

"AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE 'FIRST WORD': THE UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF 'BISMILLAH' AND BEDİÜZZAMAN'S INTERSECTION WITH POPULAR SCIENCE-1"

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Popular science is a discipline that seeks to explain intricate scientific concepts and discoveries in a language accessible to the general public. The aim of popular science is to disseminate science and technology to a broader audience, making them comprehensible. Popular science simplifies the often complex and technical language of scientific literature and elucidates scientific findings and theories using language that the public can grasp.

Popular science originated in 19th-century Europe, a period marked by rapid advancements in science and technology. Scientists and writers recognized the importance of conveying scientific discoveries and theories in a language the public could understand. **This underscored the necessity for the democratization of science and easing public access to it.** Distributing scientific knowledge widely allowed society to understand science and recognize the role that scientific theories and discoveries play in their lives.

Popular science addresses a range of subjects. It can encompass biology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, medicine, technology, ecology, and much more. These topics are usually elucidated using accessible language, often complemented by visual elements or relatable examples. Additionally, popular science sheds light on how scientific discoveries and theories impact society and the environment and how this knowledge can be applied in our daily lives.

In an era marked by the remarkable progress of science and technology, the intricacy and challenges in understanding scientific concepts might alienate the wider public. A similar predicament exists for topics like religion, philosophy, and the afterlife. **However, just as popular science translates complex scientific notions into language the masses can understand, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur Collection similarly aims to present religious and philosophical subjects to the public.**

The Risale-i Nur Collection is a beacon of hope for those who are deprived of knowledge and thought, and perhaps for those who have become estranged from religious information. Risale-i Nur presents complex religious topics at a level the general public can grasp. As a result, the masterpiece of Risale-i Nur offers readers, from every level, age, and culture, the opportunity to expand their worldview and spiritual knowledge.

Risale-i Nur introduces religious and philosophical concepts in a language that everyone can understand, yet it does not oversimplify. In this way, each reader can both develop their own thoughts and explore a broad spectrum of knowledge.

Consequently, ***Risale-i Nur extends the mission of popular science – that of presenting scientific subjects to the public – to the realms of religion and philosophy.*** In a world that distances people from science, thought, and religious knowledge, this work renders these subjects once again meaningful and

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accessible. In other words, ***Risale-i Nur comes to the aid of a vast public bewildered by the pace of scientific progress and disillusioned by the intricacy of religious knowledge.***

Here, the aim of the Risale-i Nur Collection is to democratize access to knowledge and thought and to present religious and philosophical information to a broad audience in an understandable manner. This will enable everyone to better comprehend the world, the afterlife, and the meaning of existence and to apply this knowledge in their own lives.

We wish to focus on "The First Word," a section from the Risale-i Nur Collection. While "The First Word" comprises only two pages of the Collection, it clearly demonstrates how Bediuzzaman presented religious and philosophical subjects to the masses.

"The First Word" is a simple yet impactful text that touches upon the fundamental points of religion. However, what stands out here is not the simplicity of the text, but the manner in which knowledge is presented. Access to knowledge is one of the primary objectives of the Risale-i Nur Collection, and we can observe this goal being achieved in "The First Word". In this piece, ***complex religious concepts are neither simplified nor diminished; instead, they are conveyed in an understandable and accessible language.***

At its core, "The First Word" elucidates the essential concepts of religion and philosophy, presenting the intricacy of these ideas in a straightforward language that speaks to the general public. This approach mirrors how popular science introduces scientific concepts in comprehensible terms. However, ***Bediuzzaman does not compromise the essence of the knowledge in the process; on the contrary, he deepens and broadens these concepts.***

"The First Word" serves as an example of how popular science is implemented in Risale-i Nur. Elevating the text to a level that the general populace can grasp is the main objective of popular science, and Risale-i Nur extends this objective to religious and philosophical topics.

"The First Word" epitomizes Risale-i Nur's mission to provide knowledge and thought accessible to the masses. ***This succinct piece stands as a perfect example of facilitating public access to knowledge, enabling everyone to better comprehend the world, the afterlife, and the meaning of existence.***

In this context, the Risale-i Nur Collection, and particularly "The First Word", carries a mission that aligns with the objectives of popular science: to present knowledge in a language that the public can understand and to ease access to this information. In a world that drifts people away from science, thought, and religious knowledge, these texts restore meaning and accessibility to these subjects. Consequently, Risale-i Nur plays a significant role in bringing knowledge to the masses by applying the pivotal goal of popular science to religious and philosophical domains.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 'THE FIRST WORD' WITH POPULAR SCIENCE:

"O dear brother! You asked for some advice from me. As you are a soldier, through the allegory of soldiering, and with eight small tales, listen to a few truths alongside myself."

❖ ***"Advice"***

Bediuzzaman's approach of giving counsel in the form of "advice" is not only a part of the tradition of religious and philosophical teachings but also an effective method of transmitting knowledge.

To give advice usually denotes suggestions and guidance arising from one's experiences, knowledge, and understanding. Typically, this emanates from a position of authority and it's anticipated that the listener will heed and learn from such suggestions. **Through trusting the wisdom and experience of the adviser, listeners can refine their perceptions and behaviors.**

From the perspective of popular science, providing advice is often the domain of scientists and science communicators. When scientists convey their scientific findings to a broader audience, they frequently offer recommendations based on this knowledge. For instance, a health scientist might provide dietary or exercise suggestions anchored in their research on healthy lifestyles. Such proposals generally encompass tangible actions that listeners can implement in their daily lives and witness the benefits thereof.

