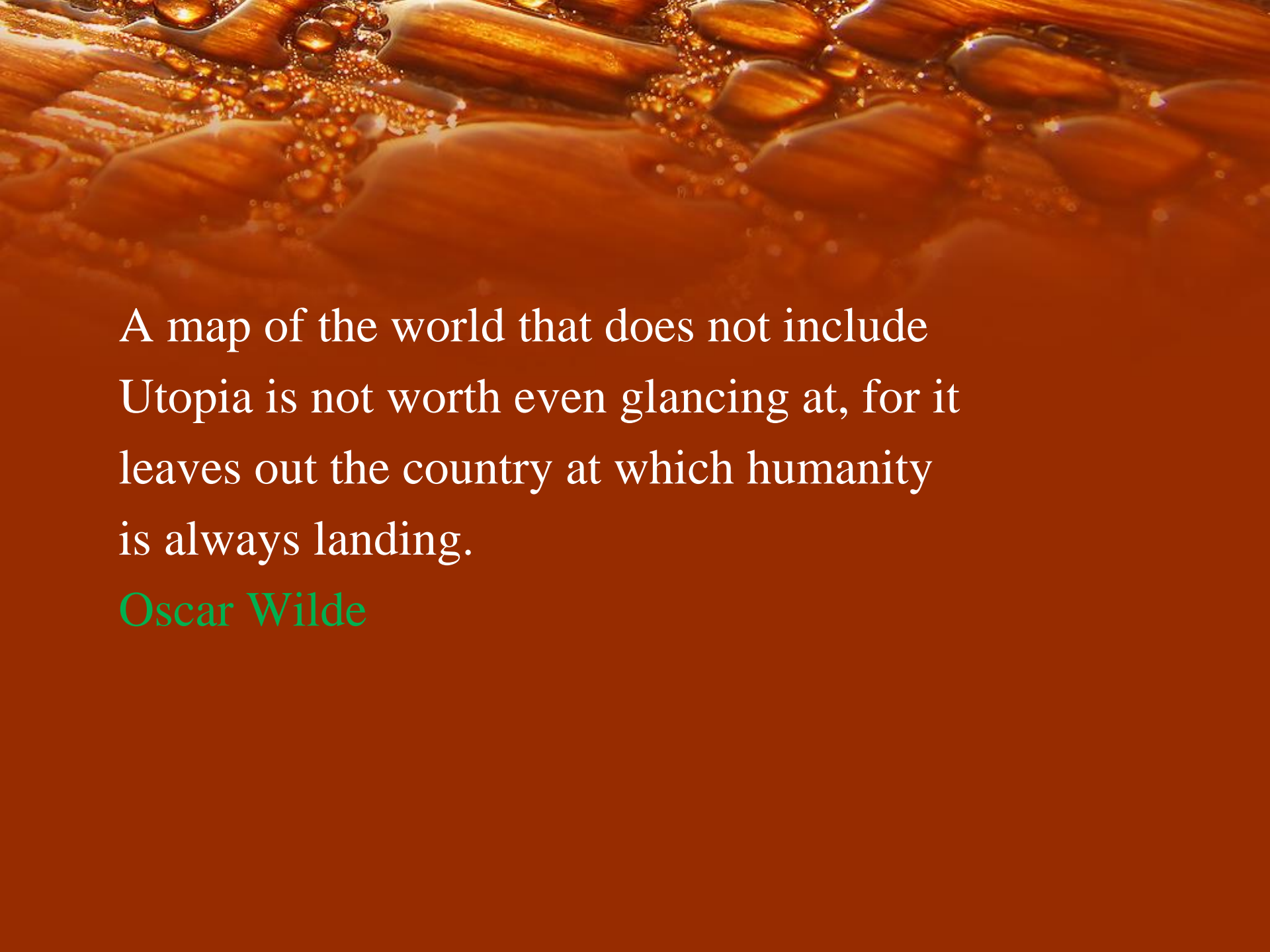# Social Change According to Badiuzzaman Nursi and Ali Shariati: Comparative Inquiry

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A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the country at which humanity is always landing.

Oscar Wilde

Introduction

• Throughout the course of Islamic revivalism history, many prominent Muslim reformists left a great impact on the actual Islamic world view. They left their marks in the efforts of lifting the Muslim Ummah up from the state of decline and backwardness.

• Theses efforts varied tremendously due to the social, intellectual, sectarian and political background of these reformists. However, it is safe to say that all of their efforts were brave attempts to cross the borders of division among Muslims and propose an Islamic framework for change.

