this distinction when considering the challenges and questions of its time:

With regard to the source [of knowledge of God], we know at the one level by natural reason, at the other level by divine faith. With regard to the object, besides those things to which natural reason can attain, there are proposed for our belief mysteries hidden in God which, unless they are divinely revealed, are incapable of being known.<sup>18</sup>

The Council taught that human reason never fully comprehends the mysteries that are supernaturally revealed, but it can reach a certain level of understanding. There is in principle never any conflict between the orders of reason and of faith. This distinction sets the context

<sup>15</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 358.

<sup>16</sup> Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 86.

<sup>18</sup> First Vatican Council, "Dei Filius, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward/Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 808.

for all Catholic social teaching, which appeals to natural wisdom accessible to all humans and also to divine revelation received through prophets and other biblical figures.

### ***The Holy Qur'ān and Biblical Prophecy and Wisdom***

The Qur'ān acknowledges that prophets were sent to Israel (2:87) and Jesus was a prophet (2:87; 3:45; 5:75). The Qur'ān affirms the principles enunciated by the prophets of Israel: the demand for justice and honesty in dealing with the poor, and concern for neighbours. Like the biblical prophets, the Qur'ān insists on righteousness in society and warns that God is displeased with any society in which the poor cannot live in dignity. The Qur'ān advises: "Competition in accumulating wealth keeps you preoccupied until you visit your graves. Nay, you shall find out soon; nay, you shall find out soon" (107:1-6). And it proclaims:

Woe betide every fault-finder, back-slider, who collects wealth and counts it. He thinks his wealth will bestow eternal life upon him! Nay, he shall certainly be thrown in *hutama* and do you know what *hutama* is? It is God's fire that He lights and that descends upon the hearts [of callous miserly people] (104:1-6).<sup>19</sup>

The biblical prophets repeatedly attacked those who abused the widow and orphan; as we have seen, Jeremiah excoriated those who went to the temple to pray but oppressed the poor. In similar tones, the Qur'ān instructs:

Did you see the one who gives the lie to the Faith? It is he who maltreats orphans and works little for the feeding of the poor. Woe betide, then, those who pray, yet are neglectful of their prayers—those who pray for show and even deny the use of their utensils [to the poor] (107:1-7).<sup>20</sup>

The Qur'ān also teaches that God is "the All-Wise" (6:18) and thus the source of all human wisdom. The Islamic tradition highly values *hikmah*, the Arabic word cognate with the Hebrew *chokmah*, which is usually translated as "wisdom," in accordance with the *ḥadīth*: "The acquisition of *hikmah* is incumbent upon you and the good resides in *hikmah*."<sup>21</sup> Muslim authors have understood *hikmah*/wisdom in different ways. Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes Islamic philosophers believe "the origin of *hikmah* to be divine."<sup>22</sup> For Muslims, as for the biblical sages, students of wisdom were not simply intellectually adept but were expected to live according the wisdom they learned.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam*, Islamic Philosophy Online, n.d., accessed August 24, 2012, <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/nasr-ip1.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> John Renard, trans. and ed., *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004).

## BEDIÜZZAMAN SAID NURSI

Throughout his writings, Nursi acknowledges the intimate relation between the Qur'ān and earlier biblical prophets:

One wing of the Qur'an is in the past, and one is in the future, and just as its roots and one wing are the agreed truths of the former prophets, and it confirms and corroborates them, and they too confirm it with the tongue of unanimity, so too all the true sufi paths and the ways of sainthood whose fruits, the saints and purified scholars, who receive life from the Qur'an, show through their vital spiritual progress that their blessed tree is living, effulgent, and the means to truth.<sup>24</sup>

### *Prophecy and Wisdom*

The themes of prophecy and wisdom, which run deep in the Islamic tradition, shape the life of Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi looks to the prophets for God's guidance and reiterates the demand for justice that we heard in the biblical prophets and wisdom tradition. Wisdom and prophecy come together in Nursi's understanding of revelation, as he expresses his view of the Qur'ān as revealing the meaning of the "book" of the created world:

