

mountains surge upward, the earth begins to breathe; it is delivered from harmful tremors and upheavals, and its tranquility as it pursues its duty of rotation is no longer disturbed.⁸

Mountains also serve as storerooms for water, minerals, and other substances useful for human well-being and function as well as landmarks to guide the weary traveler. This the Qur'an itself affirms: "And He set up on the earth firm mountains, lest it shake under you; as well as rivers and pathways, so that you may be guided. And landmarks, and by the stars they are guided" (Qur'an 16: 15-16.) Just as the mountains' grandiose panorama inspires men to reflect on the sovereign majesty of the One who produced them, so also the utility of mountains for human life reminds people of God's tender, compassionate care.

When Nursi turns his attention to the plant kingdom, he sees that from the mightiest tree to the tiniest seed, the vegetative world proclaims the glory of its Creator. This eloquent praise, found both in individual plants and in the totality of plant life, points to an intelligent Creator. The vast range of genus and species, their great variety in appearance, and the wide scope of beneficial usage for humankind all point to a Maker with genuine concern for His creatures. The various uses by which God provides for humans are evidence that the Creator has prepared this world for humankind. Whether it be plants whose existence is essential for human life in the form of food, wood, or medicine, or plants like flowers whose only purpose is to delight the eye and nose, they all proclaim the Creator's glory by their nature.

As is the case with flora, so also with fauna. When Nursi looks at the animal kingdom, he observes that the immense variety of animal life is all giving glory to God, indicating God's mercy, and proclaiming, "There is no god but He." The animal world teaches three great truths. Firstly, it shows that creation cannot be conceived as occurring by chance or random selection; the life of animals must come from One capable of wisdom and purpose. Secondly, symmetry and proportionality of innumerable species demands the existence of one who is all-Powerful who can accomplish this feat. Finally, the production of such an exhaustive variety of animal life from the mingling of virtually identical eggs and sperm shows the infinite capacity of the Producer.

⁸ The Supreme Sign, p. 138.

Advances in biology and DNA mapping have in no way invalidated Nursi's arguments. Rather, science has shown the way that the life of animate beings has developed. The more that humans discover the workings of nature, the more deeply are they able to appreciate the fruits of creation and to understand the song of praise that all creation gives to its Maker.

5. The wonders of humankind

Finally, Nursi's reflection turns to humanity itself. The first sign of God's providential care is His sending of prophets. Nursi considers the line of prophets as essential to guiding the transition of men from the animal to angelic state. As humans learn to think and act less like animals and live more like angels, they need guidance. God did not abandon humankind in their need and in order to bring them to the fullness of their true humanity, God sent the prophets with His message of light. Through the Divine guidance found in the prophetic word, people became able to transcend their lower natures and attain their divinely granted lofty status.

The prophets are the strongest manifestations of God's power, mercy, and blessings for humankind. As the most perfect of representations of humankind, the prophets have been models for human emulation. Through them God was able to warn and correct those who were going astray and lead them on the Straight Path. Belief in all the prophets has become a great source of strength for humans down through the centuries and a sign of God's loving providence. Beyond all else, the unanimity of the prophets' teaching provides humankind with a sure sign of the truth of the message God has communicated.

After the prophets, the next great proof of God's power and mercy are the saints, those remarkable individuals who have been formed by the prophetic message. He is speaking of those whose lives, attitudes, and accomplishments have been shaped by their reflections on "affirmative matters connected with faith." Nursi is referring to the wise teachers and scholars whose faith-based lessons have applied God's prophetic word to generations of believers.