• In this presentation we will explore the differences between Badiuzzaman Nursi's `gradualist', `progressive' approach and Ali Shariati `revolutionary' approach to generate social change.

Why the comparison?

1. Comparison is an effective way to generate, widen and construct knowledge.

2. Both Nursi and Shariati are Muslim thinkers and reformist who sought to change their respective societies.

3. Both attempted to create change through education.

4. Both left a big impact on their contemporaries and the generations which came after that

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4. To find out the extent of Muslim 's preparation in general and Nursi 's followers in particular to engage in an objective evaluation of his thought.

5. The relevance, continuity and progress of Nursi 's thought depends largely on our willingness to reassess it.

6. Nursi himself adopted and practiced the concept of evaluation. The call for self-review was the core of his approach.

7. Glorifying Nursi and resisting the attempts of objectively and critically reviewing his ideas wont help advancing his cause and keeping his struggle alive.

Concept of social change in Islam

• Generally, change is a universal, unavoidable, irreversible and is a necessary phenomenon.

• Depending on their ideological background, sociologists and thinkers offered explanation of the nature of change (cyclical/evolutionary) and its dimensions (identity, levels, rate, magnitude, direction, consequences, effects, and sources)

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- *tagghaiyyur, tabaddul, tahauwwl, khoroj, tajdid*, and *Islah* are some of the terminologies which refer to social change.

- Islam 's views on change are unique, and although it agrees with the necessity and universality of change, Islam insists that change must be aligned according to Tawhid.

- Therefore, the main objective of change in Islam is to assert and proclaim the unity of Allah in all spheres and aspects of human life.

- Islam asserts that not everything can be subjected to change. There are constant and transcendental realities.

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• In Islam change must take place at all levels: individual, societal and universal, but mostly at the level of the individuals. Change in them will cause subsequent changes at the other levels.

• In the case of individuals, Islam emphasizes to change their inner beings; awareness and consciousness, attitudes, beliefs, motivations and morality and spirituality.

• Change must be planned and gradual. This can be achieved by:1. Acquiring proper and appropriate knowledge, 2. Proper thinking, 3. Changing or reforming beliefs, 4. Worshiping regularly, 5. Adjusting deeds constantly in consonance with Islam, and 6. Establishing good relations with others.

Continuation

•   Islam lays down laws for social change. These laws are fixed and universal. These laws are manifested in certain concepts, like justice and injustice, luxury and ostentatious life, and internal and external changes.

•   Concepts are significantly related. For example to administer justice, it is presupposed the existence of certain conditions, which are proposed by Islam to change humanity and societies. These conditions are brought out through concepts like knowledge, *Tazkiyah, Tafakkur, Islāh, Jihād, Taskheer* and *Ijtihād.*

Ali Shariati in Brief

- Ali Shariati Mazinani (1933 – 1977) was an Iranian revolutionary thinker and sociologist.

- His intellectual contribution was mainly related to the sociology of religion.

- He is regarded by many as one of the most influential Iranian intellectuals of the 20th century. Some critics hold him as the "Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution".

- Though, he was an intellectual, Shariati is also regarded as an activist who worked with the masses.

- To some extent his thought inspired the revolution in Iran.

Social Change According to Shariati

In the lectures delivered in 1970, Dr. Ali Shari'ati tried to establish an Islamic theory of change and revolution. This theory was mainly constructed on the following ta number of main themes, including:

- The role of intellectuals,
- Education,
- Reviving sciences,
- Scientific research,
- Propaganda (da'wah).
- He discussed his Islamic renaissance project from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Some of the lectures tackled the theoretical aspects of the project, including: "Where shall we began", "What is to be done", and "Surah al- Rum "The Roman": A Message to Enlightened Thinkers".

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• The lecture entitled "What is to be done: A Practical Plan for Husayniah Irshad", which appeared in the last part of the book, presented a practical plan of action for this project.

• As a whole, What is to be Done uncovered the ideal epistemological guide of Ali Shari'ati with regard to reforming the Muslim world in general and his native Iran in particular

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However…

The ideas he presented were so controversial mix of ideas that it is very difficult for a critic to fairly determine the school of thought that he belonged to. His consistent borrowing of key Marxist concepts such as "class struggle", "classless society", "imperialism" and "class exploitation" instigated some authors to describe him as a reformist who had been influenced by the social ideas of Marxism *(Bayat, 1977).* This tendency was shared by many of Shari'ati's contemporary intellectuals and associates, including Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere. Such association incited some researchers to consider Shari'ati a member of the "Third-Worldist Populism Movement", which represented a blend of nationalism, radicalism, anti-"dependencia", anti-industrialism, and somehow anti capitalism (Assef, 1990).