The All-Wise Qur'an, the treasury of miracles and supreme miracle, proves the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) together with Divine unity so decisively that it leaves no need for further proof ... The All-Wise Qur'an, which makes known to us our Sustainer, is thus: it is the pre-eternal translator of the great book of the universe; the discloser of the treasures of the Divine Names concealed in the pages of the earth and the heavens; the key to the truths hidden beneath these lines of events; ... the instructor, true wisdom, guide, and leader of the world of humanity; it is both a book of wisdom and law, and a book of prayer and worship.<sup>25</sup>

Nursi believes the order of creation manifests the wisdom of God, and God has spoken to humans by sending prophets with specific revealed messages. As an illustration of the order of creation, Nursi tells a parable about the wisdom of God in creation. As two men travel through a beautiful land, one comments:

See with what lofty wisdom and ordering affairs are managed, and with what true justice and balance transactions are effected! Now a wise polity requires that those who seek refuge under the protecting wing of the state should receive favour, and justice demands that the rights of subjects be preserved, so that the splendor of the state should not suffer. But here in this land, not a thousandth part of the requirements of such wisdom and justice is fulfilled; for example, empty-headed people such as yourself usually leave this realm unpunished. So again we say, matters are postponed for the consideration of a Supreme Tribunal.<sup>26</sup>

Since justice does not always occur in the affairs of this world, Nursi believes there must be another world where justice will be fulfilled. The Wisdom of Solomon made a similar claim, noting in this world the just often suffer persecution, but are vindicated after death (Wis 2:1-

<sup>24</sup> Said Nursi, *The Words: On the Nature and Purposes of Man, Life, and All Things*, *Risale-I Nur Collection*, vol. 1, trans. Sükran Vahide, rev. ed. (Istanbul: Teyhan Ofest, A.S., 2002), 461-62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 61.

3:19). The Wisdom of Solomon asserts that God created all things in measure, number and weight (Wis 11:20). Nursi similarly comments on the wisdom and order of creation:

Yes, the Being that administers this cosmos preserves all things in order and balance. Order and balance are the manifestation of knowledge and wisdom, of will and power. For we see that the substance of every created object is fashioned in well-ordered and symmetrical fashion. Not only is each of the forms it changes throughout its life well-ordered, but the totality of these forms is also marked by the same orderliness. We see, too, that the Glorious Preserver preserves many forms of all things the life of which comes to an end when they have performed their function.<sup>27</sup>

For Nursi and the prophetic and wisdom traditions of the Bible, justice is a demand implanted by God in creation; the preaching of the prophets reiterates this call. Throughout Nursi's life, he continually returned to the application of prophecy and wisdom to the contemporary world, often in extremely difficult circumstances of his personal life. Nursi quotes the Qur'ān, "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your tongues and in your colours" (30:22) and he comments:

Yes, the first degree of the pages of the world which testify to an All-wise Maker is the origin of the heavens and the earth, their creation. Next is the heavens being adorned with stars and the earth made to rejoice with living beings ... And since the works of art and wisdom of a Maker are apparent in the original creation of the vast heavens and earth, Who positions them purposefully as the foundation stones of the palace of the universe; the works of His art and the impress of His wisdom will surely be most clear in His other beings.<sup>28</sup>

Nursi exhorts: "Look at the living creatures revolving in this flowing universe, in these flowing beings! You will see that on each are many seals placed by the Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One."<sup>29</sup> For Nursi, all creation manifests the wisdom of God; "Look at and consider also the universal wisdom which is apparent on the face of the earth as a whole and is to be seen in its totality and shows clearly purpose and will."<sup>30</sup> Nursi sets the special guidance of God through prophets in the context of the cosmic manifestation of God's wisdom and power. He tells us that God, "the Peerless Creator,"

willed the creation of the palace of the universe and the tree of the cosmos, which forms the macrocosm. He set the foundations of the palace, the tree, in six days through the principles of wisdom and laws of His pre-eternal knowledge ... Then He manifested and made luminous His Names within the arena of those universal laws and general principles. And then in a special way sent to the assistance of individuals crying out at the constraint of those universal laws His Names of Most Merciful and All-Compassionate. That is to say, within those universal and general principles He has special favours, special succour, special manifestations, so that everything may seek help from Him and look to Him at all times for every need."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 411.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 302.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 695.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid,, 684.