The moral force of this assembly of intelligent, conscientious thinkers down through the centuries gives the ordinary believer a powerful strength that he or she would not otherwise have. Nursi asserts that “the belief and firm conviction concerning the Divine unity that all luminous intellects possessed, despite their varying capacities and differing, even opposing, methods and outlooks, was the same, and that their steadfast and confident certainty and assurance was one.”⁹

Their united voice in affirming and praising the one Creator enables the believer to rely not only on his own abilities and insights, but to be able to draw upon generations of accumulated and transmitted wisdom. Nursi is speaking both of the intellectual heritage handed on by generations of scholars, as well as the spiritual heritage transmitted by “millions of spiritual guides who were striving toward the truth.”¹⁰ Enriched and emboldened by this long history of belief in God and His Prophets and Books, the believer can confidently affirm “the necessary existence, the unity, and the sacred attributes of the Creator of this cosmos.”

Finally, his meditations on the One God manifested in creation lead Nursi to the truths revealed through the prophets. He has learned much on his mental voyage through the realms of creation and is now prepared to listen directly to the words of the Creator. Contemplation focused on creation will always lead back to the Author of that creation. He began his contemplative exercise in response to the Divine command to “reflect,” and his reflections conduct him through the phenomenal world and back to the Unseen Commander. In the process, Nursi has affirmed the purposeful nature of creation and moved to give glory to the Creator. In the words of the Qur’an: “Those who reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth (and say): ‘Our Lord, You did not create this in vain. Glory be to You!’” (Qr 3: 191).

For Nursi, there are two great vehicles by which God has communicated His message to humankind; the message of revelation, found in the Qur’an, and the message of creation, found in the universe. Christians find themselves in unison with Nursi’s understanding of how God communicates His word to humans. In medieval times, St. Bonaventure enunciated this approach to God’s Word. “Creation,” Bonaventure wrote, “is like a book from which we can

⁹ The Supreme Sign, p. 145.

¹⁰ The Supreme Sign, p. 143.

gather insights about the creator. The natural world bears the footprints of God, and the human person is created to read this book and know God.”¹¹

In our own day, Pope John Paul II repeatedly refers to the need that modern people have to learn from the Book of Creation. We have to rediscover a sense of wonder and learn to listen with the ears of our heart. This unusual phrase, “the ear of our heart,” is actually used by John Paul II to describe how we can learn the lessons that creation teaches. He says: “The ear of the heart must be free of noise in order to hear this divine voice echoing in the universe. Along with revelation properly so-called, contained in Sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night. Nature too, in a certain sense, is “the book of God.”¹²

Elsewhere, John Paul describes the universe as a kind of Gospel that teaches us divine matters. “Nature,” he holds, “becomes a gospel that speaks to us of God. From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Our capacity for contemplation and knowledge, our discovery of a transcendent presence in created things must lead us also to rediscover our kinship with the earth, to which we have been linked since our own creation.”¹³ The Pope cites the Book of Sirach that links the Jewish tradition to those of Christians and Muslims: “Who can have enough of beholding God’s glory? Though we speak much we can never reach the end, and the sum of our words is: ‘He is the all.’ The Pope concludes: “How can we find the strength to praise him? He is greater than all his works...” (*Sir* 43: 27-28). This verse anticipates *Allahu akbar*, the Muslim cry, “God is greater,” which in turn reappears in a yet later age by the desire of Jesuits to work “for the greater glory of God.”

Conclusion

I don’t consider myself an expert on the thought of Said Nursi. I have many friends who have devoted their lives – for 20, 30, 40 years and more – to the study of the *Risale-i Nur*. They read the work alone at home, in student residences, in weekly group study sessions. These are people

¹¹ Ilia Delio, *The Emergent Christ*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011, p. 13.

¹² John Paul II, "General Audience," 2 August 2000.

¹³ John Paul II, "General Audience," 26 January 2000.

from all walks of life – professionals, laborers, housewives, civil servants, students. Some of these men and women I consider to be true experts in the thought of Said Nursi. At least they have always been able to give convincing and inspiring answers to any questions that I put to them. I find myself a guest who arrives from a different land and culture, formed in and following a different religious path from the Islam shared by Said Nursi and his students. Nevertheless, I have learned a lot from Nursi and am grateful to him for his ideas and his example of constancy and devotion to God. I feel that my life – including my faith life as a Christian – has been greatly enriched by my encounter with the *Risale-i Nur*.