Badiuzzaman Nursi in Brief

He is Said Nursi (1877-1960) a Sunni Muslim theologian who was nicknamed "Bediuzzaman" which means the most unique person of his time, that is due to his unique abilities of learning. He lived under the Ottoman rule and later witnessed the desintegration and the collapse of the Caliphate. "He was a scholar of the highest standing having studied not only all the traditional religious sciences but also modern sciences and had earned the name Bediuzzaman, Wonder of the Age, in his youth as a result of his outstanding ability and learning." (From the Risale-i Nur Collection THE DAMASCUS SERMON by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 1996)

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His life was full of turbulances due to the unique political
circumstances witnessed by his country (later called
Turkey) and the transition from the Caliphate to the republic
 under the leadership of Kamal Attaturk.

The concept of Change According to Nursi

- The religious aspect of any social change in the Muslim *ummah*.

- The role of education: It usually stated that "the credit for the establishment of the haraki schools of tafsir goes to the Muslim Brotherhood, though Emad Mahmud Abdul Karim asserts that actually it is the combined efforts of the men of reformation and renewal, the most popular of them all are Abd al-Hamid bin Badis, Badiu al-Zaman Sa'id al-Nursi, Abu al-A'al al-Mawdudi and of course, in addition to al-Banna. Emad considers these individuals as pioneers of these schools, as their Quranic interpretations have an integrated approach that provides a theoretical and Studpractical view of life from the Qur'an, which was considered something new at that time. *(Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research 2013)*

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- His call to combine between religious sciences and modern sciences.

- Called for the unity of the Muslims under the caliphate , which has put him into conflict with the military ruling class in turkey at that time.

- He proposed educational reforms to the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid aiming to put the traditional Madrasah (seminary) training, Sufism (tasawwuf) and the modern sciences in dialogue with each other

Continuation

- He has embarked on a mission to prove that Qur'an can accomodate the necessities and requirements of the modern time(his time). This idea has led to the writing of *Rasale-i Nour.*

- His style in creating the change and maintaining the Islamic world view as a legitimate way by Besides these writings themselves, a major factor in the success of the movement may be attributed to the very method Nursi had chosen, which may be summarized with two phrases: 'mânevî jihad,' that is, 'jihad of the word' or 'non-physical jihad.

Summary Remarks

1. The thought of Nursi demands critical appraisal and a mature synthesis, rather than to be adopted wholesale without critical analysis.

2. The political climate at the time of Nursi, and the elusive and obscure oratorical metaphorical and rhetorical language he used meant that the fullness of his thought is yet to be reached.

3. The agenda for Nursi's writings was often set by the contemporary needs of his fellow Muslims. Nevertheless he emphasized greatly on the need to strengthen the faith.

4. On the basis of his western sociological training Shariati paved the way for the emergence of a radical manifestation of Islamic revolutionary expression.

5. Both may differ in their sectarian interpretation of the state affairs of the Muslims , however they have agreed that social change from an Islamic perspective should be founded on

education and enlightening the masses.

6. Shariati's approach of social change displayed a clear understanding of the major cultural principles governing social and human interaction in Iran in the realms of the sacred and the profane.

7. Shariati presented to the Iranians an Islamic framework consisting of contrasts between good and evil, oppressed and the oppressors as embodied in confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, and Hussein and Yazid.

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- provided new meanings and definitions of identity and added a new focus of liberation to the symbolic cognitive core of the masses. Revolutionary mobilisation was therefore not only a product of the fervent exhortations of revolutionary leaders but also the result of the conjunctural cathartic function of the passion plays which reenacted and kept alive the memory of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at Karbala. The Karbala metaphor was thus manipulated in order to unify disparate social groups into one mass movement.

- Shariati's thinking was based on an analytical distinction between two alternative types of Islam: a static Islam characteristic of the oppressors and a dynamic, liberating Islam committed to the oppressed.

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- In a nutshell, both have aimed at creating social change in the Muslim *Ummah* . However Shariati has proposed a plan for "societal salvation" (*yazau' Allah bil al sultan ma la yaza'uhu bil al qur'an*).

- Meanwhile Nursi has proposed a method for "individual salvation" (*yazau' Allah bil Qur'an ma la yazau' bil sultan*).