Sami `Afifi Hijazi comments on the two books of revelation, which were authoritative for Said Nursi. There is “[t]he recited book,” which is the Qur’ān. There is also “[t]he created book, which represents the universe and symbolizes the manifest world.”<sup>32</sup>

### *Economic Justice*

After the transformation from the “old Said” to the “new Said,” Nursi did not believe he had a vocation to be directly involved in political and economic affairs: “Service of the All-Wise Qur’an severely prohibited me from the world of politics ... Indeed, service of the Qur’an prevents me from thinking of socio-political life.”<sup>33</sup> Nursi did not want his comments on the Qur’ān to be mistaken for political propaganda: “All praise be to God, because I withdrew from politics, I did not reduce the diamond-like truths of the Qur’an to the value of fragments of glass amid accusations of political propaganda.”<sup>34</sup> As we have seen, Pope John XXIII grew up in the years following the end of the Papal States, when popes were no longer temporal rulers of central Italy. Thus, beyond the narrow boundaries of Vatican City, he was not a direct political ruler, but was profoundly interested in political, social and economic questions.

While Nursi after World War I did not intervene directly in political and economic affairs, nonetheless, like the biblical prophets who expressed concern for the widow and orphan, and condemned those who profited by abusing the poor, the *Risale-i Nur* condemns such economic exploitation as evil and the source of social unrest, commenting that “just as the source of mankind’s revolutions is one phrase, so another phrase is the origin of all immorality.

**First Phrase:** ‘So long as I’m full, what is it to me if others die of hunger.’

**Second Phrase:** ‘You work so that I can eat.’<sup>35</sup>

Nursi sees the Qur’ān as abolishing both phrases, the first with the teaching of *zakat* (almsgiving) and the second with the prohibition of usury and interest. Jesus, like the prophets of Israel before him, denounces the worship of money: “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Lk 16:13). Similarly, Nursi insists on the importance of using material wealth properly:

Thus, if man relies on his ego, and making worldly life his goal, attempts to taste temporary pleasures while struggling to make his living, he becomes submerged within an extremely constricted sphere, then departs. All the members, systems, and faculties given him will testify against him at the resurrection and will bring a suit against him.<sup>36</sup>

Jesus advises his listeners: “Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Lk 12: 33-34). In

<sup>32</sup> Hijazi, “Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’s Ideas on the Qur’an and the Book of the Universe,” 440.

<sup>33</sup> Nursi, *Letters*, 68, 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Nursi, *Words*, 421.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 337.

a similar vein, Nursi insists: “Thus, this great wealth in faculties and abundant capital was certainly not given for procuring this temporary worldly life.”<sup>37</sup> Nursi warns: “O man who worships this world, is the lover of worldly life, and is heedless of the meaning of ‘the most excellent patterns’?”<sup>38</sup>

Another area where Nursi and the biblical prophets converge is in hoping for the non-violent resolution of conflicts. As we have seen, the prophets Isaiah and Joel challenge their contemporaries to turn swords into plowshares. As Thomas Michel has noted, Nursi proposes a God-centred life as the antidote to a culture of violence.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Monotheistic Faith***

Nursi sees a close connection between the prophetic teaching of the oneness (*tawhīd*) of God and the principles of justice. He believes, in order to establish justice and balance in human society, faith in one God is necessary. He sees materialism and atheism as threats to justice. In sharp contrast to the language of the First Vatican Council, Nursi believes there are “proofs” for the pillars of beliefs:

Belief is a single truth, which, composed of its six pillars, cannot be divided up. It is a universal that cannot be separated into parts. It is a whole that cannot be broken up. For each of the pillars of belief proves the other pillars with the proofs that prove itself. They are all extremely powerful proofs of each other. In which case, an invalid idea that cannot shake all the pillars together with all their proofs, cannot in reality negate any one of the pillars, or even a single of their truths, and cannot deny them.<sup>40</sup>

However, in his discussions, Nursi does not offer the types of proof familiar to Catholic theology in Thomas Aquinas. In proving the existence of God, which for him is but a preamble to supernatural faith in God, Aquinas begins with observations on the world, invokes metaphysical principles from Aristotle and argues in stringent fashion to a conclusion.<sup>41</sup> Instead of this formal, philosophical manner of proof, Nursi proposes rhetorical questions to support his claim:

Yes, is it at all possible and reason accept that a pre-eternal everlasting sovereignty of dominicality, a post-eternal Divine rule, which administers the boundless universe as though it was a palace, a city, or a country; and makes it revolve in balanced and ordered fashion; and changes it with wisdom; and equips and directs all together particles, planets, flies, and stars as though each was a regular army, and continuously drills them within the spheres of command and will in a lofty manoeuvre; and employing them in duties makes them act, and causes them to roam and travel, and to parade worshipfully; – is it at all possible that that

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 338.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 339.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Michel, “Is a God-centered Life an Antidote to a Culture of Violence? Some Reflections from the Risale-i Nur,” in *The Risale-i Nur: Knowledge, Faith, Morality and the Future of Humankind* (Istanbul: Istanbul Ofset, 2010), 338-49.

<sup>40</sup> Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Rays Collection, Risale-i Nur Collection*, vol. 4 (Ankara: Ihlal NurNesriyat, 2004), 295.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1.2.2-3, 12-14.

eternal, everlasting, enduring rule would not have an eternal seat, a permanent and everlasting place of manifestation; that is, the hereafter? God forbid!<sup>42</sup>

Catholic scholars could well make a similar type of appeal, but would not call it a “proof.” Nursi goes on to specify that “proofs” can be applied to the prophets and scriptures. He poses and then answers the rhetorical question:

Although He [God] speaks with them and with all living beings, should He not speak with men verbally and send them scriptures, books, and decrees? God forbid, innumerable times! That is to say, with its certainty and innumerable proofs, belief in God proves belief in the prophets and sacred scriptures.<sup>43</sup>

In sharp contrast, Vatican I teaches that supernatural revelation offers an additional knowledge of God beyond what can be proved by reason:

Wherefore, when the Apostle [Paul], who witnesses that God was known to the gentiles from created things, comes to treat of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, he declares: ‘We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this. God has revealed it to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God’ (1 Cor 2:7-8, 10).<sup>44</sup>

Catholic theology distinguishes a double gratuity: the first gift is the order of creation. This natural order in no way requires or proves the second order of the supernatural gift of revelation in prophecy and Jesus Christ. For Catholics, there is in principle no way of proving the supernatural revelation given through the prophets or in Jesus Christ. Catholics believe because of the trustworthiness of God who offers the revelation, not because of any attempted proof. Vatican I teaches: “If anyone says that in divine revelation there are contained no true mysteries properly so-called, but that all the dogmas of the faith can be understood and demonstrated by properly trained reason from natural principles, let him be anathema.”<sup>45</sup>

Nursi believes humans could not establish a just social, economic, and political order if they did not worship God properly. He offers very harsh criticisms of atheism: “For example, unbelief is an evil, a destruction, an absence of affirmation. But that single evil comprises insulting the whole universe, belittling all the Divine Names, and abusing all humanity.”<sup>46</sup> Catholics agree that atheism is explicitly a rejection of God, but Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council sought positive dialogue with atheists, acknowledging there can be elements of truth and goodness in their perspectives.

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<sup>42</sup> Nursi, *Rays*, 295.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 297.

<sup>44</sup> First Vatican Council, “*Dei Filius*,” 808.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 811.

<sup>46</sup> Nursi, *Words*, 333.