Thus, offering advice is an influential means to disseminate knowledge widely and motivate listeners to take action. Bediuzzaman's use of this technique might indicate his intent to reach a broader audience with his teachings and inspire them to apply these lessons in their lives—a strategy that could have analogous aims in popular science.

Bediuzzaman's advisories often root themselves in the verses of the Qur'an, presenting God's verses as advice for both himself and his audience. This accentuates the reciprocal nature of knowledge; that is, knowledge benefits both the giver and the receiver.

A similar process is observed in popular science. When scientists and communicators elucidate scientific findings and understandings to a wide audience, this knowledge often shapes their own insights and reflections too. As a scientist explains a subject, they often gain a deeper comprehension of the topic, enriching their own knowledge. In this process, the information benefits both the scientist and the larger audience.

Similarly, Bediuzzaman's presentation of the Qur'an's verses as advice deepens his understanding and faith while also instructing his listeners. The sentiment "One who does not reform himself cannot reform others" echoes this idea. Conveying knowledge to others without enhancing our understanding and knowledge can be challenging. Bediuzzaman's approach immerses both the teacher and the listener in the power of knowledge, emphasizing its value for both.

Such an approach allows us to understand that learning and knowledge transmission is a reciprocal process. It underscores that knowledge isn't just a one-way flow but necessitates dialogue and interaction. This concept holds significant ground both in popular science and Bediuzzaman's teachings. The sharing and learning of knowledge is a process where both the teacher and learner benefit from each other and from the knowledge itself.

❖ ***"Military Service":***

The statement mentioned in Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's "The First Word" preface embodies an approach that is akin to the essence of popular science. Here, Bediuzzaman asserts that he writes specifically for a group (soldiers) and hence employs a language and illustrative method (military representations and anecdotes) that resonates with them.

Military service, in almost every society, serves as a common reference point, understandable by people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. Bediuzzaman's choice to elucidate religious and

philosophical matters using military representations parallels the aims of popular science. Military terms and scenarios concretize complex religious and philosophical concepts, presenting them in a language the masses can understand.

A similar approach is observed in popular science. Scientists, when elucidating intricate subjects like quantum physics or genetic engineering, often draw examples from everyday life or situations and objects familiar to the general public. Take, for instance, the frequent use of the train and light speed analogy to expound Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Such examples bring tangibility to abstract concepts, simplifying them for the layman's understanding.

Bediuzzaman's employment of military representations serves as an effective method for demystifying religious and philosophical concepts for a broader audience. These examples render abstract notions tangible, presenting them in a vernacular that resonates with the masses. Therefore, Bediuzzaman's method aligns with the objective of popular science: disseminating intricate knowledge to a broader audience.

There are multiple layers to Bediuzzaman's use of the military metaphor.² It serves as an allusion to the notion that the path to success and contentment in life is paved with discipline and order, and it hints at Islam's inherent system of discipline and order.

Soldiers operate within a specific discipline and order. **Their primary duty is to follow commands, which is the key to success.** Bediuzzaman, in this context, **proposes discipline and order as means to achieve happiness and success in life**—a principle that holds true across various facets of life, be it at work, school, personal relationships, or even personal development.

Moreover, within the Islamic faith, God's commands represent a form of discipline and order. Acts of worship, the routine of daily life, moral codes, etc., should all be perceived within a framework of discipline and order. ***The idea that a Muslim's life should be 'soldier-like' echoes this sentiment. Meaning, much like a soldier, a Muslim should remain devoted to God's commands and the teachings of Islam.***

Regarding this subject, Bediuzzaman, in his magnum opus "Risale-i Nur", specifically in the book "The Letters (Epistles)", beautifully states:

"I observe that: In this worldly life, the most fortunate is the one who perceives the world as a military guesthouse, comprehends it as such, and acts accordingly. With such a perception, one can swiftly attain the highest rank, which is the rank of divine contentment."³

² **Metaphor:** It's the art of explaining something by comparing it to another thing. Not only found in literature, metaphors are also frequently used in everyday conversation. They allow one to convey a concept or object in relation to another, making the expression more compelling and engaging. For instance, in the statement, "He was brave like a lion," the lion is used metaphorically. Since the lion is a symbol of courage, it's likened to a brave person. Metaphors provide readers or listeners with a richer and more vivid narration.

The statement, "There are multiple layers to Bediuzzaman's use of the military metaphor." can also be understood as "There are many underlying meanings to Bediuzzaman's use of the military example."

³ The Letters (Epistles)-33 (The first paragraph of the "Thirdly" section of the Ninth Letter - Epistle)

The term "military guesthouse" signifies a lodging for soldiers or a place where the military resides. Bediuzzaman employs this term to accentuate that the world is but a temporary dwelling place, reminding us that we only stay here for a fleeting moment and our genuine abode lies in the hereafter.

Yet, the discussion isn't solely concentrated on the world's transient nature. **Through the descriptor "military", it's emphasized that our existence in this world mandates duties and responsibilities. A soldier follows orders and leads a life replete with discipline and structure. Bediuzzaman articulates that our sojourn in this realm has a profound purpose, emphasizing the need to adhere to God's commandments and remain steadfast to Islamic teachings.**

In portraying the world as a "military guesthouse", Bediuzzaman enlightens us about the ephemeral nature of this world and the responsibilities we're tasked with during our tenure here. The short time we reside in this worldly life is filled with profound obligations and duties. Much like a soldier in his barracks is bound to follow orders and maintain discipline, we too are called upon to navigate this world adhering to God's dictates and upholding the teachings of Islam. This perspective not only promises joy and success in this life but assures the same in the afterlife. ***It's precisely this perception of the world that aids us in swiftly achieving the highest rank, which is "the rank of divine contentment".***