## JOHN XXIII: PACEM IN TERRIS

On 11 April 1963, Pope John XXIII issued his last encyclical, which was in effect his final will and testament to the world. He was gravely ill at the time, and died of stomach cancer about seven weeks later, on 3 June 1963. For the first time in the history of papal encyclicals, Pope John addressed *Pacem in Terris* not only to Catholics, but to all people of good will, including those who do not believe in the one God. His effort to reach a wide audience succeeded on an unprecedented level in many regards. This is the only papal encyclical that has been set to music – by French Jewish composer Darius Milhaud, who was commissioned by Radio Television Française. It is also the only papal encyclical to be published in its entirety in *The New York Times*, and the only encyclical to be published in the Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*.

The encyclical takes up the principles of the prophets of ancient Israel—economic justice especially for the poor, abhorrence of war and hope for peace through the non-violent resolution of conflict. In this work, Pope John XXIII clearly affirms for the first time in Catholic history the right of all persons to follow their conscience in religious matters. However, Pope John does not ground his appeal only in the authority of the prophetic proclamations of supernatural revelation. In his effort to address all people of good will, Pope John also appeals to the wisdom of creation, which in principle is open to the discernment of all people of good will. As we have seen, Nursi combines the themes of prophecy and wisdom in his understanding of the Qur’ān and divine revelation. In order to reach the widest possible audience, Pope John bases his teaching not only on the divine revelation offered through prophets, but also on the wisdom of God in creation:

That a marvelous order predominates in the world of living beings and in the forces of nature, is the plain lesson which the progress of modern research and the discoveries of technology teach us. And it is part of the greatness of man that he can appreciate that order, and devise the means for harnessing those forces for his own benefit.<sup>47</sup>

Noting the multiple difficulties and dilemmas facing the human community, Pope John rejects materialism and explains his hopeful approach:

But the mischief is often caused by erroneous opinions. Many people think that the laws which govern man’s relations with the State are the same as those which regulate the blind, elemental forces of the universe. But it is not so; the laws which govern men are quite different. The Father of the universe has inscribed them in man's nature, and that is where we must look for them; there and nowhere else.<sup>48</sup>

Quoting the Psalms and Wisdom of Solomon, John XXIII argues that God has implanted a just order in creation, and endowed humans with rights and duties, which every governmental authority must respect. There is a powerful convergence of Pope John’s teaching with the perspectives of Nursi, who writes:

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<sup>47</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, The Holy See, April 11, 1963, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 6.



Since there is to be found in God's absolute, infinite, luminous, essential and eternal power a Divine justice and unending wisdom that is the origin, source, fundament and beginning of all order, regularity and equilibrium in creation; and since all things, particular and universal, small and great, are obedient to the command of that power and submissive to its workings—it follows that God causes the stars to revolve and to move, through the wisdom of His order, as easily as He rotates and moves the atoms.<sup>49</sup>

Pope John recapitulates and develops the major principles of Catholic social teaching, applying the principles of the prophets and wisdom teachers of ancient Israel and of Jesus Christ to contemporary life. In particular, Pope John denounces the arms race and the lack of basic economic necessities for the poor in the world:

We are deeply distressed to see the enormous stocks of armaments that have been, and continue to be, manufactured in the economically more developed countries. This policy is involving a vast outlay of intellectual and material resources, with the result that the people of these countries are saddled with a great burden, while other countries lack the help they need for their economic and social development.<sup>50</sup>

Nursi and Pope John shared a concern for religious liberty. The Qur'ān teaches: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256). In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John clearly affirms this right, making a crucial distinction between error and persons who are in error:

It is always perfectly justifiable to distinguish between error as such and the person who falls into error—even in the case of men who err regarding the truth or are led astray as a result of their inadequate knowledge, in matters of religion or of the highest ethical standards. A man who has fallen into error does not cease to be a man. He never forfeits his personal dignity.<sup>51</sup>

Like Nursi, Pope John rejects atheism, but nonetheless acknowledges there can be good elements in projects undertaken by atheists, and he encourages Catholics to cooperate with unbelievers in working for justice in society: "Catholics who, in order to achieve some external good, collaborate with unbelievers or with those who through error lack the fullness of faith in Christ, may possibly provide the occasion or even the incentive for their conversion to the truth."<sup>52</sup> Pope John makes a distinction between an atheistic worldview and the projects in society undertaken by atheists. He stresses the undertakings of atheists may contain elements of truth and goodness:

Again it is perfectly legitimate to make a clear distinction between a false philosophy of the nature, origin and purpose of men and the world, and economic, social, cultural, and political undertakings, even when such undertakings draw their origin and inspiration from that philosophy ... Besides, who can deny the possible existence of good and commendable elements in these undertakings, elements which do indeed conform to the dictates of right reason, and are an expression of man's lawful aspirations."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Nursi, *Rays*, 209.

<sup>50</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 159.

Pope John's positive outreach to atheists, seeking ways to collaborate, is in contrast to Nursi's sharp condemnations of non-believers. The Second Vatican Council, which Pope John convened, developed his teaching further and reached out to atheists, seeking a common basis for mutual understanding and cooperation. In *Gaudium et Spes, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, which was promulgated in 1965, the Council proclaims its solidarity with all humans without exception: "In their faithfulness to conscience, Christians are united with all other people in the search for truth and in finding true solutions to the many moral problems which arise in the lives of individuals and in society."<sup>54</sup> The Council suggests the concept of God that some atheists reject may not be the true God: "Others so conceive of God that the image which they then reject bears no resemblance to the God of the gospel."<sup>55</sup>

The Second Vatican Council frankly acknowledges that Catholics have not always born effective witness to God and thus share responsibility for the rise of modern atheism: "And no small part in the rise of atheism is attributable to believers who may be described more as concealing the true features of God and religion than as revealing them."<sup>56</sup> The Council proposes a sincere dialogue with atheists:

Yet the church seeks to identify the causes in the minds of atheists which underlie their denial of God, and it is sensitive to the gravity of the questions which atheism raises. In its love for all people it considers that these questions demand serious and deeper examination.<sup>57</sup>

## CONCLUSION

While there are major differences between their respective religious paths and personal lives, there are also important areas of convergence between the beliefs and practices of Pope John XXIII and Said Nursi. Both saw a world of massive injustice, inequality and violence; both saw humans on their own as unable to meet these challenges; and both found resources to guide humanity in the wisdom of their respective religious traditions. Both worked tirelessly to actualise the promise of peace of their particular religious paths. Both believed in religious freedom. Roncalli knew and respected Muslims from his years serving as a papal envoy in Sofia, Bulgaria, and in Istanbul. As Pope John XXIII, he changed Catholic teaching by affirming for the first time in Catholic history the right of religious freedom. He also set in motion the process that would lead to the 1965 promulgation of *Nostra Aetate, The Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Other Religions*, which would profoundly transform Muslim–Catholic relations by expressing the respect of the Catholic Church for Muslims. Nursi interpreted the Islamic heritage of prophecy and wisdom in relation to the challenges of his

<sup>54</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward/Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1078, 17.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 1079, 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 1080, 21.

context. Pope John and Nursi drew lessons from the prophets of their traditions to guide contemporary believers. Both stand as beacons of hope for humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Nursi and Pope John appreciated the deep anxieties of their contemporaries over the many threats and uncertainties of modern life; both knew the havoc that can be brought by unchecked human passions. Submission to God as the one sure path to peace was at the very centre of Nursi's understanding of Islam and human life. It was also central to Pope John's understanding of Christian discipleship. In the closing paragraphs of *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John cites the memorable words of St. Augustine:

Does your mind desire the strength to gain the mastery over your passions? Let it submit to a greater power, and it will conquer all beneath it. And peace will be in you—true, sure, most ordered peace. What is that order? God as ruler of the mind; the mind as ruler of the body. Nothing could be more orderly.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 165.

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